I Quit! Never mind. *Whatever…*
*Please leave me alone and let me work!*

or

**Dis-Un-Engagement is re-motivating by de-un-motivating!**

Imagine a workplace where the welfare of each person is built on an environment of mutual trust and respect and where positive, creative energies engage everyone in a shared purpose; a place where both people and ideas are valued and where all do their best and collaborate to contribute, optimize and improve.

But now let’s get back to the real world…

Welcome to the average workplace, populated by many who are dis-engaged and only casually involved. Many in management might think that people would be happy to have a job, and they are; most truly are happy but happiness does NOT translate into productivity and performance.

Stats show 85% of employees report their morale declines significantly after spending 6 months on the job (from Sirota Survey Intelligence) and 49% of workers say they constantly have their antennae out for new job opportunities — *even when they are happy in their current position.* Few feel their current employer is giving them a fair deal in terms of advancement opportunities (Kelly survey).

So, what begins as an energetic, positive and committed new hire becomes one of those people who simply disappear and are working to simply get by and noticing if something better might come their way. Focused on meeting the minimally-acceptable standards of productivity and quality, they seem no longer much interested in much. They are not the first person you call on when something needs to get done. And there are a lot of them in most workplaces.

As managers and customers, you know who they are. Most were attractive job candidates and new hires and some are supervisors and managers. There is little about them that cause them to stick out. What could possibly be wrong with an employee who:

- Is a nice person and was an attractive and skillful job candidate
- Quietly processes and handles transactions, day in and day out
- Arrives on time and rarely leaves early or misses a workday
- Follows policies and procedures as do most employees
- Is seldom aggressive or defensive
- Goes through the motions of working, attends meetings, joins teams, gets things done
- Does nothing that causes him/her to attract much attention
And as legendary basketball coach John Wooden said,

“Never mistake activity for achievement.”

You may hope that people are actively involved but the reality and research says that many are just on the job. As we used to say in a college beer drinking game, “I’m in, but I’m out” when we needed to take a pause and leave the game – “keep me in, but I am not playing.”

The Numbers, the Opportunities:

Before I get to thoughts on improving the situation, let me share a bit more info for those who like statistics and details. (You can jump to “How do you motivate these people?” if you want!)

Gallup has done extensive surveys and reporting on engagement and find that 70% of US workers are not engaged and are somewhat sleepwalking during their days – 54% of the workers are muddled in the middle -- and “saboteurs” represent the actively-disengaged other 17% of the workforce. The middle 54% are choosing to not produce to their potential!

And things are not getting better even though many organizations report they are “working on engaging people”: Employee engagement has declined from 24% to 13% in the past two years (Mercer’s 2012 Attraction and Retention Survey)

Randstand Corp found that 70% of employees say, “you have to work late and work overtime to get ahead,” and Towers Watson found that 39% of employees feel senior management does not exhibit attitudes and behaviors that reflect that they care about the well-being of their employees. And while 59% of engaged employees say that their job brings out their most creative ideas, only 3% of dis-engaged employees report this. (Gallup)

Survey that 54% and they will say that they like their jobs and they are even happy at work. Nothing will stand out statistically and they may even add some positive comments. Many are neither interested in looking for a new job nor getting more training, even though they would leave if something came up. Most say things are just fine as they are. They are not exactly demotivated but they are certainly not engaged and involved nor are they top performers in any respect. Read this as: Average. Middle. Mundane. Un-exceptional. Un-engaged.

Statistically, their results are found around the middle of any curve of performance results.

The situation looks something like the graph at the right, with the continuum of performance from low to high on the bottom and the numbers on the side:

(contradictions for my hand-drawn charts)

These same muddling-along middle-curve people also have the highest potential impact on individual and overall workplace performance improvement if you could improve
their results. They have more headroom than most others since it is not a capability issue but one of choices. They are choosing not to excel and not to commit themselves to higher levels of performance and expectations.

The idea is to move the curve to the right by engaging some of the un-engaged. This moves the average performance level up (and may also engage some of the poorer performers since they do not want to be too far below the average).

