

chapter 1

The Truth

There seems to be some perverse human characteristic that likes to make easy things difficult.

—Warren Buffett, Most Successful Investor of the 20th Century

THE STAKES ARE HIGH.

You are the coach of a five-man basketball team battling against another team. But this isn't just any game. It's the Olympics and it's all for the glory. You are leading the team who is gunning for Gold in the men's basketball final.

Hundreds of thousands of sports fanatics—representing virtually every country in the world—hover above their colorful stadium seats shouting with all their might in the hopes of inspiring your team to victory. You are about to begin the fight of your life ... battling for the title of “best in the world.”

As the ball is tossed in the air at center court, one of your star players grabs it and races down the wooden planks as fast as he can, gunning for the competitor's net. Just imagine, three of your five starting players are standing at center court waving to their family and friends in

the stands. Your final starting player is watching ESPN SportsCenter on a TV in the locker room as he sips lime-green Gatorade and roots for the opposing team.

Is it real? Absolutely! Leaders, this is your workforce today.

Houston, We Have a Problem

According to Gallup, 87 percent of global workers and 70 percent of American workers are “disengaged” from their jobs and “emotionally disconnected” from their workplaces. The cost to the U.S. economy is \$500 billion per year and trillions to the global economy. Have you calculated your share?

Why should the employee disengagement crisis keep you up at night? Because your personal success and your company’s success hinge on your ability to re-engage your workforce.

employee engagement

[em-ploi-ee in-gage-munt]

noun

1. the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization.

There is no getting around the fact that there is a direct correlation between employee engagement and profitability. The most successful companies in the world have the highest levels of employee engagement and realize other important benefits, including:

- Increased employee productivity and customer satisfaction.
- Increased company performance and profitability.
- Increased employee retention.
- Decreased safety incidents, theft, absenteeism, and quality defects.

Engaged employees go the extra mile and do everything they can to ensure the company succeeds. They give a lot of discretionary effort, which pays enormous dividends.

Mark Crowley is the author of *Lead From the Heart: Transformational Leadership for the 21st Century*. In a recent article in *FastCompany* magazine, he wrote:

Gallup's report shows that organizations in the top tier of engagement outperform their peers by 147 percent in earnings per share and have a 90 percent better growth trend than their competition.

It Really is Madness and March Has Nothing To Do with It

What do disengaged employees do with their time? They play online games, surf Internet sites, nod off, and heat-up the social media airwaves with friends, family members, and co-workers.

The Chicago outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas issued a press release based in part on U.S.

Bureau of Labor Statistics data. The firm purported that employers could lose up to \$1.9 billion in wages due to the 60 million American workers who devour the NCAA men's basketball tournament, affectionately known as March Madness.

THE TRUTH...

Disengaged employees offer the greatest untapped potential for your business to improve its profitability and performance. Period.

With these realities in mind, it stands to reason that disengaged employees offer the greatest untapped potential for your business to improve its profitability and performance. Period. Your business will never win Olympic Gold in your industry if you do not step-up and awaken this untapped potential.

THREE CATEGORIES OF WORKER ENGAGEMENT

- **Engaged:** Employees feel a profound emotional connection to the company. They drive innovation, move the organization forward, and trust senior leaders.
- **Disengaged:** Employees are sleepwalking through their day, putting time—but not creativity, energy, or passion—into their work.

- **Actively Disengaged:** Employees aren't just sleepwalking through their day; they're busy acting out their lack of engagement. These workers undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish.

It's important to note that employee engagement is not about creating a group of happy workers. It's about creating a workforce that has an emotional connection to your company and trusts senior leaders.

Perks like an office dog, ping pong table, and beer in the mini-fridge make people happy. However, I can assure you that if an employee does not have an emotional connection to your company and does not trust senior leaders, "Fido" will not be enough to make that employee stay.

Why You Exist ... I Know, This is Big ... Right?

The Earth is a giant puzzle, made up of seven billion people. Therefore, seven billion unique pieces. You are one piece of the puzzle and your piece is like no other. If you leave this world without putting your piece in place, you've not only robbed yourself, you've also robbed the world of your gift.

Owning up to the responsibilities you have to the Earth—and the people you share it with—and making a difference in this world is the real definition of success.

Nothing matters more and nothing will make you feel more fulfilled in life. It's why you were created. It's why you exist. It's a part of your purpose.

THE TRUTH...

If you leave this world without putting your piece of the puzzle in place, you've not only robbed yourself, you've also robbed the world of your gift.

We all have responsibilities at home, in our community, and in our workplace. As a leader at work, one of your main responsibilities ... your piece of the puzzle ... is to create an environment that people love where they can soar, so your company can soar.

You owe it to employees to create an environment that excites them, lights them up inside, and inspires them to give their all; and then some.

Step-Up or Step Aside

What is your role as a leader as it relates to employee engagement? In one word: Everything!

Employee engagement initiatives have failed for the past 30 years because leaders outsource “culture change” to Human Resources. Then the changes are rolled out to employees as a stand-alone program or initiative (think “program du jour”) with few linkages to the actual business; therefore, it's not a priority.

