

Are Your Employees Engaged and/or Empowered? **by Kittie Watson, Ph.D. – President Innolect Inc.**



Many company leaders behave as if once an employee accepts a position that he or she is committed and married to the job. Unfortunately, especially in today's environment, many workers view their jobs as temporary with a trial period of testing to see if it is a good fit. In fact, many employees with both short and long tenure fail to stay in jobs long-term. Since some reports suggest that only 17-29% of employees are actively engaged in their job at any one time, most companies have room for improvement. What leaders want, according to a report in the Ivey Business Journal, is an employee who "...is fully involved in, and enthusiastic about, his or her work...Engaged employees care about the future of the company and are willing to invest the discretionary effort, exceeding duty call, to see that the organization succeeds."

Yet, it is estimated that 12% of all high potentials are actively searching for new jobs (September 2009, Corporate Executive Board) And, most current business publications report that as the economy recovers, 40-60% of *all* employees will actively seek new employment. Given these staggering statistics, employee engagement is a top priority and it is important for leaders to look for and recognize warning signs of disengagement. For example, it is common for disengaged employees to be more negative and pessimistic. In addition, leaders may notice a slowdown in productivity, low aspirations, expressions of helplessness, and passive aggressive behavior.

Leaders need to ask, "What can I do to engage our employees before it is too late?" Don Lowman, in his recently published book, *Closing the Engagement Gap*, asked tens of thousands of employees in six countries (including U.S., China, and India) that question. He discovered that the best way to increase employee engagement is for senior management to **show interest in employees' well being**. In fact, demonstrating interest is more impactful than career advancement, relationships with direct supervisors, and even higher pay.

Another method to demonstrate interest and keep employees engaged, according to the HBR article, *Powerlessness Corrupts*, is to invest in ongoing inclusion and empowerment strategies. Leaders can:

- Be more transparent with information.
- Recognize employee contributions publicly.
- Include employees in brainstorming sessions.
- Involve employees in decision-making processes.
- Provide networking opportunities.
- Invite employees to develop initiatives on their own.

At Innolect, we believe leaders have the ability to attract and retain top talent. Leaders can identify workplace practices that increase engagement and productivity. When companies focus on engaging and including talent, they find that *employees feel more grounded, job satisfaction goes up, turnover goes down, and productivity improves*.

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