

“... the authors show the research that lays out the path to sustainable engagement.”—*Jac Fitz-enz, Founder, The Saratoga Institute*

**HOW AMERICA'S
BEST PLACES TO WORK
INSPIRE EXTRA EFFORT IN
EXTRAORDINARY TIMES**

RE-ENGAGE



**WHAT THE TOP 1 PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS DO DIFFERENTLY,
BASED ON 2.1 MILLION EMPLOYEE SURVEYS FROM 10,000 EMPLOYERS!**

LEIGH BRANHAM, SPHR, AND MARK HIRSCHFELD

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New York Chicago San Francisco Lisbon London
Madrid Mexico City Milan New Delhi San Juan Seoul
Singapore Sydney Toronto

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▶ CHAPTER TEN

Self-Engagement

The Employee Side of the Equation

I always remember an epitaph which is in the cemetery at Tombstone, Arizona. It says: "Here lies Jack Williams. He done his damndest." I think that is the greatest epitaph a man can have—when he gives everything that is in him to the job he has before him. That is all you can ask of him and that is what I have tried to do.

—HARRY S. TRUMAN

▶ STEVEN'S STORY: WEATHERING THE PERFECT STORM

Steven wondered how he'd gotten himself into this mess. There he was, rolling along nicely in his career, when, according to friends and colleagues, his "*ship began to take on water.*"

Steven always loved computers, even before computers were "cool." He fondly remembered long nights at the university computer lab in the late 1970s, readying boxes of punch cards he'd carefully programmed, so he could haul them around campus. Steven just knew the effort would pay off, and for the first 20 years of his career he

could not have been on a faster track—great company, lots of promotions, and frequent calls from headhunters wanting him to jump ship for better-paying gigs. His life as a technology project manager could not have been better.

Then came a series of unfortunate events that proved to be his perfect storm: the bursting of the dot-com bubble, computer jobs moving offshore, and the introduction of new technology platforms with which he had less competence. This typhoon left his employer no choice; Steven and a group of fellow middle managers were let go.

Steven received a six-month severance package from his employer in 2001, but instead of taking time to update his skills, he frittered away the window of opportunity. He took a programming job just to pay the mortgage, but felt bitter about this “demotion”—something his new employer sensed. That job lasted barely a year.

For the next five years Steven floundered, slogging from one dead-end job to another. A reunion with an old college pal got him thinking about his course. Steven’s friend could sense his anger, disappointment, and lack of enthusiasm about work. His friend gave him it to him straight: *“My friend, you need an attitude adjustment. You are your biggest enemy. If I were a manager, I wouldn’t hire you.”*

From Drowning to Sailing

After several years of drowning in his own pity, Steven decided to take a hard look at his life and his attitude about work. Could he sail himself out of this perfect storm?

The job he held at that time was far below his skills, and he found himself working for a supervisor a dozen years his junior.

Steven decided to reach out to his old college friend for help. His friend reminded him of the way he felt about his profession in the early days of his career: *“Do you remember how excited you used to be? Do you remember how those long hours paid off for you? I know you still have that in you. You just have to find it.”*

His friend was right. He did love this work, but he’d let his anger get in his way. Steven pledged to turn his career around by heading

straight into the tempest. He vowed to be the most committed employee he could possibly be.

Steven stopped watching the clock and started thinking about getting projects done on or before deadline. He volunteered to help a team that was behind in getting a software update to a client. Steven joined a community technology group, where he met and networked with former colleagues. When a much younger peer asked him to lunch to ask advice about his fledgling career, Steven took that as a sign he might have turned the corner.

At his most recent performance review, Steven's supervisor expressed his appreciation for the change in attitude: "*Steven, everyone knows that you're one of the smartest guys in the business. But nobody wanted to work with you. I have to admit, when I first noticed your change in attitude I was skeptical. None of us were sure you could keep it up. But you've proved to all of us—and probably to yourself—that you can be an outstanding contributor when you put your mind to it. I'll be recommending you for the next available promotion.*"

Steven smiled. The storm was beginning to pass, and he was proud he had charted his own course to safe harbor.

► TO ENGAGE OR NOT TO ENGAGE—WHO MAKES THAT DECISION?

As Steven's struggle reminds us, it's the employee who makes the decision to engage—or not. Even the best, most engaging leaders, managers, and employers may not be able to inspire those who are not ready and willing to be engaged. It may take a crisis in life or work for the decision point to arrive, but ultimately each employee must choose the path to engagement.

