

Employee Motivation: Engaging the Disengaged



By Patrick Healey

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The Employee Attraction™ Workbook]

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29%



57%



14%

Engaging the disengaged

As I discussed on Page 40, employees generally end up in one of these three categories. If you are fortunate to have some **engaged** team members, then the ideas in this chapter will allow them to blossom even more. Plus, if you empower them to do so, they can play an active role in motivating the rest of the team. As for the **actively disengaged**, we'll get to them later in the chapter. That leaves the bulk of most teams—the **disengaged** ones who are more or less just doing the minimum to collect their paycheck and leave work each day with enough energy to attend to their personal lives. Of course, this is a continuum, and these employees may perform better at times, then slip back into disengagement. The rest of this chapter contains ideas to turn these potentially valuable team members around. When you consider the investment you already have in each of these employees, it's a no-brainer to put some effort into salvaging these people.

Don't forget, your best tool in this regard is *Finding Joy In Your Job*, which is a step-by-step process to boost employee engagement.

It can't always be about you

Ouch! As entrepreneurs we *are* self-focused. Our businesses are reflections of us. It's always been about us—or us and our clients. This idea requires you to rethink that. **There are times when you simply**

need to put your employees first. Your team is looking to you to offer them a positive, nurturing environment where career development and ongoing learning are entrenched in the culture of your business over and above additional cash sweeteners. As business owners we're often squeezed between being pro-employee and wanting to make things better for them, and our managers above us, who are constantly comparing us with our competition.

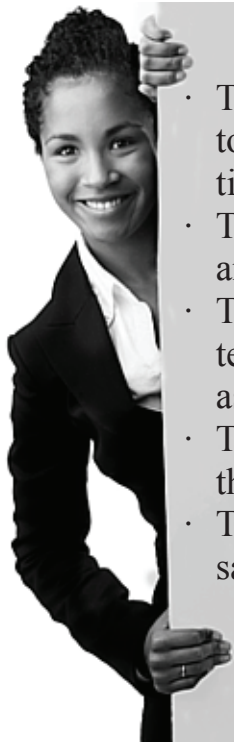
Management doesn't always understand the need to be team-focused, but you need to be a crusader for your team. And while we're on the subject of interacting with corporate on these issues, here is something else to consider. Positions in insurance agencies have become more and more demanding, and we need talented, committed people to fill these positions. What are we doing at the agent and corporate level to make careers in our agencies appealing to the kind of people we need to attract in order to be successful?

As a crusader you need to demonstrate that you are on their side and that you'll advocate within your company for things that will make their lives easier. Be willing to contact your management if necessary to see if there aren't ways to streamline the multiplicity of tasks that come our way. One agent I know pointed out to his management team that they were inundating him with emails on a daily basis and distracting his team from the

business of making money. The managers soon got his point, reorganized their approach and now only send emails to him and his team once a week—and short ones at that. That was a victory for everyone.

Your team also needs to believe you when you say you're committed to positive change. I'll say it again: **the number one concern of employees who have attended my workshops is that their boss won't follow through on all the good ideas that were discussed.** In case you missed it, I refer you back to the worksheet on Page 63: What's Your Promise And How Will You Keep It? Remember that your team reflects *you*—whether you are a cheerleader or not—you set the tone. Ask yourself: what tone have you been setting?

Recent surveys by the *Gallup Management Journal* show that happy and engaged employees have many advantages:



- They're much more likely to have a productive relationship with their boss
- They can deal with changes and challenges better
- They manage stress better—and have better health as a result
- They feel more valued by their company
- They enjoy greater overall satisfaction in their lives

My own research while giving workshops for small businesses across the country reveals the same findings. One often overlooked key to retaining good team members is focusing on what really makes them happy. I spend a lot of ink on this in my book *Finding Joy In Your Job*, but here are some main points to consider. **What creates happiness in the workplace:**

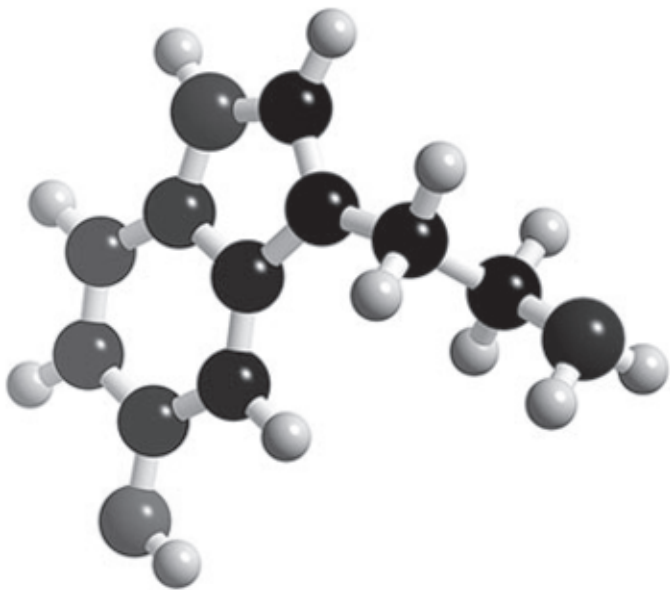
- When an employee's skills and aptitude match her job
- When workers have some control over their day
- When team members are encouraged to create their dream position where they already work
- When people have options for a flexible schedule
- When the office environment encourages new ideas and growth, rather than strict adherence to established ways of doing things
- When companies have a working process for problem solving

