

Workplace Dynamics

At the CORE of Employee Engagement

by Sherry Buffington, PhD

A 2014 *Gallup Employee Engagement* report states, “While the state of the U.S. economy has changed substantially since 2000, the state of the American workplace has not. Currently, 30% of the U.S. workforce is engaged in their work, and the ratio of engaged to actively disengaged employees is roughly 2-to-1, meaning that the vast majority of U.S. workers (70%) are not reaching their full potential — a problem that has significant implications for the economy and the individual performance of American companies.”

A *Gallup Management Journal* national study concluded that supervisors play a key role in worker well-being and engagement and implies that the focus supervisors should be on keeping people happy because happy people are more engaged. While this is true, it is an incomplete observation. The researchers contend that happy employees are better equipped to handle workplace relationships, stress, and change. Of course they are, but leaders already know that. What they don’t know is how to get and keep employees happy without going to ridiculous extremes.

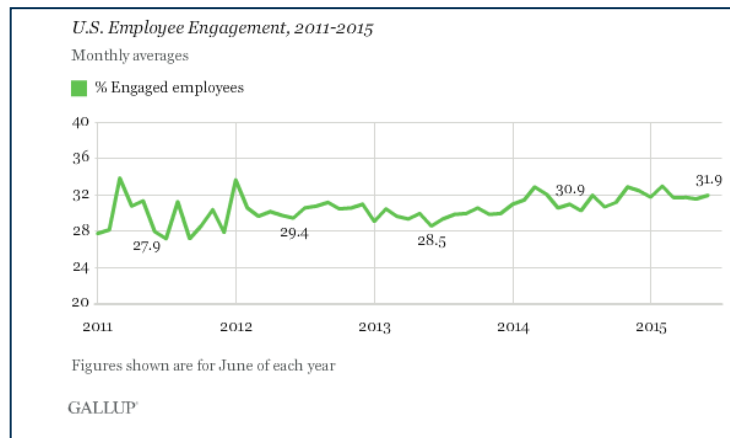
Company leaders want their employees to be happy. They are well aware that happy employees are more engaged and engaged employees are more productive. So what can leaders actually learn from the extensive Gallup surveys and reports? Mostly how concerned they should be.

The Gallup Organization has surveyed more than 30 million people since the year 2000 and the results have remained amazingly consistent over the fifteen years since the studies began. The study reported on here was conducted to determine how happiness and well-being affect job performance.

The researchers examined thousands of employee responses to see which factors differed most strongly among engaged employees (27% of respondents at the time of the study - 29% in 2014), those who were not engaged (59% at the time of the study - 54% in 2014) and those who were actively disengaged (14% at the time of the study – 18% in 2014). (See "Three Types of Employees" insert.) Interviews were conducted by telephone over a five years period and included more than a thousand employees. The error rate attributable to a sampling of this size is plus or minus three percentage points.

Three Types of Employees	
1	ENGAGED employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and actively work at moving the company forward.
2	NOT -ENGAGED employees are simply showing up, putting in time, but not investing any energy or passion into their work. They do only as much as they must to keep their job.
3	ACTIVELY DISENGAGED employees aren’t just wasting time, they are purposefully sabotaging the company, undermining their boss and draining the energy of their co-workers.

Though the percentages in this report are from a 2005 survey, as the chart below shows, little has changed in the years since. In fact the numbers of actively disengaged employees is increasing, which is what makes it imperative that leaders begin looking in the right direction and correcting at the right levels.



The percentages in the latest Gallup Poll (2014) closely correlate with our findings around healthy versus unhealthy development levels; high versus low emotional intelligence (EQ) levels; good versus poor coping skills; well developed versus under-developed and undeveloped interpersonal skills; and healthy versus unhealthy levels of self-esteem.

The *CORE Multidimensional Awareness Profile* (CORE MAP) and the *CORE Personal Effectiveness Profile* (CORE PEP) accurately predict employee related problems, including poor job performance, low productivity, poor attitudes, disengagement, interpersonal conflicts and poor self-management (EQ). The behaviors, attitudes and level of engagement in specific arenas can be measured and accurately predicted through the Personal Effectiveness patterns these assessments reveal. Low scores on the development of positive traits, emotional intelligence, coping abilities and interpersonal skills generally spell trouble.

Poor job performance, low productivity, poor attitudes, disengagement, interpersonal conflicts and poor self-management account for 93% of work-related problems and are at work in all ten of the top 10 reasons why employees get fired.

