BUSINESS

ARTICLE

ACCELERATED LEADERSHIP

5 WAYS TO INCREASE
EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT
IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

ROSS TRAHAN

LEADERSHIP & COMMUNICATION TRAINER

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THE
ISSUE

There has been a problem with disengagement of the American workforce over the last two decades. It has cost our U.S. economy an estimated 450-650 billion dollars annually in lost productivity.
The problem and estimated lost has been identified by the Gallup Institute beginning in the year 2000.
Gallup has surveyed over 90,000 employees in the U. S and across the globe, in 12 different industry sectors, over a period of 20 years.

The good news is that in the U.S. there has been a gain in engagement, especially over the last five years.

The Gallup graph on next page shows how the rate of 'engaged' employees has risen from **26%** in 2000 to **36%** in 2020.

The 'actively disengaged' worker has gone down from **18%** to **14%** in the same time frame.

Though not shown in the graph, during this time the amount of U.S. employees that are 'not engaged' has gone down from **56%** to **50%**.

The increase has many causes, but much credit must go to the awareness and work being done by companies training their leaders on how to increase engagement in their organizations.
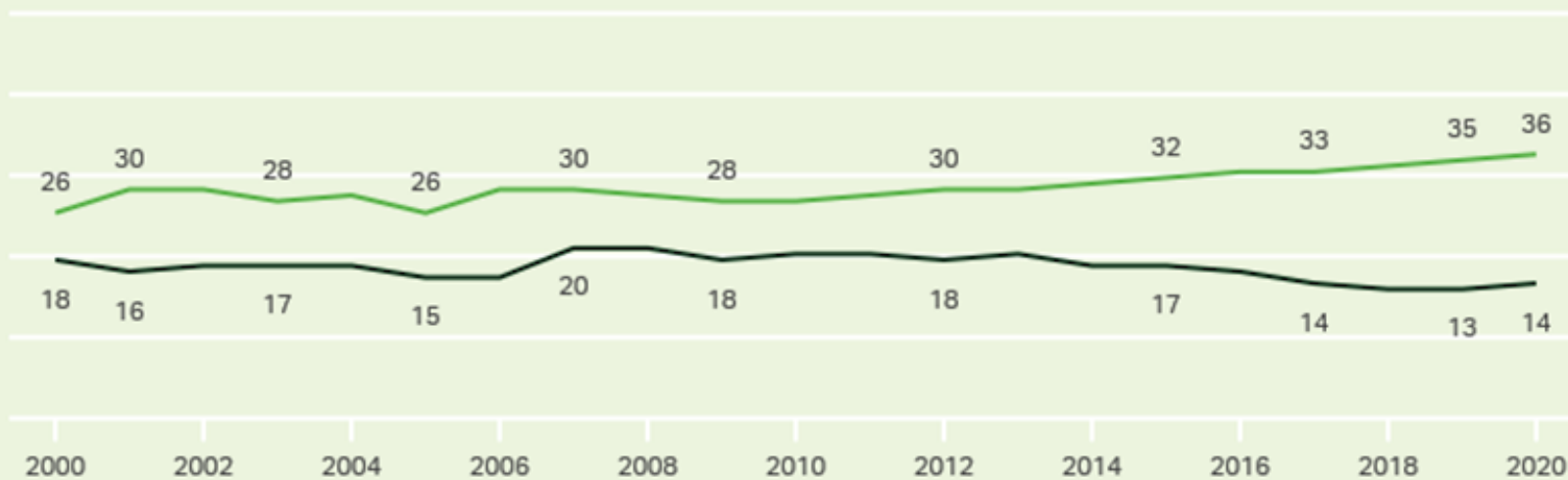
We want to celebrate the trend, yet there is still much to be done when nearly two thirds of the U.S. workforce is either **'not engaged'** or **'actively disengaged'**.

The issue is global as well. Globally, the average of 'engaged employees' is **19% - 17%** lower than the United States.

U.S. Employee Engagement Trend

Annual averages

■ % Engaged   ■ % Actively disengaged

Year	% Engaged	% Actively disengaged
2000	26	18
	30	16
2002	28	17
2004	26	15
2006	30	20
2008	28	18
2012	30	18
2014	32	17
2016	33	14
2018	35	13
2020	36	14

Note: 2018 results are for January through June

GALLUP

Engagement of our workers is a huge area of opportunity that is being seized upon by smart companies.
Organizations with strong employee engagement scores generate revenue growth at a rate **2.5 times higher than companies with lower marks**, according to the Hay Group - a management consulting company.

There is also vital research done by, Gallup, Goldman, ADP, and the Tanner Institute which contends that gaining the engagement of our employees is very possible, practical, and profitable.

The findings indicate that **skillful leadership is one of the major factors in employee engagement** and point us to vital aspects of leadership in principles that do not change with time, seasons, or economic climate.

I would like to mention five timeless leadership traits that directly affect engagement:

These traits are what employees want from their leaders, and it encourages their engagement.

Each of the five traits will be expanded upon in follow- up articles, where I will speak more about their applications in our current technological and economic climate.

- **Respect**
- **Communication**
- **Listening & Feedback**
- **Team Building**
- **Culture & Leadership**

CARE AND RESPECT

There is no greater cause of disengagement for employees than for them to feel that their leader does not really care about their well-being or does not respect them as a person.

There are hundreds of ways to cause disengagement. Leaders will often unintentionally behave in ways that bring disengagement. Often those negative behaviors and their effects are dismissed by saying, **"We just need to get things done,"** or **"It is just business"** or **"They should not take things so personally"**.