EXERCISE: White Shirt Day

Sometimes it just takes a playful attitude to draw out some hidden truths about how your office is functioning. I know a team that revels in this activity, so consider giving it a try or adapting it in some way. Give each team member an inexpensive white T-shirt to wear to work one Friday per month. During the day, have them write notes on each other's shirts about what's working and what's not. At the end of the day take a few minutes to look them all over, then give them the weekend to mull over what they read. On Monday discuss the comments and pick two items to work on that month.

How's your social intelligence?

There's another fascinating book relevant to this issue, and that's *Social Intelligence*, by Daniel Goleman. In it he shares new knowledge from the emerging field of social neuroscience. The latest brain research can be so revealing when applied to office dynamics. Neuroscience now proves that our effects on one another—both good and bad—are significant. As Goleman demonstrates, we are indeed social beings who respond on a chemical level to other people. The act of being kind to another person raises serotonin levels in both the giver and the receiver of the kindness. More surprising is that just witnessing an act of kindness raises the serotonin level of the observer an equal



amount. **(Serotonin has been dubbed the Happiness Molecule, and is a neurotransmitter directly associated with mood. Higher levels of serotonin put a big old smile on your face.)** If you have something good to say to an employee, when appropriate, do it in front of the whole team and let everybody share in the hormonal rush.

Conversely, negativity breeds more of the same. We all have mirror neurons, brain cells that sense another person's feelings and prepare us to imitate what they are feeling. That's why it's important to dump any bad apples that may have landed on your team. Once you've determined they can't be brought back from the dark side, then they simply have to go. Sadly, once employees become actively disengaged they drag the whole team down. Even worse, neuroscientists can now see that stressful relationships have a negative effect on our immune systems. Fewer bad apples may indeed equal fewer sick days for the whole team—and that includes you! As Goleman states it: "...toxic relationships can act like slow poison in our bodies." There's a whole section in *Finding Joy In Your Job* beginning on Page 240 that examines how to handle bad apples, with tips to help you determine if they can be salvaged.

Another fascinating finding of new research is how plastic our brains are, how able we are to learn new things and even grow new brain cells at any age. That's comforting to this older dog, that we can still learn new tricks after all. But an unexpected result of our malleable brains is that we shape them throughout our lives by the relationships we maintain. As Goleman

explains, "...being chronically hurt and angered, or being emotionally nourished, by someone we spend time with daily over the course of years can refashion our brain." Again, the implications for our work lives—and beyond—are immense.

You simply must make it a priority to move your team into thrive mode as quickly as possible.

First identify the wows

Before you start trying to fix what's not working in your office, it's a good idea to acknowledge and celebrate everything that is going well. That way all the emphasis isn't on problems. I suggest you have a team meeting and ask everyone to name aspects of the business that are functioning well, such as: positive customer experiences, sales growth, good team cooperation on a particular project, the new and improved office furniture—whatever they can think of that they see as a positive in their work lives. Write these on a whiteboard and have someone keep a record. This forms a baseline to build on as you add more good things. Perhaps you keep a running list of these posted somewhere and add to it every month so everyone can see the progress. Once that's done, you're ready to examine the flip side.



Are your campers unhappy?

Since we know 57 percent of employees are indeed unhappy to some extent, the real question is: Why are *your* campers unhappy? Here are some of the main reasons employees are unhappy. The world famous Mayo Clinic has done research into the effects of job satisfaction on health and they found **many factors that contribute to a worker's stress level**. They include:

- Not having the required resources to succeed
- Conflict between co-workers
- Conflict with a supervisor
- Not being appropriately compensated for the work performed
- Feeling powerless in decisions that affect their situation
- Fear of losing employment from restructuring or outsourcing
- Performing tasks that are boring, or ill-suited to their talents and skills.
- Lack of opportunities for advancement

Another less obvious cause of employee unhappiness results from larger issues, such as a lack of integrity in business leaders, a faltering world economy. As employees age, they tend to look outside themselves more and develop cares—and concerns—beyond their own sphere. This has all contributed to the creation of what *Forbes Magazine* calls **a new age of meaning**, a time when people of all ages rethink their purpose in life and work. Employees are asking themselves if their job is relevant, and if not, what can they do to make it more so. You'll find remedies for this in *Finding Joy In Your Job* starting on Page 57.