The Top Ten Reason Employees Get Fired

1. Insubordination
2. Misconduct
3. Poor Performance
4. Stealing
5. Using Company Property for Personal Business
6. Taking Too Much Time Off
7. Violating Company Policy
8. Damaging Company Property
9. Drug or Alcohol Possession at Work
10. Falsifying Company Records

The Supervisor

Previous Gallup research, as well as results from this survey, repeatedly states that supervisors play a crucial role in worker well-being and engagement. They prove this point through reporting the answers

to questions they ask. When respondents were asked to respond to the statement "My supervisor focuses on my strengths or positive characteristics," for examples, 77% of engaged workers strongly agreed with the statement, while just 23% of not-engaged and a scant 4% of actively disengaged workers strongly agreed that their supervisor focused on their strengths or positive characteristics. Interestingly, not one engaged worker disagreed with this statement*.

*** ALTHOUGH LEADERSHIP IS A KEY COMPONENT TO ENGAGEMENT LEVELS, WE CONTEND THAT DISENGAGEMENT HAS ALMOST AS MUCH TO DO WITH THE WORKER AS WITH THE SUPERVISOR AND OUR RESEARCH STRONGLY BACKS THIS POSITION. EVERY RELATIONSHIP PRODUCES A DYNAMIC THAT CAN BE CHANGED BY EITHER PARTY. PEOPLE DEVELOPED TO HEALTHY LEVELS DON'T ALLOW THE MOODS AND BEHAVIORS OF OTHERS TO ALTER THEIR OWN MOODS OR ACTIONS. THEY ARE GENERALLY SELF-MANAGED AND SELF-MOTIVATED SO THEY GIVE THEIR SUPERVISORS PLENTY OF POSITIVE THINGS TO FOCUS ON. THE ONLY WAY TO GIVE DIFFICULT EMPLOYEES POSITIVE FEEDBACK IS TO BE INAUTHENTIC FEEDBACK, WHICH IS NEVER A GOOD IDEA AND RARELY IF EVER IMPROVES THE ATTITUDE OR BEHAVIORS OF UNDEVELOPED EMPLOYEES.**

Co-Workers

When survey respondents were asked how they would characterize their interactions with their co-workers, 86% of engaged employees said their interactions with co-workers were always positive or mostly positive. The findings for less engaged workers showed significantly different results: 72% of not-engaged workers characterized these interactions as always or mostly positive, compared to just 45% of actively disengaged workers.

The researchers in this study concluded that these findings suggest that people with higher levels of job engagement enjoy substantially more positive interactions with their coworkers than do their less engaged counterparts.*

*** WHILE JOB ENGAGEMENT AND POSITIVE INTERACTIONS DO GO HAND-IN-HAND, ONE DOES NOT LEAD TO THE OTHER. BOTH ARE PRODUCTS OF THE HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT OF POSITIVE TRAITS AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE. PEOPLE WHO HAVE DEVELOPED THEIR POSITIVE TRAITS AND EFFECTIVELY MANAGE THEIR EMOTIONS GENERALLY HAVE EFFECTIVE COPING STRATEGIES, A HIGH DEGREE OF TOLERANCE AND GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH MOST PEOPLE, BOTH ON AND OFF THE JOB. THIS HAS FAR MORE TO DO WITH INDIVIDUAL ATTRIBUTES THAN WITH THE NATURE OF THE JOB. DEVELOPED PEOPLE ARE ALSO ENGAGED AND EFFECTIVE BOTH ON AND OFF THE JOB. POSITIVE INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS CORRELATE WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSITIVE TRAITS AND EFFECTIVE COPING STRATEGIES, NOT WITH ENGAGEMENT.**

Feeling Challenged

When asked how often they feel challenged at work, a majority of engaged employees (61%) said they feel challenged very often, while 35% said they sometimes feel challenged. In contrast, just 49% of not-engaged and 24% of actively disengaged workers indicated that they very often feel challenged at work; 39% of not-engaged workers and 42% of actively disengaged workers sometimes feel challenged.