Then, the impacts are shown in the amount of green…

Let me illustrate the solution with a joke:

Little Billy has never talked and one morning, when Mom serves him breakfast, he says, “Mom, oatmeal cold.” Mom is obviously pretty excited and she asks him why he has never said anything before. His response? “Up until now, everything been okay.”

Like Little Billy, everything been okay for most workers. Not good or bad, just okay.

How do we get them “to talk” about what needs to be changed? How do we give them more and better choices and alternatives? Employees want to succeed when they are hired and starting the job and the company wants them to be successful. What has happened and what can we do?

Some Common Situation Causal Factors:

Your typical employee attitude survey will be ineffective in finding much from these people. They are unlikely to complain publicly and sometimes will not even comment privately.

But it is highly likely that one of a few things has happened.

- **Being Restrained:** One area of concern is around the miss-fit of policies, procedures, rules and regulations. They may become frustrated because they are restrained in how they accomplish things. They might want to be more helpful to customers or they may see possibilities of improvement that are either rejected as ideas or simply brushed aside.

- **Being Ignored:** They may simply feel that they are ignored. They might not have feedback systems that provide effective information about their performance and those results may be invisible, in their opinions, to their management team. They might feel that they need training (or they are sent off to training for no apparent reason). And when they do extend forward, no one notices or comments; it changes nothing.

- **Not on the Team:** Or, they may feel like they are not part of the team or the in-crowd. People at the margins tend to become marginal. As part of a team, they often feel that their efforts contribute to the overall good. But with no sense of such involvement, they tend to become less involved, quickly.
After all, it’s hard to care for customers if you don't feel anyone cares for you.

- **Accidental Adversaries**: Another factor was discussed by Peter Senge in his work on learning organizations and involved a series of small negative events that, in the bigger overall situation, would become more and more annoying over time. Repetitive small “pinches” could eventually be disruptive. There was not one event or one thing, just a bunch of little things that added up. It should not be surprising that these loops could be common between workers or between an individual and a supervisor and that, left unattended, they underpin a motivational problem.

- **Punishment**, defined as a negative consequence that occurs following some behavior, is another issue in many workplaces. We are not talking “public disgrace” here or corporeal punishment; we are talking about little comments or perceived slights or the threat of negative consequences that could occur in response to behaviors.

  Punishment – commonly referred to as *aversive control* – will generate Compliance Behavior, or what I consider a manager’s worst nightmare!

  When people are strictly following policies, procedures, rules and regulations, they will **not be productive**. (Yes there are situations like safety where strict compliance is important, but less so for customer service, manufacturing or similar kinds of activities). In fact, most work slowdowns are anchored in people following things overly precisely and carefully.

  A manager’s inadvertent negative or critical comment, meant to support correction or improvement, might be perceived as punishment by the employee, who may simply withdraw and become less engaged.

Lots of things can work to un-engage people. It’s a long list, for sure. On the other hand, because most supervisors are not really skilled at motivating these average performers, they may not focus on this performance improvement opportunity and choose to do nothing. After all, these are good employees and they do get things done without a lot of supervision. So, they tend not to act: Why rock the boat or wake up sleeping dogs…

So the result is that the individual become more and more un-engaged over time. That “new hire fire” simply burns down.

So, why address un-engagement? Because it is simply the very best thing you can do for you, your workplace and for the majority of your people.

Many are completely aware that they are underperforming, feeling as if they are giving a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay and performing like most others. And they have reasons and justifications for any attitudes that impact the choices they make. Attitudes tend to align with behavior. But the impact they can make on overall success is significant, simply because they have the capability and because they represent half of the workplace! They also exert peer-support pressures on others, simply by improving their level of performance.
How do you motivate these people?

Re-engage them. And understand that this will take time and effort. You cannot do this to them, but you can do it with them. Change and improvement take time, but the capability is there. And, “Trust is the residue of promises fulfilled.” (Frank Navran)

I frame the solution in the simple context of Dis-Un-Engagement.

(Or, re-motivating by de-un-motivating, although the concept of motivation is a difficult one because of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that are often unknown or uncontrollable.)