The common assumption is that these phrases will somehow repair the damage done to the person's motivation.

Few will argue about the direct connection between engagement and the need for our employees to feel respected.

But how to demonstrate respect and care in a practical and effective manner will often evade us and our leadership team, **especially as we seek more efficiency and production**.

It is hyper-critical in difficult & uncertain times that we find ways, as leaders, to efficiently demonstrate **care and respect for our personnel**.

Otherwise, the 'crew' will find it much easier to 'abandon the ship' than to stay with it. Adding to this concern is the fact that the 'crew members' who we need most, are the ones who usually have the most options.

COMMUNICATION

Communicate, communicate, communicate.
Keeping someone uninformed, choosing an impersonal means to handle issues that affect someone personally, being overly aggressive in tough situations, or verbally running over someone's idea, are all ways to disengage employees.

Unskilled communication by leaders is a major cause of disengagement.

As leaders we often fail to provide those following us with enough of the right kind of communication. Communicating is simple in theory, but complex in application.
Effective communication involves the content of what needs to be to be said. Then there is the structure, process, and tools used to communicate.

Most importantly it involves **Communication Skills** which efficiently and effectively show **Care** and **Respect**.

Every time a leader engages someone in communication, there is an opportunity to increase or diminish engagement.

What we do is important, often more important than how we do it.

The needed skills can, and should, be learned if we want the **benefits** and **profits** that come with **higher engagement.**

Our communication content needs to be what is appropriate for the position being addressed, yet seek to be real and transparent.
Our employees need to know, and be updated, about the general condition of the organization and how it affects them.

Though it may seem counter-intuitive to leaders, the worse the conditions become in an organization, the more frequent the communication needs to occur.

When dealing with performance issues or discipline, we need to sincerely communicate, face-to-face, so the person can see our body language and feelings in the situation.

This becomes different when many of us are working remotely.
In tough situations do not settle for an email or let others do your communicating to your team.
Instead, make your communication as personal as possible, and it will increase your personnel's desire to engage.

LISTENING
& FEEDBACK

Effective Listening is the second most sited element that increases **Engagement** with employees.

When employees feel they have a voice that is being heard, their Engagement automatically Increases.

Do you let them know what you can do in response?
Are they informed in a respectful way about what cannot be acted upon and why?

These are not negotiations, but a simple means of hearing and listening to feedback without repercussion, then employees can know they have a voice – *or not.*

When a person feels there is little hope of being listened to, they begin putting their heads down and **start doing only what is necessary** to collect their check.
This universal sign of not caring causes them to care less about everything else.

This occurs in large and small-scale moments throughout the organization **on a daily basis.**

How leaders conduct themselves in every conversation and in every situation sends the message of whether people are being heard in your organization - *or not.*

We need to use feedback skills and structures, where we are able to receive feedback from the different levels of our workforce and be responsive to their ideas.

Do you have an effective means to let your personnel know you have heard them?

TEAM BUILDING

Employees will follow us if we are real about where we are and what we need from them as a team, in order to make it through tough times.

When teams are not operating well as a unit, or across natural barriers, difficult times will cause every team to pull for themselves.

If not redirected, it will eventually be every person for himself/herself.

This scenario does not end well for the organization or the individuals.

Teams with the ability to work well with others from different departments is one of the signs of a healthy organization.

In troubled times, they pull together even tighter and often greater synergy and innovation is the result.

This does not happen without skillful and intentional team-building and intra-team and divisional collaboration.

Ultimately, if we are going to win, it will need to be with a United Effort.

"

Trust, collaboration, inclusion, and value can all be demonstrated when our teams pull together.

We become more powerful together.

Culture is cited in studies as one of the main reasons people stop trying to please their supervisors.
Is culture intentionally formed, or does it just accidentally occur?
The answer is yes to both.

However, being intentional about culture will lower the rate of 'accidental culture.'
Yes, **Culture is a definite driver of Engagement, and when negative, Disengagement as well.**

There are many factors that contribute to forming and maintaining a healthy organizational culture, which in turn, encourages **Employee Engagement.**

Often, changing culture to be more positive and productive is a process that is occurs in degrees over time, yet there are step changes that can shorten the process.

However, when faced with crisis, there is often opportunity to right many wrongs.

If we can **Identify** negative cause-and-effects in culture, **take Responsibility**, and leadership is **willing to change**, there is a possibility of making great progress in shifting culture.

Opportunity to get better can be seized when 'status quo' is no longer desired, and we come together to make it through the storm.

This is often dependent on leadership's willingness to look at what they are great at, and what they can do to improve.
When leadership improves, engagement goes up. It is a fact.

THOUGH IT FEELS COUNTER-INTUITIVE, WHEN LEADERSHIP IS HUMBLE AND OPEN ABOUT WHERE THEY CAN IMPROVE, **THE SAME BEGINS TO OCCUR IN THOSE THEY LEAD.**

Leaders need to set the **vision**, **mission**, and **values** for the organization.
They need to communicate in a **positive manner** on how these elements apply in the company's present season and situation.

Leaders need to communicate how it can be 'a win' for individuals as well as the organization.

If leaders set an example of living out the values, and demonstrate a positive attitude, employees will tend to follow.

In time, the entire work culture will become more motivated.

Tough or uncertain times for an organization is an opportunity to go up to a new level.
Some of the greatest wins in business are discovered after experiencing loss.

May we all seek to win together. Undoubtedly, increasing engagement will be part of the answer.

ACCELERATED LEADERSHIP

It's an EXPERIENCE!

Ross Trahan – Sr. Partner

@acceleratedleadership

www.altrainer.com