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Engagement is Not Enough

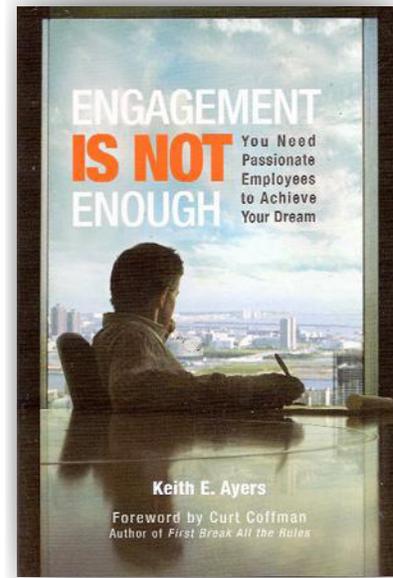
You Need Passionate Employees to Achieve Your Dream

Keith E. Ayers

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Summarized by Jennifer Cuthbertson

INTRODUCTION

Corporate leaders must constantly assess the threats to their business. Often times, leaders look externally to foreign markets, the economy, or competitors as the most likely source of danger. However, the most serious threat to a business may emanate from an internal source—disengaged employees. In **Engagement is Not Enough**, Keith Ayers details the steps a manager must take to engage employees and inspire passionate team members. Managers of teams large and small will learn how to create a team composed of committed employees who understand the meaningfulness of what they do and how their role contributes to their company's success.

PART I: THE ANATOMY OF A LEADER

Employee disengagement is a very real problem for businesses of all sizes. Ayers cites a study by Curt Coffman and Gabriel Gonzalez-Molina, Ph.D. which found that the average employee engagement figures for the United States are: 30 percent engaged, 54 percent not engaged, and 16 percent actively disengaged.

In organizations where an average number of employees are engaged, between 30 and 50 percent of the payroll is going to employees who at some level are disengaged from their work. "The not engaged employees and, to a larger degree, the actively disengaged employees are very costly, taking their pay and

benefits and then working against the best interests of the organization. They spread their discontent and do their best to turn the engaged employees against the organization as well.”

When employees join an organization, they are excited and ready to take on the responsibilities of their new job. People generally apply for positions that interest them and for which they believe they have the talent, skills, and creativity required to succeed. On day one, they are excited and ready to make a contribution to the organization. How, then, do so many employees become disengaged?

The first six months with an organization are critical. The decline into disengagement starts when employees begin to believe that their expectations are not being met. They begin to wonder if they made a mistake in their choice of employment. Their disengaged coworkers encourage that doubt by disparaging the organization to the new employee. Without intervention, new employees become disillusioned and will either start thinking about leaving and looking for a new job, or, more commonly and costly, they will remain with the organization but will “switch off” and cease being active contributors.

According to Ayers, for such a high percentage of employees to become disengaged over the first six months, there must be a significant failure at the leadership level. “Despite the billions of dollars spent on leadership development every year and the thousands of resources on the subject, the primary objective of effective leadership, getting all employees to perform at their best, is not being achieved.”

Many leaders either underestimate the threat to their company from a disengaged employee, or they attempt to employ a stop-gap solution, thinking that better compensation, benefits, or incentives will fix the problem. But, there is no easy solution for the problem of disengagement. In addition to looking to ineffective solutions when dealing with disengagement, some leaders may unintentionally cause employee disengagement by being consumed by what the author terms “one of the four primary obsessions.”

- **An obsession with financial success:** Driving myopically toward profit or meeting budget alone and ignoring the needs of employees can be very

KEY CONCEPTS

There are five primary needs employees have that must be met if they are to become passionate about their work. Employees need to:

1. **Be Respected:** Employees need to be listened to and to know that what they do is valued by their leaders.
2. **Learn and Grow:** Employees have a natural desire to develop their talents and complete tasks that use their strengths.
3. **Be an Insider:** Employees who feel that they are being treated differently will not be engaged and passionate about their work.
4. **Feel Meaningful:** Employees need to know that what they do is worthwhile and makes a difference.
5. **Be Part of a Winning Team:** Employees on high-performance teams outperform others because they are fueled by passion.



