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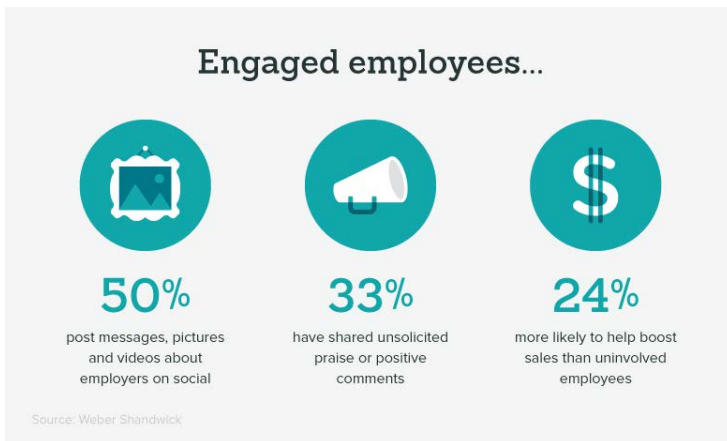
For twenty-seven years, the Executive Edge has been a value added service to support our employers and candidates in their Personal & Professional Development.



The Changing Face of Employee Engagement: 7 Trends Part 1 - The Data

By Joe Hunt

With so many organizations focusing on engaging their employees, why aren't engagement levels across the world increasing? According to Gallup's January 2016 article, *The Worldwide Employee Engagement Crisis*, with low engagement in the workforce, there are serious and potentially lasting repercussions for the global economy.



According to Gallup's latest poll, employee engagement has been pretty stagnant. Only 32% of U.S. workers were engaged in their jobs in 2015, compared to 31.5% the previous year.

Defining Employee Engagement

Wikipedia defines an “engaged employee” as one who is fully absorbed by and enthusiastic about his/her work and so takes positive action to further the organization's reputation and interests.

An organization with “high” employee engagement might therefore be expected to outperform those with “low” employee engagement, all else being equal. However, there isn't always a shared meaning of what engagement means, nor is there a universally understood method of developing it.

In *The Best of Gallup Management Journal 2001-2007*, Jerry Krueger and Emily Killham describe three types of employees:

- **Engaged employees** work with passion, and they feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.

- **Not-Engaged employees** are essentially “checked out.” They’re sleepwalking through their workday, putting time—but not energy or passion—into their work.
- **Actively Disengaged employees** aren’t just unhappy at work; they’re busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.

David Mizne of 15five.com defines employee engagement as “proactively and passionately adding value while aligning with the company mission.” In his opinion, this can be hard to quantify. “An engaged employee wears it on their face, demonstrates it in their work and in their workplace communication.”

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Faulty Engagement Surveys

Gallup sees a clear divide emerging within the engagement industry. On one end of the spectrum are scientifically and experientially validated approaches that lead to changes in individual and business performance, supported by strategic and tactical development and performance solutions that transform organizational cultures. These approaches require more intention and investment, and companies that use them are more likely to see increases in employee engagement.



At the other end of the spectrum are invalidated, unfocused annual surveys. Much like a traditional employee satisfaction survey, this type of survey usually measures a multitude of workplace dimensions that often have limited alignment with other business objectives and can be difficult to take action upon after receiving results.

Technology also makes it easy to create an “employee survey” and call it an engagement program, which allows a company to fulfill an apparent organizational need and “check a box.” But metrics on their own don’t drive change or increase performance. Many of these survey-only approaches measure employee perceptions and provide metrics instead of improving workplaces and business outcomes.

According to Gallup, when companies focus exclusively on measuring engagement rather than improving engagement, they often fail to make necessary changes that will engage employees or meet employees’ workplace needs. These shortcomings include:

- Viewing engagement as a survey or program instead of as an ongoing, disciplined method to achieve higher performance.
- Focusing more heavily on survey data or reports than on developing managers and employees.
- Defining engagement as a percentage of employees who are not dissatisfied or are merely content with their employer instead of a state of strong employee involvement, commitment and enthusiasm.
- Relying on measures that tell leaders and managers what they want to hear—“We’re doing great!”— rather than research-based metrics that set a high bar and uncover organizational or management problems that are hindering engagement and performance.
- “Feeding the bears,” or measuring workers’ satisfaction or happiness levels and catering to their wants, instead of treating employees as stakeholders of their future and their company’s future.

In Part Two, we will explore the future trends of employee engagement and address the "reasons for hope" when overcoming the pitfalls of non-engagement.



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