

# It's Engagement not Enslavement

If employee engagement is so important to the success of an organization, why are only 26-29% of employees in the average company fully engaged? All the research shows employee engagement significantly improves performance, loyalty, and profitability. This makes the paradoxical gap between desired results and actual results so compelling. How can this be?

Engagement is a heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his/her work such that he/she is willing to exert greater discretionary effort to accomplish tasks, innovate, solve problems, and/or improve work. Optimal engagement is needed now more than ever because our economy has changed to global from local. If we are going to effectively operate in a global economy we must enroll every heart and mind of every employee to compete. The only true competitive advantage is to utilize the innovative nature of the human mind to solve problems faster than the competition. In the beginning of the industrial age much of our work was routine, employees were not well educated, and therefore the work itself did not require employees to use much of their brain power. In light of this, our language reflected how we thought about employees. They were known as "hands". Times have changed and we need an "upgrade in theory" to bring us to the global age. We need everyone's brains and heart not just their hands.

Employee engagement is a competitive advantage and managers recognize its importance and work hard to achieve it, right? But, they are dismal at achieving it. This is because the typical manager is using "enslavement" thinking not "engagement" thinking. The two main enslavement policies that are the result of this thinking are 1) the typical performance appraisal linked to 2) pay for performance. According to Hewitt Associates, a leading Human Resources Consulting firm, 90% of organizations have some form of these policies to "motivate" their workforce. This is up from only 80% in 2001.

The typical manager is using enslavement policies because that is how we have all been taught to think about people and problems. We have been taught a theory of motivation that is wrong. Perhaps you are thinking, "*How arrogant! How can 90% of very smart managers be wrong?*" They can be wrong for the same reason Galileo was criticized and put on house arrest until his death for claiming the sun is the center of the universe (Copernicus' theory). 90% can also be wrong for the same reason Einstein was called a kook by most of his scientific colleagues when he, using his new Theory of Relativity, made a prediction that light from the sun would be bent by gravity during a solar eclipse. Obviously both Galileo and Einstein have been exonerated and proven to be courageous innovators who communicated a new theory in the face of strong resistance.

We have been taught a pair of theories that are no longer useful for creating optimal engagement: B.F. Skinner with his theory of Behaviorism and Frederick Taylor with his theory of Scientific Management. If we want optimal enslavement these theories work well. If we want optimal engagement, we need new theories.

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Frederick Taylor's scientific method of management was implemented to improve productivity and it did, to a point. Unfortunately it has reached its limit because it employs management to solve problems and ignores the brain power of employees to solve problems. This same theory is used in our schools where it is the teacher who is omnipotent and has all the answers to the tests and the students who must do and remember what they are told. When one expects others to solve his/her problems one loses interest and motivation. Tackling challenges in life keeps one motivated.

Taylor encouraged the use of the performance appraisal because his scientific method depended upon the manager being omnipotent and being in a position of control. The all knowing manager creates the ideal method according to a scientific set of steps. The manager's job is then to evaluate the employees to be sure they are doing that exact ideal method. It is the manager's job to know how well the employee is doing his/her work. If the employee needs improvement the all-knowing manager will tell them what to do. We can see how the current performance appraisal fits Taylor's mindset perfectly. A performance appraisal is at best controlling not motivating. In fact, most research shows that fewer than 50% believe performance appraisals actually improve individual and organizational performance. Many studies show they actually make things worse or at best, just waste everyone's time. Controlling behaviors with threats is not engagement. It is enslavement.

B.F. Skinner made popular our current addiction to pay for performance. Using animals in his experiments he "proved" that behavior is simply an outcome of genetics and rewards and those rewards could motivate. He then made the claim that the same is true for humans. **WRONG!** Humans are much more complex and are motivated by much more than a simple reward. Alfie Kohn, in his landmark work, Punished by Rewards, lays out a solid argument against pay for performance. Kohn argues that pay for performance creates many unintended consequences such as diminished interest in the task, a reduction in the focus on the customer, a diminished focus on quality, competition instead of cooperation etc. The unintended consequences created were the opposite needed for engagement.

Every research study I have ever read shows money is **not** the top motivator. At best, it is forth behind challenge, making a difference, personal achievement, enjoyment, etc. Yet, managers continue to use rewards to improve performance. Again, we are addicted to a theory that has limits and holds us back from achieving engagement. Pay for performance's mantra, "Do this and you will get that" is a just another method of control. Control is enslavement not engagement.

What theory must we embrace to upgrade our cultures of engagement? Two gentlemen have helped me to answer this question, Rob LeBow and Dr. W. Edwards Deming. Both LeBow and Deming have a deep respect for people. They each offer a unique approach to motivation that when combined provides a complete new theory to optimize engagement. I combine their two theories to form the Values and System Management Model. This model can move us away from enslavement and provide a guide to create long term engagement.

