

# Let's Grow!

Growing engaging leaders



**Karen Schmidt** Speaker . . . Workshop Leader . . . Facilitator

## Employee engagement ecourse

### Unit 1 . . . Defining engagement

#### A term that means many things



I believe that defining engagement is a vital step in the engagement process that is often missed. Many organisations launch straight into measuring engagement without really understanding what it means and then wonder why the results are not more conclusive. It won't matter how sophisticated your measurement tools are if you don't have a clear understanding of what you are measuring.

If the phrase "employee engagement" is one of the current buzz words in management circles, then like other terms used to describe workplace trends, it is open to interpretation. To understand what it means, you need to look do a bit of a workplace history lesson. Back when the modern workplace as we know it began, managers were under the impression that all it took to get a "solid days work" out of an employee was to:

- a) pay them
- b) threaten to fire them

Afterall, there were plenty of other, similarly skilled people waiting to take their place so there was little need to think past the obvious motivators. As the balance of power changed and workers became more skilled and specialised, these tactics also needed to change. That's where organisational psychology began, with people like Taylor who believed that attention, whether it was positive or negative, made workers perform better. Whilst his theories have since been proven false, the desire to better understand the motivations of the average worker continue to inspire managers to seek the "holy grail" of motivation.

Today we realise that people are complex and that defining "engagement" in a single sentence may not actually be possible. Yes, there are many attempts at a definition and some of them a quite good. Some of the key words that we do agree on when it comes to engagement are "discretionary effort" and "connection" and "choice".

"The extent to which employees put discretionary effort into their work, in the form of extra time, energy and brainpower" **Burkholder**

"A heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for the organisation, which influences them to exert greater discretionary effort in the work" **The Conference Board**

It is important when thinking about your workplace that you first define your own parameters of success and use these as a basis for then defining what an engaged employee in this environment will think, feel and do. The reality is that engagement will vary depending on the industry, occupation and even the geographic location of the people concerned.

Think about your own career for a moment. How has your definition of engagement changed over time? How have the tactics used by your managers varied in their success rates depending on where you were at in your career? Can you see where using the wrong definition of engagement has caused you or others to act in ways that decrease rather than increase engagement?

If you have read my book "Keep 'em keen: a guide for managers on engaging people of all ages and career stages" you will be aware that I have come up with my own model for the 4 stages of engagement . . . Green, Keen, Mean and a Has Been. Whether you use this model or the popular Gallup model (Engaged, Not Engaged or Actively Disengaged) you still need to apply it to the particular circumstances of your workplace if it is to be most effective.

## Workplace perspective . . . Sales and marketing

**Name:** Liz Jackson

**Job title:** General Manager - Customised Learning & Development

**Industry:** Training and Conferencing

**Career overview:** Various sales and marketing roles for publishing houses, a manufacturing business, a major retailer and now a conference and training company.



**Describe your best job and what made it that way** My current role is the best job I have had for the following reasons: The company is relatively small and has a relaxed informal culture compared with bigger companies I have worked for. My boss, our MD, leads the way in creating the culture and makes coming to work each day an enjoyable experience. My colleagues are supportive and fun to work with. We have a number of organised social activities which make it easy to get to know others outside of the workplace.

**Describe your worst job and what made it that way** A marketing role for a retailer. The company was large so had some negative bureaucratic policies and procedures. Management did not get very involved in day to day work so upwards communication was difficult. They had a culture of long hours, no lunch breaks which led to a lot of burn out and turnover. There was a climate of fear, of not speaking up in meetings for fear of being knocked back. The company had a strong hierarchy which made those who were not at the top feel inferior. Not many positives really!

**How would you define the term "employee engagement"?** The degree to which an employee is engaged or attached to their role - this would include elements of satisfaction, enjoyment, commitment and the degree to which they relate to their company and role.

**What does it take to get you engaged at work?** A culture where individuals are respected whatever their position, a certain degree of autonomy to get the job done in the best way possible, management who are positive and interested in what staff do every day, colleagues who are supportive and positive, remuneration sufficient to feel of value, training for personal development offered.

## Expert opinion . . . Does engagement really have meaning?



You'd think employee engagement's meaning would be clear, even if quite a few people don't know it. It's probably not that they don't know it; more likely they don't have a mental file folder labelled "Employee Engagement". That's why when I answer someone's what-kind-of-work-do-you-do question with, "I'm an employment engagement consultant", I usually get the arched-eyebrow response.