In order for employee engagement to soar in your company, your responsibility as a leader is to partner with other leaders, Human Resources, and Internal Communications, to “own it” and make it a priority.

Everything in business rises and falls as a result of leadership. If a company has high levels of employee engagement and meets or exceeds its goals, odds are there's a great leader or leadership team that has owned up to its responsibilities.

You may be thinking: *that's not fair.*

- Why is it all about me? If every employee simply “owned” their engagement, we wouldn't have this problem.
- Why aren't employees taking responsibility for their attitude and getting with the program?

Both are excellent questions that create multiple responses.

THE TRUTH...

When you are responsible for other people at work, you've graduated from being an individual performer into being a leader. Step up and own it, or step aside.

While employees are a part of the equation and have a role in employee engagement, consider this.

The truth is that although every employee may be doing his/her best with good intent, many people in this world are complicated, lack self-confidence, live in fear, prefer to follow vs. lead, and are incredibly distracted both at work and at home.

Is this really who you want to rely on to help improve your disengagement crisis?

I didn't think so!

You are a leader ... a dealer in hope. As such, you must understand the importance of culture on your company's bottom line, "own it," and stop outsourcing it to Human Resources. You must *partner* with other leaders, Human Resources and Internal Communications, to create an Employee Engagement Strategy that you share with Supervisors to execute.

THE TRUTH...

Leaders must understand the importance of culture on the bottom line, "own it," and stop outsourcing it to Human Resources.

When you create an environment people love where they can soar, you will see a measurable change in your workforce. Your employees will become more self-confident, courageous, present, optimistic, productive, and creative. Consequently, your business performance and profitability will increase.

You are in a leadership role for a reason: to ensure your company succeeds. If you don't think you have what it takes to lead an employee engagement revolution in your workplace, then put together a game plan to get back into the ranks of individual performers—people who do not supervise others.

When you are responsible for other people at work, you've graduated from being an individual performer into being a leader ... a Champion. Step up and own it, or step aside.

Trust Me, It Works

I saw this phenomenon play out at Avaya, a global provider of next-generation business collaboration and communications solutions.

I led their global Internal Communications organization. The leadership team understood the ramifications of having a disengaged workforce, so we implemented many of the concepts contained in the pages within *If Not You, Who?*

Leaders didn't ask disengaged employees to come to work tomorrow engaged. Leaders believed that if they created an environment people love where they could soar, employee engagement and profits would soar. They were right.

We implemented a global strategic plan within Avaya to crack the code of employee disengagement and in two years we:

- Drove a six- to 16-point increase in three employee engagement survey categories: Strategy Buy-In, Confidence in Senior Leaders, and Open and Honest Communications.
- Moved the overall Corporate Employee Engagement Score from 51 to 62 percent

(a two-percentage point increase is considered “statistically significant”).

- Realized a 26 percent rise in Avaya’s stock price.

My guess is that if you realized similar measurable results in your company, you’d be viewed as a Champion, so keep reading!

THE TRUTH...

You are not meant to bear that which you find unpleasant; you are meant to change it.

I’m Onboard. Now What?

So what’s a leader to do? Mike Dooley, author of *Infinite Possibilities*, says, “You are not meant to bear that which you find unpleasant; you are meant to change it.”

Change it? By ordering employees to be engaged? By stopping employees from filling out March Madness college basketball brackets? By eliminating break rooms and ping pong tables? Not by a longshot.

Employees want to be trusted and they don’t want to be micromanaged. They want to have autonomy in their day, knowing that it’s OK to submit their college basketball bracket selections during work hours, as long as they also do the work that is expected of them—as long as they place their piece in the puzzle.

You are going to change it by doing two things:

- championing a four-step process; and
- modifying your behaviors in the workplace.

It really is that simple.

To crack the code of employee disengagement, I could give you a list of 20 traits that all leaders need to possess. I also could have developed multiple employee engagement strategies for different geographical regions, generations, sexes, tenures, and blah, blah, blah.

However, I didn't do that. Why? Because it's not that complicated.

Two of my takeaways from decades in Corporate America, working for global Fortune 500 companies in seven different industries, are:

- People make things harder than they have to be.
- People are basically the same everywhere in the world because we are all human. Cultures and languages may differ, but people are people. Yes, even the Millennials.

Because people are basically the same everywhere in the world, there's one solution to improve employee disengagement and your profitability—whether you are a two-person company in India or a 300,000-person company in the United States.

Your bottom line: there are four **things** you need to **do** and four **ways** you need to **be**. It's that basic.

THE TRUTH...

People make things harder than they have to be and people are basically the same everywhere in the world. Yes, even the Millennials.

Go Forth and Conquer, Champ!

The next eight chapters outline the four **things** you need to **do** and the four **ways** you need to **be**.

Tackle this issue with passion and make your employee disengagement crisis as big a priority as whether your new product line is meeting its revenue targets in Europe. When you do, you will realize greater success in virtually every area of your business and you will have cracked the code of employee disengagement. Kapow!

Now let's blow the doors off this barn and make you look like the Champion you are ...

Jill