

“Who can I talk to, Skipper?”

It's a simple question. Every employee should know the answer. Who is their trusted mentor or manager for individual guidance, problem solving and career planning? Employers would not knowingly sail an employee into a workplace ocean without this basic support, would they? Yes, it happens far too often, and I believe it is a significant cause of “disengaged” workers!

The Problem

The issue is obvious: an employee who has no focused manager to help solve problems and seize opportunities is adrift. The best employees will do what they can, suffer extreme stress at times and watch what others do to cope (some of it destructive). They may also look for another job. The average-to-poor employee may mentally check-out or even actively work against the employer's best interests until caught. “Checked Out” is a good way to define disengagement. The disengaged or discouraged employee cannot and will not perform to expectations for any length of time. Customers may notice before the organization acts.

An example will help illustrate the problem. I just spoke with a young person in a multi-state professional service business. She has an entry level position with a great deal of client contact. Most employees work on several client-focused teams. The model is operationally sound, but it leaves team members without a real manager, leader or mentor who cares about their individual status and progress. The lack of a well-defined and high-functioning contact for venting, advice, useful feedback and navigating the workplace is corrosive. It corrodes the connection between the employee and the company, its clients, and the team members. It forces employees to seek out peers for solutions, causing griping, grouching and gossiping. People need much more than just exaggerated kudos or help putting out the worst fires. They need a mentor and trusted leader.

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MY PREDICTION:

I believe we have so much disengagement among workers today primarily because employees are adrift and disconnected from a true manager. We spent time and money to recruit. We ordered assessment tools and background checks. We did effective interviews, checked references and hired the best. We created a competitive pay and benefits package. We may have worked hard to produce a “cool” workplace, encouraged the use of social media and provided free cappuccino. After one month on the job, none of those features are as important as the presence or lack of a genuine, growing, healthy and open relationship with a manager who takes the role seriously.



HOW TO PREPARE:

Take a self-critical look at processes and company cultural choices putting your employees at risk of disengagement. Before you spend too much time on fun employee engagement techniques, work to change workplace features and manager behaviors that actively create disengagement. “Walk before you run” is good advice. Start with specific processes and managers that may deliver day-to-day results, but work against your need to retain and grow the best people. The most successful companies find ways to meet both operational and engagement goals.

You spent time and treasure to assemble the right crew. Provide your teams with positive individual leadership to keep the right people on board and your ship on course.

Contact me directly if I can help you or your team.

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