It appears that while most U.S. workers do perceive their jobs as being at least somewhat challenging, engaged employees lead the way in this respect. But if most workers feel challenged sometimes or very

often at work, is that good or bad? To explore this issue further, respondents were also asked how often they feel frustrated at work. Here, the differences were even more striking. Almost 4 in 10 engaged employees (39%) indicated that they rarely or never feel frustrated at work,* while only 13% very often feel frustrated. In contrast, twice as many not-engaged employees (26%) and a whopping 60% of actively disengaged employees said they very often feel frustrated. These responses suggest that while engaged workers do feel challenged at work, they view these challenges in a much more positive light than do less engaged workers.**

*** ENGAGED EMPLOYEES ARE MORE AWARE OF WHAT THEY NEED TO BE MORE FULLY FUNCTIONAL. AS A RESULT, THEY ARE MORE SELF-DIRECTED AND BETTER ABLE TO SELECT THE RIGHT POSITION IN THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT. THE ENVIRONMENT CAN CERTAINLY INFLUENCE THE MOODS AND BEHAVIORS OF PEOPLE, BUT THOSE WHO ARE DEVELOPED TO HEALTHY LEVELS AND HAVE GOOD PERSONAL AND RELATIONSHIP BOUNDARIES TEND TO MANAGE THEIR ENVIRONMENT RATHER THAN ALLOWING THE ENVIRONMENT TO MANAGE THEM. THEY SEEK OUT CHALLENGING WORK AND PRESENT TO THEIR SUPERIORS AS CAPABLE, AND SO ARE GIVEN MORE OPPORTUNITIES.**

**** PEOPLE WHO ARE DEVELOPED TO HEALTHY LEVELS, AND HAVE GOOD COPING SKILLS AND WELL DEVELOPED INTERPERSONAL SKILLS VIEW CHALLENGES DIFFERENTLY AND MANAGE THEM FAR BETTER THAN THOSE WHO AREN'T DEVELOPED TO HEALTHY LEVELS. DEVELOPED PEOPLE APPROACH CHALLENGES AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH AND LEARNING WHERE UNDEVELOPED ONES APPROACH THEM AS PROBLEMS BLOCKING THEIR PROGRESS.**

Perceived Value

When asked how difficult it would be for their employer to replace them, 54% of disengaged employees said it would be extremely or somewhat difficult for their employer to replace them, compared to 76% of engaged employees. Engaged workers also felt significantly more secure at their workplaces: 54% of engaged workers reported that they felt more secure at work than they did a year ago, but only 36% of not-engaged workers and just 18% of actively disengaged workers felt more secure than they did a year ago.*

*** INDIVIDUALS WITH HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT LEVELS, HIGH EQ, GOOD COPING AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS, AND A HEALTHY LEVEL OF SELF-ESTEEM, ARE REAL ASSETS TO A COMPANY. THEY ARE SELF-DRIVEN, REQUIRE VERY LITTLE SUPERVISION AND TEND TO BE HIGH PERFORMERS. THEIR SENSE OF SECURITY COMES FROM HAVING A CLEAR CONCEPT OF WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY HAVE TO OFFER, AND MAKING SURE THEY ARE HIGH VALUE EMPLOYEES.**

Taking Stress Home

To discover the connection between happiness at work and happiness outside the office, the survey asked respondents how much happiness they experience at work. The contrast in responses given by workers in each engagement group was quite noticeable. A clear majority of engaged workers (86%) said they very often felt happy while at work. Among low-engagement respondents, 48% of not-engaged employees and only 11% of actively disengaged reported that they were very often happy at work. In response to the question "How much of the happiness you experience overall would you say comes from your work life?"; 45% of engaged employees said they get a great deal of their overall

happiness from their work life, compared to just 19% of not-engaged and 8% of actively disengaged employees.

These findings suggest that while most workers experience varying degrees of happiness and well-being at work, engaged workers get the most from these feelings. Not surprisingly, engaged workers also reported higher levels of overall life satisfaction. More than five in 10 engaged workers (53%) strongly agreed that they had gotten the important things they want in their lives, compared to just 13% of actively disengaged workers.*

Almost half of engaged employees (46%) strongly agreed that the overall condition of their lives was excellent, in contrast to just 9% of actively disengaged workers. Negative feelings at work also seem to spill over into actively disengaged workers' home lives.** The survey asked respondents if they had three or more days in the past month when work stress caused them to behave poorly with friends or family members. More than half (54%) of actively disengaged workers and 31% of not engaged workers answered yes to this question, while just 17% of engaged workers answered yes.** These results are similar to those reported in previous surveys.

