



Managers fail to engage staff

Only half of the UK's workforce feel fully engaged by their employer.

How well are you engaging your employees? In a recent UK survey of over 40,000 employees working at all levels across all sectors of the economy only half (51%) feel fully engaged by the company they are employed by.

What explains this unwillingness to connect? YouGov who carried out the research indicate two main reasons.

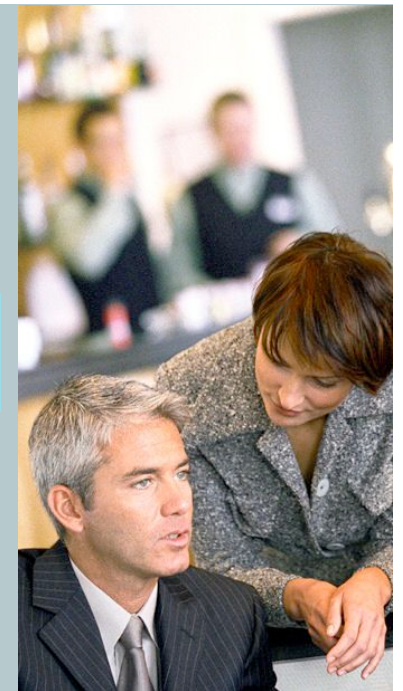
Poor leadership that fails to capture the imagination of a hard-stretched work force

Lack of rigorous performance management

The poor leadership may not come as a surprise, but the lack of rigorous performance management is not so obvious.

At the heart of this response is the observation that staff see managers failing to deal with poor performers and at the same time displaying blatant favoritism towards a select few. As a result meaningful engagement becomes elusive, except amongst the select few.

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The importance of employee engagement has been well documented in reports like Reichheld's *The loyalty effect* published by the Harvard Business School nearly 10 years ago. Yet despite the perennial nature of this message there is an evident failure to train leaders in how to achieve it.

We are convinced that managers must understand four things if they are going to engage their workforces. Remove any of these four and they will fail to engage more than the favoured few.

- 1 Realise that each of their employees are unique.** Marketing professionals have long understood the power of segmentation, to consider all customers as one, treating them identically is deemed unlikely to bring success. Instead they segment customers and focus the marketing entirely for each category. Workforce engagement must be viewed in the same light, a one-solution-fits-all approach remains unlikely to deliver. Managers and leaders need to develop the ability to engage at an individual level tailoring every opportunity to fit the specific requirements of the individual.
- 2 Understand each employees uniqueness.** The uniqueness of each employee must not only be realised, but understood. This takes time and effort to assimilate. What is it that engages your staff? Not collectively, but individually! What is it about Joe that engages him, how does Sophie differ to that? One may need to feel wanted, the other may need a steady flow of new challenges, and so the different unique characteristics will play their part. Only when you begin to understand the individuals drivers, preferences and strengths can you lead in a way that will engage them. Think through your direct reports, how many of them could you be certain about what truly engages them? There's no room for guesswork here either, you have to spend time with them finding out directly what ignites their flame.

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Lead individuals not just groups. To lead you must have followers, to have engaged followers you have to lead individuals. Having embarked upon the journey of individual understanding, you must colour all decision making, task assignment, praise, reward, performance management and leadership based upon it. The knowledge of what engages each individual has to influence the way you lead them if you are to be successful. This is very tangible; Peter is engaged if he can see an opportunity to climb the corporate ladder, so you need to promote opportunities for him to perform in front of influential individuals. Sophie's need for new challenges means you should be putting her in the front line of program launches, not exclusively, but intelligently as and when the situation is appropriate.

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Performance manage. Finally you have to be tough enough to really performance manage your people, equally and transparently. They will see through any lip service offered up as performance management. You must become blatantly clear about goals, tasks and expectations, you must offer praise where praise is due, and you must administer retribution where that is also required. Miss any one of these three and your efforts to engage everyone will be reduced in effectiveness. Staff need to know what is expected of them, they also need to know when they have failed to deliver as required, and they always need the motivation of a simple "well done" when work has met or exceeded expectations.



Engaging your staff has to be a highly commendable aim for organisations and their managers. The challenge is whether we are truly enabling our managers and leaders to be engaging employers. One volunteer is worth 10 pressed men, so the saying goes. If only half of our staff feel engaged we must have only scratched the surface of our true organisational potential.