As you would imagine from the title, the whole point of my book is resolving employee unhappiness. The key message is that disengaged team members can take on new roles instead of looking for new jobs. Even

though it was written specifically for employees to use as a workbook to navigate these issues, there is much value in it for you. I suggest you meet once a month with your team and go over a chapter. This discussion can open an honest and revolutionary dialogue among you.

NOTES

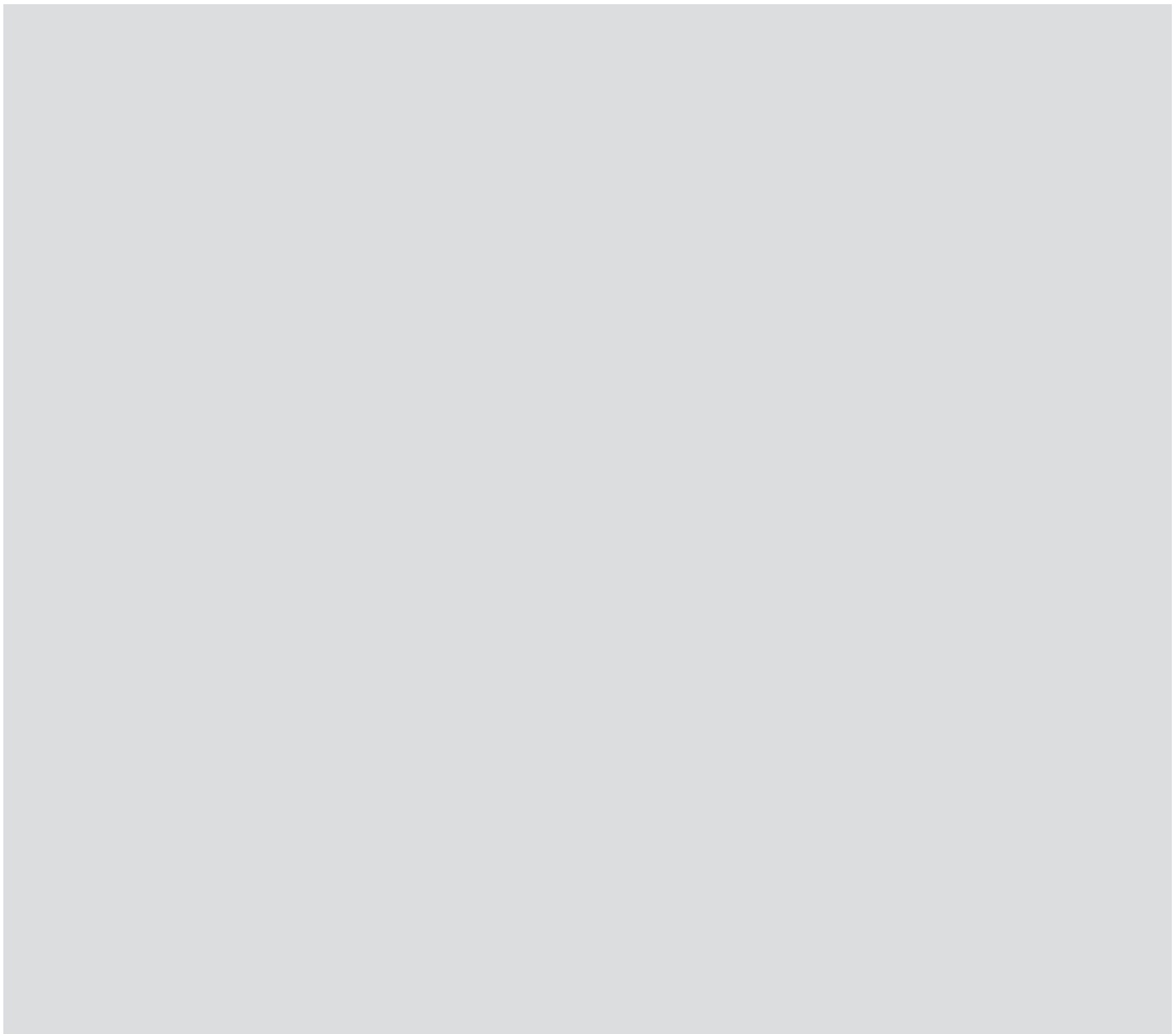
WORKSHEET

What Are Your Team's Un-Wows?

