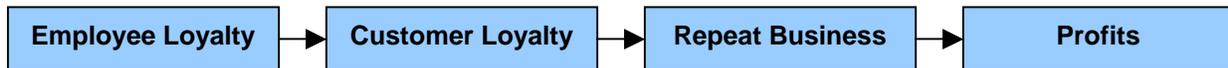


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Practical tools for developing emotional intelligence

What's Missing In the Workplace? Engagement As An Untapped Resource

Landmark research by James L. Heskett et al, at the Harvard Business School¹ has shown that the most significant contributing factor to an organization's success is employee loyalty. The research indicates that employee loyalty drives customer loyalty, which in turn is proven to generate the biggest portion of an organization's income in the form of return or annuity business. Employee loyalty yields customer loyalty yields repeat business that yields bottom line profits.



What can organizations do to impact each employee's loyalty?

The easy answer is: satisfy the employee's needs better than the competing organization. So, let's get out that old Maslow's list of human needs and take a look at what might be missing in the regular list of compensation, office furniture, benefits, parties, and recognition systems.

Maslow talked and wrote about the ultimate need being a need for self-actualization. *Forbes* publisher Rich Karlgaard calls on organizations to understand and "bet their business" on the 21st Century being "the new age of meaning" reflecting four distinct social and demographic causes: 9/11, baby-boomers approaching retirement, changes in the global economy, and the fallibility of organizational and governmental leaders.² At INSPIRATIONWORKS we translate this self-actualization and bring the "new age of meaning" into day-to-day behavioral terms as the need to matter in the world.

Carl Jung in his study of human psychology wrote about the universal need to answer questions about meaning in life. He actually called this basic human drive a "religious instinct". He was saying that we humans are "wired" to find meaning in life like Stephen Pinker in his best selling *Language Instinct* says we are "wired" for language.

Like Carl Jung, at INSPIRATIONWORKS we believe that the human animal is "wired" with a need for engagement. But we are missing two fundamental elements in today's workplace: an emotional competence perspective and a way to develop and exercise it daily.

We believe that humans have an emotional nature and need that must be fed during every workday. This emotional need is a condition of work that an employer helps employees satisfy (or not) and that is as essential as proper lighting. In fact, this emotional engagement focus is a "lighting"---an enlightenment, an inspiration--- that enables the employee to work to their best capability. Those employers who acknowledge, understand, and provide for this basic human need, this proper lighting of the workplace, will be the organizations that earn the loyalty of their employees because humans stay where their needs are satisfied. Even more, humans are eager to stay where they thrive. They are more enthused about their work more of their day.

That word *enthusiasm* is interesting in this context of missing workplace elements. Employers often ask for more enthusiasm from employees. The original meaning of the word *enthusiasm* was "to be divinely inspired." Perhaps the time is right to talk about that missing element to thrive, the element that has been missing in all the total quality management and organizational development programs: emotional engagement in the daily work organization.

It's not new to say that to be a whole person you have to tend to your physical, intellectual, and emotional needs. The new recognition is that we don't practice what we preach. We don't tend to all those needs at work. It's the rational, logical elements of human nature that we are familiar with and encourage. We're taught to compartmentalize work and emotions, to prohibit any language that is too emotional. Even talking about taking an emotional perspective in the workplace is often suppressed. Do say, "Let's have some team spirit

¹Harvard Business Review, March-April 1994

²Forbes, April 26, 2004

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here!” Don’t say, “Listen to your emotions.” Do say, “Let’s have some enthusiasm!” Don’t say, “Listen for inspiration.” We’re inhibited when it comes to taking an emotional perspective in organizations.

The act of inhibiting emotional perspectives causes emotional and even physical illness. James Pennebaker, the psychologist, researcher and professor at University of Texas at Austin, in hundreds of studies on the power of expressing emotions, measured the significant increase in immune system effectiveness as humans disclose feelings around life experiences. But we are taught to inhibit any emotional nature that we might have while we are at work. Jose Arguelles, the Spanish philosopher, said: “When a man is deprived of the power of expression, he will express himself in a drive for power.” We are taught to inhibit our emotional nature in the workplace culture. Relationships suffer from power competition. Health care costs to organizations rise. The whole person---integrated physically, mentally, and emotionally---is not supported.

What does it mean to support emotional engagement?

It’s interesting to notice that since the beginning of the written word, in every age and generation, and many times in each generation, the same question is asked by individual human beings. That common question is: “Why am I here?” It seems that this common question articulates a universal human need: the need to matter, the need to have a legacy, to leave a mark that says, “I was here and I mattered.” We believe that if the organization can honestly support that need to matter, then that organization will matter more to its customers. The organization’s need to have a legacy is addressed. As each Self in the organization is supported to survive and thrive and have a legacy, the organization will survive and thrive and have a legacy.

The mission, therefore, is to equip employers and employees with the process and the tools to satisfy the need we are wired for, that we inherently have, as humans: the need to recognize meaning in my life and my place in that big picture. We are wired to strive to satisfy this need even while we are at work. This wiring is not turned off just because we are in the organization where we “make a living.”

