



Empowerment vs. Engagement

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Any results you, as a leader, are looking for will take care of themselves if you are focused on the answers to this single question: How do I make it easier for you, my co-worker, to do great work? It's actually the only thing that's of critical importance to a manager on any level. Anything on a manager's mind that's going to affect the bottom-line will have either a direct or tangential relationship to the answers to this question.

Leaders today are too often misdirected – they want to do what's best but they're simply pointed in the wrong direction. They're facing their boards of directors and shareholders, and they need to be pointed to where the heart of the energy is flowing into their company – in the direction of their brilliant workforces.

No wonder the 24,000 CEOs polled globally by Gallup, say that only 13% of their workforce is engaged and that their number one concern is that they 'have the wrong talent.'

Their second greatest concern, by the way, is that the goods and services produced by their people are 'mediocre'. Their concern isn't even so much that they're pumping mediocrity into our societies, but more that it's hindering their bottom-line.

At the Institute for unLearning, we believe in the power of heartfelt leadership; and by that we mean, leaders who create space that's safe for workers to tell their truth.

With the energy from truth-telling, you the leader, can begin to develop the department, work group and organization that is fully engaged and building innovative goods and services.

1. How Empowerment is Killing Us

Leaders have always been tasked to do two things, grow the bottom line and get their people to do a better job so they can grow their bottom line. So, 'empowerment' was seen as a way for leaders to get people to do a better job. That was a decade ago – and the problem is still with us.

In fact, *empowerment* hasn't only not worked, it's driven our workers in the opposite direction. Productivity is down, disengagement is on the rise. Just look at the incline in disengaged workers. Up a staggering 7% in 12 months, from 80% to 87% according to Gallup.

To counter chronic disengagement, Americans are spending \$10 billion a year on self-help gurus. The sleep-aid business is at a record \$32.4 billion. We can't get happy at work, then we can't get happy at home, we can't sleep and our chronic fatigue is epidemic. Empowerment is killing us.

Here's what we believe is at the heart of the issue: corporate workforces have been operating under the delusion that empowerment is *given* by leadership to employees. That's a falsehood and misnomer. Let's shift the perspective – people have empowerment all of the time because it's already theirs, and always has been. It's slipped our conscious awareness that we own our empowerment, and that we always have.

When we operate without consciously knowing that we are all empowered, we start to do two things: we act out, and we shut down.

The solution is a simple one – all leadership has to do is realize that they aren't in charge of empowerment. It's their job to support and make it as easy as possible for their people to do a great job -- and then get out of the way so their workforces can do the great job.

2. People are Built to Make Valuable Contributions

Empowerment is an outcome of Engagement. Engage yourself with your life and you experience the shift in perspective when you give yourself permission to bring your passionate, innate genius to your work. In other words, when you come online with your own empowerment, you plug in and engage with all aspects of your life. Nobody had to give it to you.

It's important to note that when senior leadership has autonomy to act, space to exercise mastery, and recognition, they have two choices: they can either keep their wellbeing for themselves, or share it.

What we're suggesting at the Institute for unLearning is that by spreading the wealth, leaders at all levels can get more of the outcomes they want for their company, and spend less time routing out the 'problems'. By finding ways to support the wellbeing, autonomy, mastery and recognition of their workers, they are feeding the sustainability of their bottom-lines.

To retain top talent, innovate, and sustain growth, leaders need to get serious about how to develop their managers at all levels. And we don't mean Human Recourse driven box-checking exercises and zip-line off-site retreats, (although they can be engaging and awareness-raising.)

We're talking about creating environments where it's safe to tell the truth.

Transparency is the Institute's number one mantra. In fact, it may be our only mantra. When you can't tell the truth, every relationship devolves. And when trust is lost, a whole host of attendant work-around behaviors rush in to shore us up.

Organizations with high employee engagement derive the very benefits, the lack of which keep CEOs up nights. What makes these benefits sustainable is that employees are *happy*. Another misnomer that has slipped our conscious awareness, is that we deserve to be happy at work.

Here are the top benefits noted:

- Company stock value increases in earnings per share
- % higher profitability
- 25 to 65% lower turnover
- 37% lower absenteeism
- 28% lower shrinkage (theft)
- 48% fewer staff safety incidents
- 21% higher productivity
- 10% higher customer engagement (sustainable and raisable over time)

(Ariana Ayu, CEO - *Ayutopia International*)

3. Personal Accountability – Where It Starts

Joe Folkman of Zenger Folkman, has just published the results of a large engagement study in *Talent Quarterly*. He looked at data from approximately 250,000 people in six extremely different organizations. He studied employees with the highest level of engagement and looked at their satisfaction with other factors in the survey. These had the highest influence on engagement:

- Open Communication
- Career Opportunities
- Individual Development Opportunities
- Organization Reputation
- Organizational Efficiency/Productivity
- Confidence in Management

- Recognition
- Teamwork/Collaboration/Cooperation
- Satisfaction with Work
- Workload

Many of these factors appear to be determined by the broader organization. But at least seven of these ten factors are highly influenced by the *direct supervisor*.

How a leader is rated by everyone around him or her correlates to his or her direct reports' *engagement levels*. To be a successful manager, becoming a servant leader – the ability to get results through creating access for the genius of others – is no longer an option.

How many times have you been in a company, working for a boss you do not admire or trust, wishing you could work for someone else? We recognize the qualities in a true leader – they do the one thing we want so badly in our lives. They are asking every day in every way, 'what can I do to help you do a great job?'

They get results through creating ways and environments for us to engage, with ourselves, each other, and the community. When we're engaged – our culture is self-motivating and self-inspiring. The culture sustains itself by driving for the expression of innate genius, and when that's alive, we create a continuously self-modulating infra-structure.

