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Bringing Updates and Relevancy to Employee Impact and Productivity: EE 2.0[©]

In the last decade, leaders and organizations throughout the world have moved at lightning speed in understanding and embracing the critical role that engaged employees have in key customer outcomes, building growth and sustainable healthy margins. Data gathered from the early 70's to the mid-90's about what "engages" employees and the key characteristics of a great working environment was organized and later presented in the bestselling management book of all time, *First, Break All the Rules* (Simon & Schuster). This provided a new view of human potential and how it can be measured within an organization. A new management approach, based upon a solid research foundation, was born.

This new "data driven" view came at a time when the new global economy was emerging, and creating differentiated competitive advantage was paramount. The timing was good; an examination of traditional HR and management practices was gravely needed. Now, being in the eighth year of the new millennium, it is hard to believe that almost all of the current employee engagement initiatives haven't been updated since the time Bob Dole was running for president and the Dow Jones Industrial Average had just reached an all-time high of 6,000.

Science demands updates and progress. However, we've failed to keep pace

with the necessary innovation to help organizations remain on the cutting edge of human potential management. Modernized research and practice is critical in this new day when competitive advantage and differentiated brand is largely owned and driven by our employees – their talents, focus, engagement and development.

Organizations are now struggling with outdated approaches that no longer deliver the desired outcomes. Companies, hospitals, government agencies and even national economies are overdue for a thorough evaluation and update, as they all are now driven by the productivity, innovation, R&D and successful outcomes created by their employees, managers and leaders.

Let's review a few current practices used today. We will examine current relevancy, apply the latest research data and courageously propose where we need to go from here.

Practice #1: *Identify engagement variables found in common with successful workgroups and then measure those items on a yearly basis.*

Review – This was effective in bringing focus to specific issues of the work environment like having the right tools, feeling recognized, trusting coworkers, producing quality, etc. Another benefit of this approach was that the long surveys of the past

were discarded and the shorter surveys that focused on the real life workplace issues were employed. The shortfall of this approach was that workgroup engagement information was never incorporated into individualized performance development and coaching strategies. The realization that strong teams are made up of strong individuals was minimized. It was also found that yearly cycles of employee feedback were too infrequent to sustain the focus and involvement of work teams. Significant problems were also observed in the time lag between when people completed the survey and when results were delivered. (On average, it took 45-60 days!)

New Research Update – Over the past 24 months, thousands of individual high-performers have been interviewed and several isolated variables were identified and correlated to: 1) outstanding contribution, 2) work team performance, 3) collaborative culture, and 4) likelihood to stay, with documented development and linkage to critical business outcomes. These variables provide workgroup tracking of engagement, but, most importantly, they translate to individual development and performance plans. Survey cycles are necessary every six months, with the time from survey completion to results distribution being less than 15 days.

Practice #2: Take results of the engagement survey to the most local level possible and engage everyone (at the local team) in a dialogue around the results.

Review – True engagement is indeed built or destroyed at the local level. Thus, measurement scope is still relevant. Dialogue around results, though, became item-specific (focus on and build an action plan around no more than two questions) without clarity built around the relationship

between items. For example, what does it mean to have “clear expectations” at the 90th percentile, and feeling one has a “strong relationship with their manager” at the 33rd percentile? Thus, pertinent cultural items were never explored and even minimized in the name of “action planning.” Because of broader perspective (i.e. “How do we get the recognition score higher?”), little individual commitment and accountability occurred. This practice also yielded an S-curve (flattened-out maturity) result within the first three years. Relationship of employee engagement also showed little to no linkage to customer results.

New Research Update – Results of the survey must be examined from the perspective of reviewing current work/people systems and assessing the engagement effectiveness overall. These systems include communications, metrics management, priorities and goal setting, to name a few. Through the creation (or deletion) of work systems, sustainable change occurs and workgroup energy is utilized effectively. With the creation of more efficient and effective work systems, individuals realize the utility of such approach and, thus, a reinforcement loop is built. The result is sustainable improvement and sharp impact on customer outcomes.

Practice #3: Monitor the percent of employees who are “engaged,” “not engaged” and “actively disengaged” and try to achieve a 4:1 ratio between “engaged” and “actively disengaged.”

Review – This overarching index brought a simple and quickly understood concept for leadership to see the tipping point between how many people were engaged, not engaged and so forth.

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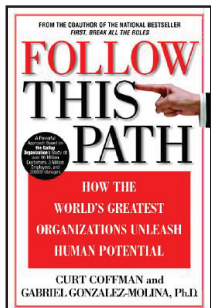
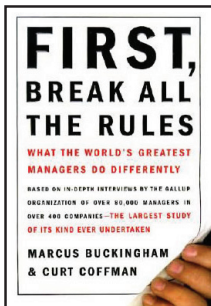
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Curt Coffman,**

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While this provided an overall view, it did not measure the most credible indicator of employee potential to utilization ratio. This basic percentage of utilization metric has proved to be a key outcome to the overall relationship to business performance.

New Research Update – Having every employee operating at high levels of potential is the ultimate goal of any engagement initiative. When employees feel their talents and abilities are utilized, they are substantially more productive, content, collaboration-driven and significantly less likely to leave. This human capacity index can be applied at the local team level, division, region or overall organization to gauge.

Through a brave and ongoing review of past research efforts, implementation models and points of view, The Coffman Organization is committed to shedding outdated and ineffective approaches. This is critical to ensuring that our clients are learning and, most importantly, applying the most up-to-date research and practices leading to outstanding outcomes.

**THE NEXT GENERATION OF
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: EE 2.0®**

1. "I know the outcomes for which I am accountable."
2. "My manager really knows me."
3. "My talents and abilities are fully utilized."
4. "My successes are recognized by my manager and coworkers."
5. "My manager does a good job of coaching me to build on my strengths."
6. "Of all the managers I've had, my current manager is the best."
7. "Every day, I see clearly the value that I bring to this organization."
8. "I am a member of one of the strongest teams in this organization."
9. "In the past year, I have grown professionally more than any other year."