We’re taught in sales training, leadership training, interpersonal training, communication training, and diversity training how to “read” others. We are not taught practical ways to read our Selves. We are not taught to watch for changes in our own body language like we are taught to look for those changes in others. We are not taught this emotional competence skill of seeing in---“in-sight”---as an energy resource. We are not taught these skills. But they are teachable. They are learnable.

There is a timely example (considering a current health problem focus) of missing the Self perspective. We are not taught in school to notice the feeling of hunger. We are taught to eat at lunchtime or dinnertime or have a cookie after school. The size of the diet industry attests to our inability to read ourselves as effort is spent on helping people know the difference between hunger and emotional eating. Our sight is directed toward the outside, rather than toward our core nature, as we find ourselves obese compared to other cultures.

What if we set a new objective to support our human engagement need: development of emotional competence to manage our emotional energy as an untapped resource. Think of it like energy management to operate the emotional as well as the rational energy in organizations more effectively.

Can we be concerned with learning how to “read” our Selves, our emotional nature? Can we be concerned with learning “in sight,” making emotional connections within us and to the world without? Can we tap this energy resource? How can we create a structure in our organizations to practice these skills to thrive?

Conclusion

Efforts in organizational development have missed a basic human need: emotional engagement. The inspired and thriving organization is the container where the Self---the physically, mentally, and emotionally integrated individual---can really emerge and develop. The inspired and thriving organization develops one Self at a time by equipping employees with pragmatic tools to inspire themSelves. Employees equipped with pragmatic tools to inspire themSelves develop inspired and thriving organizations. When the organization equips each Self with tools to satisfy the human emotional engagement need, that’s when the employee really “makes a living.” Emotional energy is put to work. The result...employee loyalty...customer loyalty...and a lot more. There is a benefit for the complete Self, which is taken home, brought back to the organization, and taken home again each day. Enthusiasm is realized and palpable more of each day.

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Discovery Sessions

In the INSPIRATIONWORKS mission to equip organizations with tools to thrive, one of the key tools that we teach is “discovery sessions.” These sessions are our own adaptation of a form of dialog. Our objective is to employ a tangible repeatable process to address innovation in organizations.

The process of dialog saw a resurgence in the latter part of the 20th century in two forms. First, as the quantum physicist David Bohm began to write and speak about the potential power he saw in “creating meaning through words” in human dialog circles. After many attempts to establish these dialog circles in society, enthusiasm dimmed because the dramatic curing of social ills has not been easy to see as a result. And that word “dialog” is so widely and confusingly defined. With a few exceptions there has been disappointment that dialog, which Bohm proposed as the vehicle to do so much for so many, has done so little.

The second form of the dialog process appeared with the recovery movement. At the turn of this century, during all the hoopla of “the millennium” in which the news media surfaced example after example of remarkable events and people in order to differentiate and commemorate the 20th century, there was a quiet comment made by the well-known science fiction writer, Kurt Vonnegut. He proposed that the most significant movement of many centuries came in the 20th century. That movement was “the recovery movement”.

The recovery movement, based on its “12 Steps,” is self-described as “a practice.” This movement realizes the process that Bohm envisioned. It is the process of dialog applied. It is humans sitting in a circle, making new meaning for themselves and each other with words. The questions that are talked about are those same basic questions that have been talked about and written about through time. There are thousands of 12 Step “dialogs” convening in every corner of the world on a round the clock basis. Who would question that dialog has had a positive impact on at least one societal disease, that of substance abuse.

More about calling them “discovery sessions”

In order to realize innovation results in organizations through the tangible repeatable practice of “discovery sessions,” a perspective shift is required. Two quotes establish the perspective of discovery sessions:

- “In seeking wisdom thou art wise; in imagining that thou hath attained it thou art a fool.”
-- Simon Ben Azzai, second-century Jewish scholar.
- “He that knew all that learning ever writ knew only this--that he knew nothing yet.”
--Aphra Behn (noted as the first professional woman writer)

In our discovery sessions we are fellow explorers. It is an ongoing process... an ongoing practice with results that are slowly profound. In discovery sessions, the focus, energy and effort, is a together thing, not a separating intention. It feels like a “zone”... or a deep joy. It does not feel like an adrenalin high. There is a peace and a joy in mutual learning, where beyond the definition of a system, “the whole is greater than the sum of the parts”...the whole is greater AND the parts are greater.

Nothing is nirvana, but it comes closer than the very fleeting success of parry and thrust in what the sociolinguist Debra Tannen calls “the argument culture.” In the debate or argument framework, even when I might have a point, I am somehow disappointed in the other person's loss because there is inherent win/lose/hierarchy in the structure. I don't come out of the experience feeling enriched for me or others. I appreciate the skill, neatness, cleverness, and even beauty of debate language, but it doesn't fill me up like the win/win of being curious in discovery. “The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat” are lonely and too easily misunderstood. This perspective separates rather than connects.

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In “discovery sessions” we talk about deep organizational and human issues because those are the subjects that matter to the mattering of the individual. Discovery sessions validate and demonstrate how the combination of personality and experience of the Self has never been seen before and never will be again and therefore is priceless in its importance. It is diversity experience in the organization taken to a 21st century level that is positive, touching, and transforming.

The timing for this structure for connection makes sense for the new age of meaning, this 21st century. The routinization of the practice is win/win to the individual and the organization. The individual emerges more energized and engaged and the organization is more innovative.