This management model has two elements and a new set of assumptions about people. The two elements are 1) Values Behaviors and 2) An Appreciation for a System. Values behaviors include the very basis of building trust. Trust is a critical element of an organization's culture and it forms the foundation for high engagement.

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Values behaviors include specific operational descriptions of integrity, respect, and customer focus. By understanding and minimizing the variation in those behaviors within the organization managers and employees can improve trust. Improved trust leads to reduced fear, increased creativity, risk taking, and efficient problem solving. Higher trust improves communication flow which leads to improved work flow. Values behaviors are those behaviors individuals can control. This model acknowledges the system within which people work has more of an impact on their individual performance than their individual choices. Employees can only control their actions and reactions. The values behaviors ensure, regardless of the situation, people will act with integrity, respect for each other, and focus on improving their customer's experience (both internal and external customers).

Improving the system over time must happen concurrently while people live the values behaviors. Dr. Deming's theory of Profound Knowledge provides us with a way of thinking that can help managers accomplish this. Optimization of the system is management's main job. According to Deming, attempting to control behaviors with threats or bribes by evaluating individuals and paying for individual results destroys engagement.

Any theory, by definition, embraces certain assumptions. Assumptions lead to questions and questions lead to decisions. Decisions lead to policies and procedures. We need to reset our theories to reset our assumptions about people to achieve engagement. Our current assumptions lead to enslavement and employees know it. That is why managers have not been able to improve engagement measures above 29%.

<b>Current assumptions from Taylor and Skinner</b>	<b>New assumptions from LeBow and Deming</b>
There is one best method of doing work and people must be evaluated on that method.	There is variation in all processes and variation must be managed to make predictions.
Pay people based on their individual performance results and achievement of individual goals.	Pay people based on organization's results. When the organization does well (system is optimized), everyone does well.
Hold people accountable for goals with pay for performance.	Influence people to be accountable for values behavior and keeping their agreements (commitments).

<b>Current assumptions from Taylor and Skinner</b>	<b>New assumptions from LeBow and Deming</b>
Evaluate individuals using the performance appraisal to control behavior and control results.	Evaluate processes (not people) because 96% of the results come from the system not the people. Control is an outcome not a strategy.
The higher the quality of the individuals the better the organization's performance (the better the individuals perform the better the organizational results).	The quality of the interactions between team members is more important than the quality of the team members (the higher the quality of the interactions the better the organizational results)
Allow people to make decisions about "how" to do their processes in order to achieve their individual goals and rate them based on the results they achieve.	Make decisions (improvements) based on the learning model (Walter Shewhart – Plan-Do-Study-Act) and optimize the entire system over-time.
People can't be trusted to do work on their own without rewards.	Trust people and create the environment that allows freedom, joy, innovation, and respect to achieve engagement.
Some "healthy" competition is good.	Cooperation beats competition every time.

Please take some time to read LeBow and Deming. Embracing a theory that creates enslavement will not help us achieve engagement. Be open to a new way of thinking about engagement. Be open to the new assumptions offered by this Management Model. Our current model is not working. Keeping our thinking the same while making tweaks in the techniques hasn't worked and won't work. We must think differently. We must embrace new assumptions to achieve new levels of engagement.

For more information about the Values and System Management Model, Values Behaviors, and Deming's Theory of Profound Knowledge please access [www.wallyhauck.com](http://www.wallyhauck.com)

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**W**ally Hauck is a Team Building Consultant who helps leaders to bring out the best in people. Organizational problems often appear, on the surface, to be “people problems”, when in fact, the real problems are actually the organization’s underlying broken internal systems. Relationships, trust and loyalty are more important now than ever before because the real value of an organization lies in the minds of the employees and their ability to solve problems. Wally helps leaders bring out the best in people.

Wally is a Certified Speaking Professional or CSP. The Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation, established in 1980, is the speaking industry's international measure of professional platform skill. CSP is conferred throughout the International Federation for Professional Speakers only on those who have earned it by meeting strict criteria.

Wally has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania; an MBA in Finance from Iona College; and earned his PhD in Organizational Leadership from Warren National University in 2008. His book **Blueprint for Success** provides ideas that can help leaders unlock their potential, remove metal blocks to success, and provide new insights to accelerate positive change. Wally’s chapter, *The Power of Influence: 7 Secrets for Successful Leadership*, provides leaders with insights to create an environment of trust, continuous learning, and employee loyalty. Wally has worked with dozens of firms and government agencies in the last decade.

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