

Getting to the Heart of Employee Engagement

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It's everywhere. Everyone is talking about it. Consultants build entire practices and companies around it. You hear executives and leaders clamoring for it! "**WE NEED EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT!**" It becomes a battle cry around which we hope to rally the troops to get our employees' heads in the game at work and keep the floodgates of unwanted attrition from opening wider than they already are. And therein lies the problem. It's not in their heads.

Yes, you heard me. It's not in their heads.

Sure, we want people to give discretionary effort, to persevere through the hard march, to get their creative energy focused on innovation, to care for and about our customers and clients. And ***none of that lives in their heads.***

Ask your HR people. They know. They know because they hear it in exit interviews all the time. And it sounds like this:

- My heart wasn't in it anymore.
- It just got too hard to care here.
- I just didn't have the heart for it here any more.
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The etymology for "engage" is "to make a pledge to." And when we pledge something, particularly allegiance, where does our hand go? Over our heart. The key to employee engagement, to inspiring them to want to pledge allegiance to our company, our mission, our clients and customers, is to learn how to empower their hearts.

Managers and leaders will be successful at doing this when they have real dialogue, real connection with their employees about what makes them inspired to come to work, what's getting in the way of their passion for showing up at work, and what matters to them as people.

And how do you do that? Talk to your team members. Ask them. They'll tell you if you take the time to nurture a relationship with them. One tool I recommend is a "stay interview," which is simply a series of purposeful questions aimed at getting to the heart of the matter.

Identify those key team members who are most critical to the success of your organization, and take them to coffee or for a glass of wine. Let them know, "you're important to me, as a person and a team member, and I want you to have a successful and meaningful career here at ABC Corp. Would you be willing to talk with me about that?"

Construct questions that engage (see what I did there?) the person's heart. Things like:

- What are you passionate about?
- What values are most important to you?
- What makes you want to get up every morning and come to work here? Or if that's not where you are, what would do that?
- Where do you see conflicts with those here at ABC Corp.?

The key is to make sure this isn't a one time conversation but a beginning of an ongoing dialogue / relationship. You must follow up on what you hear from your team members. A powerful close to this conversation is to recap with a summary of "here's what I heard you say that matters most to you, and here's what I heard you ask for us to work on. You have my commitment to doing so, and I will keep you posted. In return, my ask would be that if you start to disengage, get itchy to look outside or start

answering those recruiters calls, that you will talk to me first so we can see what's going on and what we might be able to. Are you willing to do that?"

When you begin having a real, honest, vulnerable dialogue with your team members, you will begin to cultivate greater trust, honesty, and connection.

Beyond that, if you nurture the heart of your employees by making sure they are taking care of their whole person, by having real commitment to and connection with your team members, you will begin to allow the heart to show up at work. It's time we talk about the heart at work and not act like it's a dirty word. We want their heart to show up in equal balance with their brain and their body.

My challenge to you is this: Find three ways in the coming week to begin to show your heart more at work. How, when and where will you do this?

Because the heart of employee engagement is the heart itself.

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