The results of the Gallup Employee Engagement Index survey show a strong relationship between worker happiness and workplace engagement. Happy and engaged employees are much more likely to have a positive relationship with their boss, are better equipped to handle new challenges and changes, feel they are more valued by their employers, handle stress more effectively, and are much more satisfied with their lives.***

*** PEOPLE WHO HAVE DEVELOPED THEIR POSITIVE TRAITS AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE TO HEALTHY LEVELS GENERALLY HAVE EXCELLENT COPING SKILLS, WELL-DEVELOPED INTERPERSONAL SKILLS AND A HEALTHY LEVEL OF SELF-ESTEEM. THESE ARE THE PRIMARY FACTORS FOR HAPPINESS AND SUCCESS SO IT WOULD FOLLOW THAT THESE PEOPLE ARE HAPPIER AND MORE EFFECTIVE ON AND OFF THE JOB. THE CORRELATION IS ACTUALLY BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT LEVELS AND HAPPINESS, AND BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT LEVELS AND ENGAGEMENT, NOT BETWEEN HAPPINESS AND ENGAGEMENT. THESE ARE BOTH EFFECTS OF THE SAME CAUSE: PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT. IT IS THIS EMPLOYERS NEED TO BE CONSIDERING**

**** NEGATIVE ATTITUDES AND POOR INTER-PERSONAL AND COPING SKILLS AFFECT ALL AREAS OF LIFE. LIFE CONDITIONS TEND TO REFLECT THE DEGREE OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AN INDIVIDUAL POSSESSES. PEOPLE WITH EXCELLENT OVERALL DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTHY PERSONAL BOUNDAIRES INVARIABLY LEAD MORE FULFILLING LIVES, WHICH POSITIVELY AFFECTS THEY WAY THEY LIVE AND WORK.**

***** THOUGH THERE IS A CLEAR CORRELATION BETWEEN HAPPINESS AND ENGAGEMENT, THE CONCLUSION ARRIVED AT BY THE RESEARCHERS HAS LITTLE VALUE. IT IMPLIES THAT MAKING EMPLOYEES HAPPIER WILL ENSURE ENGAGEMENT. AS MANY EMPLOYERS HAVE DISCOVERED TO THEIR DISMAY, THIS IS AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK AND A VERY EXPENSIVE PROPOSITION IN BOTH TIME AND MONEY. THE FOCUS NEEDS TO BE ON PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT (WHICH IS DIFFERENT THAN EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT AS IT IS TYPICALLY APPLIED) NOT ON EXTERNAL INCENTIVES.**

Work Roles

The engagement levels of executives and managers are not too far ahead of the rest of the pack and this is a big problem because, as the leader goes, so goes the pack.

<i>U.S. Employee Engagement, by Work Role</i>	
% Engaged employees	
	June 2015
Manager, executive or officer	40.4
Clerical/Office	36.0
Other	33.3
Professional	31.9
Sales	31.2
Construction/Mining	28.3
Service	28.1
GALLUP®	

The single most important decision company leaders can make is who they place in management positions. Nothing fixes a bad hire at a senior level—not compensation—not a big paycheck—not benefits—nothing. The numbers that Gallup polls keep reporting have serious implications for the future of U.S. companies, and companies around the world.

Disengagement and ineffective management are costing U.S. companies an estimated \$450 billion to \$550 billion annually. Gallup compared the top 25% of teams with the bottom 25% and found that the top 25% have nearly 50% fewer accidents and 41% fewer defects in the products they create. What's more, healthcare costs for the top 25% were far less. Gallup CEO, Jim Clifton, concluded "Having too few engaged employees means our workplaces are less safe, employees have more quality defects, and disengagement — which results from terrible managers — is driving up the country's healthcare costs."

Clifton says, "If your company reflects the average in the U.S., just imagine what poor management and disengagement are costing your bottom line. On the other hand, imagine if your company doubled the number of great managers and engaged employees... Engaged employees... come up with most of the innovative ideas, create most of a company's new customers, and have the most entrepreneurial energy."

As fifteen years of data based on extensive research continues to show, the answer to having better managers and happier, more highly engaged employees is not where most leaders think it is. It is not on external motivators, such as more perks and incentives, or company parties, or rah! Rah! speeches. Great managers and high performance, fully engaged employees have certain characteristics and development patterns that need to be duplicated. You can discover the patterns that lead to engagement and high performance with CORE assessment systems.

CORE MAP is an integrated system designed to measure and predict job performance, productivity, attitude, motivators, demotivators, interpersonal skills development, self-management capacity, emotional intelligence overall and in specific arenas, and the ability to cope under varying levels of

pressure. CORE assessments provide clear, laser-focused guidelines for developing employees to their highest potential and making the most of their natural strengths and abilities. CORE assessments are exceptional at predicting employee performance, aiding in accurate employee placement, and pinpointing areas where training and development will reap the greatest rewards.

To learn more about how CORE Integrated Systems can help your company achieve its goals in the fastest most cost efficient way, visit our website at www.coremap.com, email Dr. Sherry Buffington at sdb@coremap.com, or call 214-688-1412.