

Your Most Important Asset as a Leader is Not What You Think

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Several years ago, Gallup did a poll that looked at the state of the American workforce. The results weren't encouraging. When they tallied up the results, a stunning 71% of the workforce was not fully engaged in their work. For those keeping score at home, that means that only 29% are fully committed to doing their best at work. What's worse, a Towers Watson study showed that 26% of the American workforce is actively disengaged. This means that almost as many employees in your workforce are doing little more than draining resources as there are those who are fully dedicated. If you imagine that your company is a rowboat, and your employees are the rowers, those who are fully engaged are rowing the in direction the company is setting. Those who aren't completely engaged have basically pulled in their oars, and those who are actively disengaged are rowing in the wrong direction, essentially counteracting the other rowers. If you've ever felt like your company wasn't going anywhere fast, this may be the reason.



When I was on Active Duty in the Air Force, we went through periodic inspections to make sure that we were operating like the Air Force wanted us to. During one major inspection, the Air Force remotely monitored the computers of a random sample of employees on base to ensure that they were managing information correctly and not compromising the mission through any sort of misuse of government computers. During the weeklong inspection, I spoke to an acquaintance about how things were going, and he informed me that the inspectors essentially watched a civilian employee play solitaire for more than six hours in one workday. This is a prime example of what an actively disengaged employee looks like. And there are millions of employees just like this throughout America. They may not be playing solitaire, but they have their own ways of using up company resources to no effect. This absolutely impacts a company's bottom line and slows the progress of the organization. In all likelihood, there are people just like this in your company.

As a leader, your biggest asset is the people you have around you. You can't do it all by yourself, so the quality and engagement of the people around you are a huge factor in determining the success of your team or business. As a result, if you're going to be focusing your time on anything, focus it on keeping your employees engaged and interested in the work that you're doing – it will pay huge dividends. Here are three ways to keep your most valuable assets engaged:

1. **Help them to feel valued:** Although you can't control how other people feel, you can get to know them and what motivates them. Give them regular feedback – both positive and constructive. Invest in them as people, and they will invest in the business. There is not greater motivator than to believe that your leaders truly care.
2. **Ensure the mission is of value:** I've known some people who were creating vital parts of some amazing and technologically advanced pieces of equipment who lost sight of their mission. They just punch the clock and don't see the bigger picture. Keep your employees connected with the mission, explain why the mission is valuable in a way that is meaningful to them, and keep your people up to date with the latest news and successes they have contributed to. This will help them develop ownership for the work that they are doing.

3. **Give them the tools to provide value:** It's hard enough for organizations to succeed in this competitive landscape, even when employees have the tools that they need. It's even harder when you're not offering ways for your people to provide value. There are endless ways to give your team tools to help them succeed – a mentorship program, professional education, up-to-date business systems, incentive programs, clear lines of delegated authority, a clear corporate mission. Do your best to remove hindrances to success and equip your people in the ways that they need.

There is an old adage that if you take care of your people, they will take care of you. Nurture your greatest asset as a leader and work tirelessly to keep your people engaged. Another Gallup poll on employee engagement estimated that actively disengaged employees cost American businesses \$370 billion annually. Make sure that you're working to reduce your company's contribution to this number. What are you doing in your organization to increase employee engagement? Please let us know on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#), and share this post with others who might find it helpful.