Information about the author and subject:

www.engagementisnotenough.com

Information about this book and other business titles:

www.elevatebooks.com

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Richard Y. Chang and Fred Smith

costly.

- **An obsession with control:** Leaders who insist on being in control communicate that they mistrust their employees.
- **An obsession with avoiding responsibility:** Leaders who look to blame problems on anyone but themselves will often inspire employees to do the same.
- **An obsession with logic:** Leaders who are obsessed with logic and left-brained thinking are often dismissive of the emotions and feelings of their employees.

Leaders are not the only ones with responsibility for employee engagement. Employees do have a responsibility to fulfill their job responsibilities. They should be engaged. However, the reality is that in the average organization, 70 percent of employees are not engaged. Being effective as a leader will help light a fire within employees, rather than under employees. Being engaged is contagious, but so is being switched off. Until leaders inspire passion, nothing will change.

An act of leadership does not occur without the support of others, and the only power that leaders really have is that granted by others—by those who support them. Turning a group of employees with varying levels of engagement into a high-performance team does not happen overnight. It takes time, commitment, patience, and the belief that the effort is worth it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Keith E. Ayers is president of Integro Leadership Institute, Pennsylvania and managing director of Integro Learning Company, Australia. He specializes in working with CEOs and senior executive teams to help them develop a work environment based on a high level of trust and personal responsibility. He has appeared on the front page of *USA Today* and is a regular contributor to *BusinessWeek.com*.

Leaders of high-performance teams meet the five primary needs of their employees. When employees are 1) respected, 2) able to learn and grow, 3) feel like an insider, 4) feel that their jobs are meaningful, and 5) believe they are part of a winning team, they are more likely to be engaged.

Leaders must provide something of value to their employees in order to get the rewards of being a leader. Ayers terms this the *Give-Get-Cycle*.

Whether leading a team, a business unit, a department, or the entire organization, leadership roles are created for a reason. These roles have a purpose, and that is to deliver the output the organization needs to achieve its strategic objective. The more leaders *give* their talents to the organization, the more their team will deliver to the organization, and the more leaders will *get* in rewards and satisfaction.

Accountability is rarely an issue when a team performs well. It is when something goes awry that accountability becomes a thorny issue, and that is what gives the word a negative connotation.

One thing that effective leaders must keep in mind is that people bring all of their beliefs and emotions to work. They do not leave part of themselves at home. Ayers compares employees to an iceberg. Only about one-seventh of an iceberg's mass is visible above the water. The rest is hidden beneath the surface. Similarly, people show only a small part of themselves on the surface. The rest is buried within. This is what Ayers terms the *Whole Person Concept*. He details four aspects of this concept:

1. **Behavior:** Consider this the tip of the iceberg. It is what is visible when interacting with a person.
2. **Thinking and Feeling:** People take action because they think they should or because they feel like they should. Thinking and feeling lie just beneath the surface.
3. **Values and Beliefs:** These are deeper motives for action that are interconnected.
4. **Needs:** These are the most instinctive part of a person and are at the core of everyone's being.

It is the job of every manager to engage with each employee as a whole person and to take personal responsibility to create the appropriate work environment through the quality of their leadership. Once an appropriate work environment is established, leaders will have a better chance to motivate employees to take personal responsibility.

Determining whether an employee is *other-directed* or *self-directed* will help a manager relate to an employee and create a conducive work environment. People who are other-directed believe they have no control over their lives and are controlled by those in authority. A self-directed person believes their locus of control is internal. Consider an employee who is other-directed and who receives a work-related task that is not included in the job description. That employee is more likely to view the task with an "I have to" frame of mind and will most likely make one of two choices: comply or rebel. Complying does not mean that the task will be completed to the best of the employee's ability, and rebelling will not usually be in the form of out-and-out defiance. Rather, it is usually resistance to, or avoidance of, the task.

