

# How Can You Bring Meaning To Engage Your Employees?



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According to Gallup's 2013 Global Workplace Report, the vast majority of your employees are probably not really engaged in your workplace. While not the least engaged of all respondents, Canadian workers' lack of engagement ranked in the higher end of the 140 countries surveyed.

Using 12 questions to measure engagement, Gallup has consistently found 'employee engagement' to have an impact on an organization's ability to be productive and achieve business and financial success. Unengaged employees tend to take less initiative, miss more work, and generally not represent an organization to the best of their abilities.

Using a 4 stage of engagement model, Gallup created a hierarchy of engagement that runs from:

- **Stage one** meeting an employee's basic needs;
- **Stage two** employees think about their own individual contributions and their perceptions of how others view and value their efforts;
- **Stage three** employees having an individual sense of belonging in the organization;
- **Stage four** an advanced stage whereby an employee feels a level of ownership and responsibility and wants to make improvements, learn, grow, and innovate;

If you consider the famous Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, you will observe a general fit between these stages. According to Maslow, people's basic needs range from:

- Physiological (to breathe, eat, sleep, etc.)
- Safety (sense of security including employment, health, access to resources)
- Love/Belonging (family, friends, intimacy)
- Esteem (confidence, sense of achievement, respect)
- Self-Actualization (creativity, problem solving, morality, authenticity)

Generally, those who feel a sense of belonging, have high self-esteem, and are working towards self-actualization are able to make a higher level of contribution in more aspects of their lives. These employees are often more engaged in life and are able to make meaningful contributions at work.

## **Employees may work to put food on the table but they will not love you for it**

Understand that if you are not providing employees enough resources to meet their basic needs, it will be very difficult for them to find meaning and be engaged at work. It is also more difficult to motivate your employees to be productive at work when you cannot pay wages to meet their basic needs.

If an organization provides opportunities for higher needs fulfillment, it enables more employees to want to give back more to the organization which in turn can result in benefits for the organization. This does not require providing above average wages and benefits but without a living wage employees may be too busy worrying to be busy being creative.

### **What opportunities for meaning can you offer your employees?**

You can offer many opportunities for your employees to find meaning in their work. As an organization, you must understand that employees may feel fulfilled in different ways, but they are all looking for ways to feel good, make an impact, and feel a sense of belonging.

Consider the key ideas behind both Maslow and Gallup's hierarchies. Beyond the basic level of need, we see words like 'belonging' 'intimacy,' 'confidence,' 'achievement,' and 'responsibility,' as well as ideas tied to creativity, problem solving, and authenticity. Create opportunities for your employees to find meaning by taking the time to consider different ways to engage your employees.

### **Four steps towards better engagement that you can implement today**

- 1) Encourage leaders to **know employees more intimately**. Leaders who treat employees as individuals whose actions make a difference within the organization will increase their employees' sense of belonging to the organization.
- 2) Ask employees about their **career or personal development goals**. Provide them with access to resources, coaching, training, or mentors to help them work towards achieving goals.
- 3) Provide opportunity for all employees to **take responsibility and be trusted in some way**. Some jobs, by their own description, enable this. For other less managerial jobs, you may need to get creative. Involve employees in non-job related activities such as organizing volunteer events or researching a local charity that the organization can support.
- 4) Invite employees to **share community based or social projects or opportunities that have meaning** for them. Allowing employees the opportunity to volunteer one day a month or a quarter during work time can help bring meaning to their lives.

You cannot meet everyone's needs all the time, but you can try. Consider the needs and motivations of others if you want to increase your odds of engaging more employees in your workplace.

### **Resources**

Global Workplace Report 2013 Gallup