I usually respond to their facial expression with, "What do you think that means?" And given the moment to think about the phrase employment engagement, almost everyone comes up with a pretty good definition. Here's what I've heard:

- Involvement in your work
- Job commitment
- Passion for what you do
- Loving your job

You can mix and match the words and come up with dozens of definitions...that all say about the same thing. Those are all quite good definitions. Here's mine. It's not any better but it is longer. That's just because I spend more time thinking about employee engagement than most people.

- Investment of one's body, mind, and spirit in one's work.
- Exceptional degree of emotional commitment that fuels the doing, thinking, and believing in one's work.
- Willingness (eagerness, desire) to exceed expectations and fulfill one's self-satisfaction quota. (These may be one's boss's expectations, expectations iterated by one's job, and/or one's own self-expectations.)

A phrase's meaning may not mean much until we see it in action. Remember how kids doing a Spelling Bee always ask for their word to be used in a sentence? Here is an example of employee engagement I witnessed firsthand.

Gabe worked in facilities management in my apartment complex. Recently promoted to assistant office manager, Gabe took his personal engagement with him. He even ramped it up a level.

Last week I called to get minor work done. Gabe answered the phone and told me he would "top of the list" my request. In an hour, Gabe called me back to tell me the process was in motion and a maintenance man would be by soon.

Gabe called me back in 2 hours to verify what he already knew: the maintenance man had shown up, repaired the problem, and reported such to Gabe. And he wanted to know if I was pleased with the service. Next day Gabe even called me. "Mr. Wright, I just want to check that everything is still OK and you're still satisfied that we took care of it in a timely, professional manner." (You're completely right to be thinking, "He's new to the job. Let's see how he's doing in 3 months." And I will.)

Finally, here's something to think about: is Gabe demonstrating engagement with his work...or only with customer satisfaction (a part of his work)?

*This contribution is supplied by Tim Wright, Chief Engagement Officer with Wright Results. Tim helps organisations base their business culture on employee engagement. Through his Culture to Engage retreats, Tim shows organizations the integrated roles executives, leaders, and managers have in a true engagement culture. Tim is based in the USA and can be contacted at [www.wrightresults.com](http://www.wrightresults.com)*

## Further reading . . . First, break all the rules



This best-selling book is based on in-depth interviews by the Gallup Organisation of over 80,000 managers in over 400 companies. Authors Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman look at what the world's greatest managers do differently to attract, engage and retain the best people.

The best managers know that you can't follow the easy path of conventional wisdom . . . they know you must take the more exacting path that demands discipline, focus, trust and a willingness to individualise. Using Gallup's trademarked "12 question model" it is the first book to present a measuring stick to prove the link between employee opinions and productivity, profits, customer satisfaction and the rate of turnover.

## Taking action . . .

- Define what engagement means in your industry, your organisation and your department. How would that definition change in another context?
- Conduct an informal survey of your staff using a discussion group format to get their opinions on what engagement looks like from their point of view.
- Talk to your family, friends and colleagues about the topic to get a range of outside opinions. Target people who you perceive are both engaged and not engaged. Do you hear any common responses?
- Start a journal to record your own thoughts on engagement, based on your past and present employment experiences.

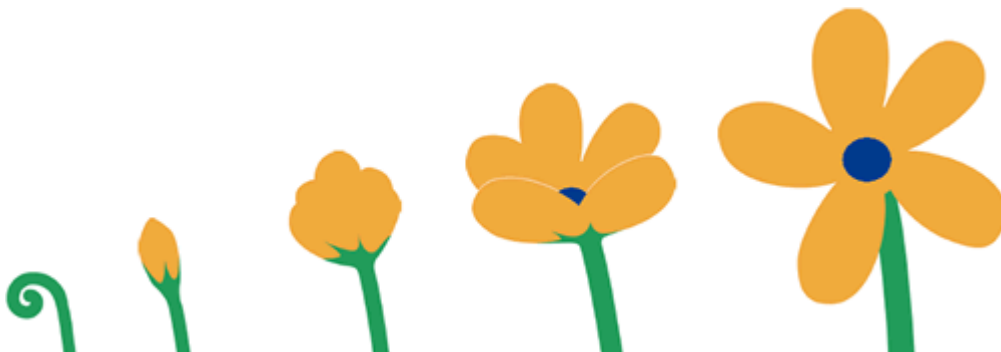


## Next is Unit 2 . . . Dealing with the disengaged

Regards

**Karen Schmidt CSP**  
**Re-engagement expert**

**CSP (Certified Speaking Professional) is the highest international accreditation designated by the International Federation for Professional Speakers and achieved by less than 10% of members**



To book Karen for your next conference or inhouse workshop visit her website [www.letsgrow.com.au](http://www.letsgrow.com.au)

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