On the other hand, employees who are self-directed believe they have a choice. They will either agree or disagree with doing the task. Whether they agree to complete the task or not, these employees will accept the consequences of their decision.

When leaders really trust people, believe in, and partner with them, when employees are more involved and have more responsibility, then they are more self-directed and more passionate about what they do.

Leaders can play a role in whether their employees are other- or self-directed. When leaders try to claim too much control and solve problems and make decisions for employees who are capable of doing it themselves, they rob those employees of the chance to be self-directed.

There are four keys to creating an environment where employees can be self-directed. These are part of what Ayers terms the *responsibility-based culture model* for leadership.

1. **Level of Trust:** In an authority-driven environment, leaders make all of the decisions and trust is low. In a responsibility-based model, leaders allow employees to take ownership of their jobs, which inspires trust.
2. **Leadership Approach:** While an authority-driven model is control-based and designed to ensure compliance, a responsibility-based model ensures that employees understand their choices and the consequences. Leaders in this model create a partnership with employees.
3. **Who is Responsible?:** Authority-driven models do not inspire anyone to take responsibility, because those who do so are often blamed if things go wrong. In a responsibility-driven model, team members take responsibility because they know the team's direction and have some stake in getting there.
4. **Understanding people:** In a responsibility model, leaders understand that most employees will do the right thing and meet the needs of the organization. They also understand that their approach to leadership determines whether employees are compliant, rebellious, self-directed, or other-directed.

PART II: GETTING STARTED ON ENGAGEMENT

The manner in which problems are solved in the workplace can go a long way toward creating an environment that fosters employee engagement. A leader who automatically begins to focus on who caused a problem, rather than what the problem is, will be unable to inspire employees to help solve the problem. Instead, employees will be on the defensive, which will make it even harder to determine what caused the problem, much less to find a solution.

The way that change is handled in the workplace can also go a long way towards shaping the work environment. When change is implemented from the top down with little input and information on why the change is occurring, employees are more likely to resist the change. Ayers believes that organizations experiencing internal resistance to change have not

focused enough on building trust and problem-solving. Company leaders simply impose change rather than facilitate it.

Facilitation requires involving team members in the change process, rather than subjecting them to it. When team members are included in the process, they will usually embrace it and assist with making it happen, because they understand the reasons behind the change. Involving employees in the process—any process—goes a long way towards satisfying their need to be respected and to be a part of the team.

Ayers highlights research from the Saratoga Institute which sheds light on why managers fail to satisfy the needs of their employees. The research found that “89 percent of managers believe that employees leave the organization for reasons related to money.” However, 88 percent of employees report that they left their previous job for reasons other than money.

This illustrates the need for managers to understand the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Pay and rewards are extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivators, such as seeing a job as stimulating, interesting, challenging, or meaningful, are actually much more important in satisfying employees’ needs.

Leaders must also be aware of their own needs, values, and emotions, as well as the impact these have on the way they make decisions. When leaders are self-aware, they tend to create a work environment that resonates with employees, because it stimulates positive emotions in their team members.

In order to be self aware and to understand what drives employees’ behavior, Ayers believes that it is critical that those in leadership positions understand the two basic needs that influence how people behave in relation to each other: the need for affiliation and the need for control.

People who have a high need for control and low need for affiliation tend to be dominating. They like to take control of projects and leave the detail work to others. Those who have a high need for control and a high need for affiliation also like to be in control, but they like to influence and persuade people to their way of

thinking. People who have a low need for control and a high need for affiliation are friendly, helpful, and supportive. Those with a low need for control and a low need for affiliation have a preference for doing tasks themselves rather than taking charge or working closely with others. Understanding where employees fall in this spectrum makes it easier to create project teams and assign tasks.

The starting point for getting employees engaged is to understand that if their needs are not satisfied, employees switch off.

Leaders who are able to recognize their own needs for control and affiliation are more likely to be aware of their own behavior and to recognize the needs of their employees. As a leader, it is essential to understand and value the behavioral styles of each team member. It is critical to getting everyone to perform at their best and to creating a high-performance team that is passionate about what they do.

