Most Workers Hate Their Jobs; Flex Time Can Help



By Debby Carreau MBA,CHRP

The Los Angeles Times headline last week ***Most workers hate their jobs or have "checked out,"*** shared the new reality of our workplaces according to a new Gallup poll. 70 percent of full-time workers are emotionally disconnected at work, meaning they only "go through the motions" to perform their jobs or worse: they do things to weaken or sabotage the organization and its goals.

Gallup's report describes three groups of employees. About one third of full-time employees are "actively engaged"…that means, committed, invested workers. Over half (52 percent) are "not engaged" meaning they are emotionally absent and "sleepwalking through their workday, putting time, but not energy or passion, into their work." Another 18 percent are "actively disengaged" from their jobs, hampering productivity and destroying the organization's culture. These people "aren't just unhappy at work; they're going out of their way to let everyone know about their unhappiness. Every day, these employees undermine what their engaged peers accomplish."

Interestingly, women report more work engagement than men do, millennials and baby boomers, for instance, are more likely to be "actively disengaged" than other age groups. Employees with college degrees are also more likely to be running on auto pilot at work. One of the key drivers of engagement is connection to the workplace which is measured using relationship-based items such as "a supervisor or someone cares about me". For example 71% of millennials expect their workplace peers to be like a second family and will often leave if this is not the case.

Workplace flexibility can be a driver of workplace engagement but it is not as simple as offering flex time. According to Gallup 39 percent of employees work off-site sometimes and these people are slightly more engaged (32 percent) than their on-site-full-time counterparts (28 percent). Those who spend less than 20 percent of their time working remotely are most engaged, suggesting that some wiggle room created by flexible work arrangements. This helps them attend to family responsibilities or other important needs which help relieve stress and pays returns to employers with engaged, committed personnel, not to mention additional hours worked. Gallup found that remote workers log, on average, four more hours per week than their non-remote counterparts.

Gallup found that flex-time produces the greatest effect on employees' overall well-

being, when compared with other workplace incentives such as vacation days and reduced hours. “Engaged employees with a lot of flex-time had 44 percent higher wellbeing than actively disengaged employees with very little to no flex time. Among employees who were not engaged or actively disengaged, those who reported having flex-time also had higher overall wellbeing compared with those with very little or no flex-time.” wellbeing is a basic human need. It is a necessary prerequisite before a person can tackle other tasks such as creative, productive, invested performance in a job.

The issue of telework has been fiercely and passionately debated in the news lately. There was a serious backlash in the media when Marissa Meyer called her Yahoo workforce back into the office. Yahoo’s decision was not the norm and, in fact, regular telecommuting grew by 73% between 2005 and 2011 (Globalworkplace Analytics 2013)

79% of U.S. workers say they would like to work from home at least part of the time (WorldatWork Telework Trendlines 2009). People who participate in such flexible work options experience greater wellbeing, which makes them more available and likely to invest emotionally in tasks at work. Workplace flexibility reduces work-family stress, which frees people emotionally to engage more at work and to commit their personal best to the work group, products, and organization. Commitment results in improved productivity and bottom line results.

When employers offer working conditions that contribute to a person’s wellbeing it is mutually beneficial. Employees won’t hate their jobs: they will engage, commit, and produce. As employers you can make a change so workers are digging in, leaning in and opting in not leaning out.
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For the past 20 years, Debby and Inspiredhr.ca have been helping teams deliver superior business results by making strategic decisions about human capital. In any industry you can’t beat real-world experience, and that’s what makes Debby a premier Human Capital consultant in a multitude of business sectors. She uses her experience as a senior leader in operations and Human Resource Management to provide pragmatic advice on attracting and retaining top talent, and developing programs and systems to get the most out of your team.

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