The box-checking exercises that may satisfy your company's 'building human capital' line on the ledger do not fulfill our desire to contribute from a deep, meaningful place in us. Accountability can't be driven through systems and infrastructure development; it's an outcome of feeling valued, being allowed to tell the truth, and getting the recognition one deserves. When we know how our contribution counts, we want to show up and hold ourselves accountable for what we do, and how we think.

When people can be truthful, the systems in which they operate, thrive. And when a system is thriving, it's evolving to remain integrated and relevant, so thriving may continue, and not only for the people involved, but for everyone around them.

The goal is not to attain a bottom-line, it is for all to thrive. If people are thriving, so will the bottom-line.

4. How People Resist Being Changed

Organizational Development, for the most part, exists to prove how hard it is to change, and that resistance is inevitable. And the longer it takes the more valuable the OD guru is believed to be.

What would an organization be like to work in if there were a Resource Center devoted to serving our passion for what we do? What would that include?

At the Institute, we believe change happens at the speed of the best questions from the *heartful leader* (www.heartfulleaders.com).

We believe your organization creates its own best answers. Start asking questions that allow people to speak their truth. Open the lid to their heartful, innate genius. These are the qualities of life that bring our innate genius to the surface, and bring our inner *heartful leader* online. Together, they assure us we are valued, heard and free to express our passion. It's from this knowing people do their best work.

Here's a cycle we believe is occurring at epidemic levels. The longer we work without open communication, trust, collaborative competition, autonomy, and recognition, the less people are able to access their personal power.

And, as personal power diminishes, systems are diminishing within companies. While well-intentioned senior management is hoping some set of box-checking exercises does the trick and the bottom line goes up, your people are going to work every day passionless, and disengaged. The current statistics offer a clear demonstration of this dynamic in action. What is it costing your organization?

When workers feel they are going to be changed ‘for the betterment of the company’, the natural impulse is to resist. People resist for one reason. If they haven’t been heard, if their opinions, experience, and mastery haven’t been tapped, we dig in our heels to resist, becoming invisible. Not being recognized is the biggest factor in shutting down. We fight the new way, we gather with other, like-minded people in our organization and we band together to prove that the situation isn’t working. It may be a great idea, or a great system worth millions, but if we haven’t been heard, we’ll spend our energy proving it’s not effective.

5. Aligned and Accountable All The Time

When a company is in trouble, leadership tells the staff, through the lens of some great expert, that we aren’t aligned, that they need to become more accountable. Here’s what no one is recognizing. The people are aligned. They are accountable. They are aligned to proving that what is happening isn’t working because there’s no room for them to bring their truth and passion into work.

They are accountable to prove in every way that what is going on isn’t helping. And it starts looking like they’re children, because in many ways, they are acting that way. And while they’re busy acting out, their innate genius is dormant. (And, don’t feel you’re the only one this paper is speaking to – only 98% of all households are dysfunctional.)

People behave and act-out the places in our organizations that don’t serve. And the more change gets imposed -- and it often looks like more rules, more restrictions, more tightly held

control from above – the more people will push back. The ways it shows up most chronically in companies is the level customers are served.

People start keeping their best ideas to themselves. They barely show up. They are basically saying, ‘you don’t pay me enough to put up with this.’ So they agree that being late, calling in sick, taking a stapler home, missing that deadline, are okay invisible and undervalued. They begin to say things like, ‘that’s just the way life is.’ Their passion for even caring has to take a back seat.

As mentioned earlier, CEOs polled for the 2014 Global Summit agreed that their second greatest concern behind ‘not having the right talent’ was ‘mediocrity’. No surprise that without the right people, mediocrity isn’t far behind. And then, these CEOs, often well-intentioned, set about finding better talent so they can sustain their bottom line. Then they spend inordinate amounts of money to retain their great talent which deepens the rift between the mission for teamwork and excellence, and promotes individual achievement, which fosters comparison and competition that breeds an environment where no one is willing to tell the truth.

Meanwhile, the scores of hard-working, vastly talented people are being told to ‘get the job done,’ without much fanfare or recognition.

You get the picture. The cycle is creating a hospice environment for corporations worldwide.

So, what is a possible solution?

6. Engagement and the Heartful Leader

It takes a strong and devoted leader to create the boundaries for growth. The leader who can sustain their organization, is one who is prepared to serve their organization, who has the courage to own what isn’t working, and that they are responsible. This describes a leader who

cares more about the wellbeing of those who have sweat equity in the company, than those who own shares, and who is filled with every-day, roll-up your sleeves, courage.

Here's the crying shame – if leaders were concerned about making sure their workers were getting valued in meaningful ways, they would no longer be kept up nights worried about their bottom-lines and whether they have the right talent.

They already have the right talent. The truth is that by and large the sell-out isn't from the employees, it's from CEOs who believe their allegiance is more important to the Board of Directors. They're facing in the opposite direction from what they desire most for the success of their bottom-line

7. Engaging Your Board and Stakeholders

If you're a leader who has a tough Board and tougher shareholders, you might be saying we're naïve. And that's possible, but is what you're doing getting you more of what you've already got, or are you seeing the essential changes?

So what's the solution? We believe it's *Heartful Engagement*. And heartful engagement begins with leaders modeling this come-from: what can I do to help you do a great job? And once workers have seen and experienced it enough and trust it, every employee starts looking around and asking, 'what can I do to help you do a great job?'

We're inviting you: If you're a leader who's experiencing a challenge with a vital change and ready to see the results you need quicker, better and with less stress and effort, get in touch with us.

We aren't for everyone. We can work only with leaders who are courageous enough to admit that what they're doing isn't working, and are willing to do it differently.

As we get in there with you, and you begin to experience the results you've been looking for, we'd like to have you join us as a guest on our radio show to share your company's story.

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