Achieving this level of passion is not easy and one key is understanding that values drive behavior. Values have a strong influence on people’s feelings and the way they think. Individual employees operate from different value sets, resulting in inconsistent behavior at best and conflict at worst. Establishing a set of core organizational values makes it very clear what standards of behavior are expected of everyone, because the values state how the organization operates in relation to everyone it deals with: employees, customers, suppliers, and the community.

When creating a set of core organizational values, there are some common mistakes that should be avoided. Those include:

- **Having too many values:** If there are too many values to remember and employees have to look them up in the employee handbook, they will not operate by them consistently. The recommendation is for no more than six core values.
- **Using platitudes:** Avoid using phrases such as “people are the most important asset,” unless it is true. Employees will not believe in the values unless the company actually operates by them.
- **Being unremarkable:** People cannot operate by value statements that they cannot remember.

Make each value a distinct, easily understandable statement.

- **Confusing values with goals or strategies:** Profit is a goal. It is not a value. Values are behavioral standards that describe how everyone in the organization is supposed to act.

In an organization where expectations are not clear, there is a lack of straightforwardness about what is expected. According to the Gallup Organization, less than 50 percent of employees are clear about what is expected of them at work each day. Ayers believes that if the tables were turned, and managers were asked what employees expected from them each day, that the percentage might be even worse. A high level of trust only comes with a high level of honesty on all sides.

In addition to honesty, receptivity is an important value in the workplace. Without it, employees are not willing to speak up and to disclose their ideas and opinions—many of which could save the company money and time. If the perception is that those in senior management are more likely to be listened to than those on the frontline, frontline employees are unlikely to offer fresh ideas.

In a low-trust workplace, employees will resist change, even when it is beneficial to them.

To build a feeling of acceptance in the workplace, employees need to feel that they are respected and they need to be recognized for their contributions. One way to help people feel that they are respected for who they are is to remember that a manager's job sometimes requires changing people's behavior, but it never has to do with changing who an employee is as a person.

Recognition can be as simple as giving positive feedback or as elaborate as a formal employee recognition program, but it is essential when creating an environment that spawns engagement.

PART III: FROM ENGAGEMENT TO PASSION

According to Ayers, when an employee accepts a job there is an unwritten psychological contract between the employee and the employer. It is based on a set of beliefs both parties have about what each is entitled to

receive and required to give in the relationship. From the employees' standpoint, the psychological contract details what is expected in return for the provision of skills and talents. A key component of this psychological contract is that employees feel a promise was made to meet their expectations, even if those expectations were never discussed.

Expectations, spoken or not, have a powerful impact on how people think, feel, and behave. When expectations are clearly defined and well-communicated, people are more highly satisfied—even if all of those expectations cannot be met. There are several expectations that employees generally have. Some of these are compensation, autonomy, work/life balance, career growth, diversity, environment, recognition, stability, structure, and teamwork.

Leaders must understand their employees' expectations as well as their own, because personal expectations will impact leadership style. For example, leaders generally expect to have autonomy—to be in charge and to make decisions. However, if the leader makes all of the decisions, then employees lose their autonomy.

Listening is a skill that helps leaders understand both behavior and expectations. Effective listening leads to a clarity of understanding that allows for appropriate

responses and enhances communications. "Effective listening makes good business sense," says Ayers. "It sounds pedantic to actually have to say that, but again, that is the irony: not enough people truly listen."

How someone listens has an impact on how they communicate. There are five listening approaches.

- **Appreciative listening:** Listening in order to enjoy the experience.
- **Empathic Listening:** Listening to understand feelings and to show empathy.
- **Comprehensive listening:** Listening to understand an overall message.
- **Discerning listening:** Listening to get all the facts and details.
- **Evaluative listening:** Listening in order to make a decision.

Empathetic, discerning, and comprehensive listening are the most difficult, because they require total objectivity. Developing the necessary skills takes time and practice. Practice with a colleague by having a conversation on a topic that will evoke strong opinions. Topics that evoke strong opinions are harder to listen to objectively.