**Dis-Un-Engagement is re-motivating by de-un-motivating!**

Identify the past and present things that are currently un-engaging people and use facilitation and teamwork to identify those factors and issues that can be changed, added or reduced that will help to eliminate or minimize these performance issues and change the culture.

This is really straightforward:

- By removing the perceived (common) or actual (sometimes) things that are un-engaging people and teams, you serve the purpose of re-engaging and re-energizing them.
- By facilitating, you generate active involvement. You lead and engage.
- And, by using teams to solve problems, you build the teamwork support, energy and resources needed to supply the peer pressure to improve and sustain.

In the illustration below, we show a normal “A and B” view of how to motivate performance.

Many organizations try to control people’s behaviors extrinsically, a highly difficult process fraught with all sorts of potential negative side effects. Money works, but there is a continuous
need to increase its amounts to get the same results over time, and you will get a lot of competitive responses between people that have negative side effects and interfere with teamwork. Plus, extrinsic incentives will only motivate the top performers, in most situations.

In B, we will get performance. But it will be compliance-focused and not exceptional. And, do NOT turn your back, since various kinds of retribution and sabotage are common.

Recognize this simple reality: **People WANT to succeed.**
**We simply have to help them come back in and re-engage.**

A cause of a lot of un-engagement is that people feel they have no voice and no one is listening.

So, we approach the situation by showing a simple cartoon and asking people what they see:

Most people would agree that the illustration represents how things really work in their organization and that they know of a lot of things that thump and bump as they work to get things done. The issue is that they do not often perceive that anyone really cares, and they will meet their personal goals if they just keep doing what they are doing.

With our approach of first playing with this cartoon for general ideas and themes and then asking the participants to generate some **Square Wheels** and then some Round ones, we can do a lot in regards to generating peer support and perspective on what needs to be improved. That camaraderie of focus can do a lot to improve overall workplace morale.

And they offer up their ideas about issues and opportunities in a group process, so most things do get out on the table for consideration and discussion. A key is to generate ideas and the help them focus on improvement.
Engaged employees outperform average employees by 20 percent (2004 study by the Corporate Executive Board)

59% of engaged employees say that their job brings out their most creative ideas. Only 3% of dis-engaged employees report this. (Gallup)

And, good ideas will be generated, many of which can be implemented. It is a proven fact that this is one of the best strategies there is for helping workgroups make improvements and to improve motivation.

We then assist the groups in identifying strategies to implement these ideas and deal with the corresponding roadblocks.

Not every dis-engaging factor is equally difficult to manage nor does each have the same kind of cultural impediments.

Some may be quite difficult to deal with (Type 1’s – tough to push) and require manager intervention while others might require a team to solve.

Some may require little or no effort to improve (Type 3’s and 4’s).

The power lies in involvement and collaboration. Help them generate ownership. Build trust by following through on your promises and commitments.

At the same time you are working to implement workplace improvements, you must look to the performance management system itself to identify ways to provide timely, supportive feedback about that performance. If you do not change the measurement and feedback systems in some way, it is likely that the existing program will not support any improvements.

So, you might start by asking them about this, and what they want to do differently:

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and start to get some of their ideas about what needs to be changed and improved. Create a more attractive vision of the future and generate some peer support for closing the gap between what they see and what they want.
We offer some good, easy to use tools for engagement and team building and all of our products are designed to generate active involvement and participation. A guiding principle has been that,

**Nobody Ever Washes a Rental Car.**

We can help you create a workplace that generates more active ownership and shared purposes. We offer a complete toolkit of PowerPoint slides, instructional materials, worksheets and facilitation skills building tools. You can find tools on our website at


For the **FUN** of It!

Scott Simmerman

Involving and Engaging People

If they are not engaged, what are they? Can we really expect good performance if people aren’t involved and included?

Scott Simmerman

**Every production of genius must be the production of enthusiasm.**

Benjamin Disraeli

**The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.**

George Bernard Shaw

**Model good collaborative processes and actions. The key word here is, Ask. The key supporting words are Listen and Act.**

Scott Simmerman