Make a copy of this for each team member, or if they prefer, they can download a copy from my website at www.employeeattraction.com. (That way they can fill the form in digitally, print it out and remain anonymous.)

List as many things as you can think of that could be improved in your office. List them all, whether they seem too huge to ever resolve or too small to matter to anyone else. These items can range from issues with team members, your boss, your office space, to agency procedures and policies. If it's bugging you, write it down here. These will be reviewed as impartially as can be, with a goal of addressing them all and correcting as many as possible. This is your chance to be heard, so take it!

Whenever possible, frame your comment in the form of what positive action you suggest, rather than what negative reality you now perceive. For example, you might write: Schedule one-on-one sessions for each employee, so we can be sure you are listening to our problems. That would be more constructive than saying: You never listen to us; we feel like you don't value us as human beings.



Actions You Can Take

Since at least half of our productive waking hours are spent at work, that time must be satisfying to us a good part of the time, or we are going to be unhappy. Review your team's responses (at home where you'll be unlikely to have knee-jerk reactions and take hasty action). Take as much time as you need to evaluate their concerns and put them into perspective. Don't play games with yourself trying to figure out who wrote what—just be grateful for their candor.

Based on the worksheets, list things below that you can do to improve life for your team. Have a plan of action, then when you can be calm and professional, call a meeting and discuss ALL of their complaints. This could take more than one session, but it is critical that each person feels you read and understood each of his or her items. Check them off methodically—don't make someone admit to a particular issue because you failed to mention it. **This is a trust building exercise, not cause for attack and bad feelings.** If you know your team has lots of issues to bring up, then consider bringing in an impartial facilitator to moderate your review sessions to keep things from getting too personal and keep the team focused on positive change.

Improvements

When I surveyed my own team, I learned that office friendships meant more to them than their relationship to me. Tough on the old ego, but that helped me understand them better. In fact, it has been shown that having a best friend at work is a marker for engaged, happy employees. I see that with my own team, because several former employees still return years later to have lunch with my current team. It can take some retraining on your part to learn to react differently when you happen upon employees chatting about personal matters while on the clock. The old school reaction is to glare or otherwise shame them into getting back to work. An enlightened boss realizes that a certain amount of social interaction among team members is essential to their harmony and cohesiveness as a team. Of course, there will always be people who abuse a policy like this, but once you move your team into fully engaged status, that type of behavior should vanish.



If any of the un-wows on your list have to do with your office environment, consider taking a cue from computer chip giant Intel. They are currently testing a new model that banishes traditional work space cubicles in favor of an open, inviting plan with warmer colors and better lighting. So far the response from employees has been positive. "It's somewhat like a prison," said Intel employee Grant McMullen referring to the old cubicle system, adding he supports his company's latest effort to change its corporate culture. Intel is also providing various diversions for employees to enjoy during

breaks. An Intel executive says they are taking these steps after learning important lessons from companies like Google and Amazon. Specifically, that office space should be a place you want to work and play in. “It’s going to make people want to come to work more,” Intel employee Claudia McCarter said, likening the new look to a living room rather than an institution.

There is no doubt that happier team members work better with each other, take fewer sick days and complain far less. What might you do around your office to spiff the place up and make it a more enjoyable place to work? This is one area where you’ll have no trouble enlisting the participation of your team, so ask them what you could do to make your office a more inspiring place to work.

Happiness and your bottom line

According to the *Harvard Business Review*, satisfied employees equal happy, satisfied customers, which in turn equal repeat, profitable business. This is the classic service-profit chain, but it bears examining in our context of employee attraction. **We might add to the formula that satisfied employees attract more like-minded team members.** (Remember, as an **Employer of First Choice™**, one of your goals is to find at least half your new hires from referrals by your best employees.) As stated in an article in the HBR,

“Customers want more than transactions; they want relationships. Only people can build those.” That’s because the employee-customer exchange is fundamentally emotional. In a service economy business, so much more is riding on the interactions between your team and your customers. Added to what we now know about the brain’s inherent wiring for connectedness, that’s not surprising. Which brings us right back to the importance of keeping your team happy

One fundamental factor of job happiness is ensuring that people are working in their core talent area a good part of each day. To accomplish that you may need to throw out your tired old job descriptions. It’s not surprising that employees focus on doing more of what they do best and less of what they are ill-suited for. **Therefore, a simple recipe for increased productivity is to get your team members doing what each one does best.**

In *Finding Joy In Your Job* I examine this whole process in great detail. I urge you to read Chapter Two of the book beginning on Page 41, which is all about determining each team member’s unique talents. Encourage your team to do the exercises in that chapter and perhaps even order the suggested Kolbe profiles. Keep in mind, though, that while aptitude and personality tools are useful, the real key is to actually do the process.