During the practice conversation, focus on the other person's feelings and ask questions to check the accuracy of perceptions. Also, stay focused on the factual content and ask for elaboration on points that are not clear. Do not ask leading questions, provide an opinion, or agree or disagree with anything that is being said. At the end, summarize what was said.

Besides being able to listen effectively, leaders must be able to give feedback. Often times, feedback has a negative connotation because it is associated with bad news or a reprimand. To make feedback more positive, it might pay to try a new approach to giving it.

When providing feedback to an employee, start with an observation of whatever led to the need to give feedback. Describe it without evaluation or judgment. Then, provide the outcome that occurred, including any consequences positive or negative. Finally, make a request or describe how things should occur in the future under similar circumstances.

Sometimes providing feedback is not enough and a leader has to act as a counselor for an employee. The purpose of this counseling is usually to help an employee understand the current situation and the need to take different actions in the future. It is important to address this need for change and to convince the employee to agree with the need. Counseling is typically a technique that is used when an employee appears unwilling to be coached, does not realize there is a need to do anything differently, or does not believe there is a need to change.

During counseling, it is important to ask questions to help explore feelings, beliefs, and attitudes and to clarify thinking. As a leader, do not express any opinions or agree or disagree. Be as neutral and objective as possible. The first step to getting an agreement

that change is necessary is establishing a clear understanding that there is a difference between the current situation and what is expected. Specific examples and detailing expectations are key to obtaining agreement.

Including employees in decisions, listening to employees, and counseling and coaching them when necessary, help to establish an environment of trust where everyone feels like an insider. This helps to create high-performance teams where everyone is passionate about what they do.

High-performing teams are much more likely to fulfill their purpose and to help the overall organization achieve its goals. It is important to ensure that teams do not become so focused on individual activities that they lose sight of their overall purpose. This occurs when their focus is limited to the procedures or tasks that they perform, rather than on how that activity benefits the organization.

Another requirement for high-performance teams is that they must have members who want to perform to the best of their abilities. In order for team members to be this passionate, their basic needs must be met. They must feel respected, have the opportunity to learn and grow, feel like an insider, and know that their work is meaningful.

Values really are the missing link when it comes to increasing engagement and passion. Get the team talking about values and how they as a team can apply them to improve their performance.

Once the individual members have their needs met, then it is time to focus on the goals, purpose and values of the team. Having a shared vision of what should be accomplished is a tremendous help in focusing the team.

The team leader's role is to be a resource and to interject only when the team requests it. Otherwise, there is the risk that the team will become other-directed, rather than self-directed. However, the leader is not a disinterested party sitting on the sidelines. The leader should act as a mentor by asking questions to help point the team in the right direction. This hands-off

approach might not appeal to some leaders, because they feel that they must be seen as in control lest they be seen as unnecessary.

Ayers believes that this fear is imagined rather than real in most instances. "Think about it this way. If a leader has coached and mentored a team into becoming a high-performance team, the team will probably have a high level of respect for their leader. They will value the leader's experience and insights and will ask for input from that leader."



FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Reading Time: 6-7 hours, 207 Pages in Book

Employee disengagement is a very real problem--one that costs companies in terms of both morale and productivity. In **Engagement is Not Enough**, Keith Ayers, shows leaders how to turn a group of employees into a high-performing team. He asks questions to help managers think about their approach to employee engagement.

The first part of the book looks at the anatomy of a good leader and delineates the difference between self-directed and other-directed employees providing tips and hints for turning all employees into self-directed ones. The importance of trust and trustworthiness is also explored, as is how to gain employees' trust.

The second section of the book focuses on the basic skills and knowledge needed to get employees engaged. It outlines the skills and behaviors that leaders must master in order to engage employees in their work. Part three details the path that must be followed to turn engaged employees into passionate ones.

Besides listing the skills that a successful leader must possess, Ayers provides tools and exercises to help leaders develop these skills. There are many examples, charts, and graphs to clearly illustrate the concepts that are presented.

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Recommended Resources.

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A chapter-by-chapter summary and a bibliography are provided.

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