By devoting this book mainly to the six drivers that leaders and managers can wield, we are in no way disregarding the employee's responsibility for doing his or her part to stay engaged. Employees should never take away the message from any employee engagement

initiative that they are absolved of the responsibility for keeping themselves engaged with the excuse that it's the manager who is being held accountable for it.

While the responsibility is shared, managers have to be highly motivated to engage each employee, because their own success and the success of their teams depend on it. So the question becomes, "How can managers make employees' self-engagement easier?" Our answer is to present techniques and tools that managers can use to challenge employees to take the self-engaging actions that no one else can take for them.

As we go through the guidelines in this chapter, reflect on your own level of engagement. As we have said before, if the manager is not engaged, it is less likely the manager's direct reports will be engaged. In fact, a recent Accenture study,¹ based on a survey of job satisfaction with middle managers, revealed that they are frustrated about several issues, including shouldering an increased workload (36 percent), not receiving enough credit for their work (32 percent), having no clear career path (31 percent), and receiving less support to work effectively (31 percent). These findings are disturbing and raise the crucial question, "How can we expect managers to positively influence others when they have negative feelings about important aspects of their jobs?"

So whether you are a manager or not, consider this an opportunity to assess your own level of engagement, and consider what you can do—independent of your own manager's actions—to enhance your commitment, enthusiasm, and performance at work for your own benefit and for those who report to you.

► DRIVING YOUR OWN ENGAGEMENT

As we have indicated, for the purposes of this chapter, you are the driver of your own employee engagement "bus." That doesn't mean you can't benefit from a road map, however. We understand that many

readers may have difficulty knowing what they need to do to be more engaged at work. For most of us, it is easier if we have questions or checklists to which we can respond. You will find these below.

Assessing Your Own Level of Engagement

Begin by going to www.re-engagebook.com, and invest a few minutes completing the Self-Engagement Assessment.

This will allow you to complete the following exercises with the benefit of knowing your own self-engagement “score.”

▶ HOW CAN YOU GET MORE ENGAGED?

For readers with low self-engagement scores, we suggest you begin by responding to this straightforward question, “What can I do on my own to be more engaged—to be more passionate, enthusiastic, and fulfilled—at work?” List your ideas below:

▶ _____

▶ _____

Now ask yourself, “What can my manager or other leaders do that would inspire me to be more engaged?” List your ideas below:

▶ _____

▶ _____

► _____

► _____

List any actions you could take to influence your manager or other leaders to do the things you listed above:

► _____

► _____

Viewing Self-Engagement through the Six Engagement Drivers

We have organized many of the steps employees can take to boost their own engagement, grouped according to the “lenses” of the six engagement drivers. Before we present the action steps, first consider which of the six drivers is most important to you in determining the degree you are willing to give your best effort and enthusiasm at work. Rank them 1 to 6, with 1 being the most important to you in your current work situation.

- ___ Trust and confidence in senior leaders
- ___ Manager effectiveness
- ___ Team effectiveness
- ___ Job enrichment and professional growth
- ___ Feeling valued and recognized
- ___ Personal well-being

A CHECKLIST OF SELF-ENGAGEMENT ACTIONS

What follows is a variety of suggestions for increasing your own engagement, organized by the six engagement drivers. Pay special at-

tention to the drivers you ranked as most important to your engagement, and then place a check next to any suggestions that you believe you could benefit from doing.

Trust and Confidence in Senior Leaders

Ways to build more trust and confidence in the organization's leaders

You may feel that trust in senior leaders is built mainly from the top down, but there may be more ways than you think to deal with the situation constructively. If you believe that your distrust or lack of confidence in senior leaders is causing you to be less engaged than you could be, consider the following checklist of actions you could take (independent of what the senior leaders may do):

- ___ Check out your perceptions of senior leaders with trusted peers, as you may be lacking important information or misperceiving their behavior.
- ___ Speak up in meetings with your manager and other leaders, and assertively, but wisely, express your convictions and desires.
- ___ When you present your ideas, be prepared with a specific plan for improvement, and volunteer to be a part of implementing the plan.
- ___ Don't be too quick to dismiss the efforts of new leaders. Give them time to communicate and begin to execute their vision before judging it.
- ___ Focus as much as possible on building trust and confidence with your immediate manager.
- ___ When a leader asks for your input, ideas, or support, be prepared to respond positively and take the initiative.
- ___ Demonstrate an "ownership mentality." Learn how the company makes money, seek to uncover unmet needs you can help address, and find out what you can do to make it more profitable.
- ___ Look for ways to take the initiative to meet the customer's needs, or ways to improve your own skills, so that leaders will trust you to handle new challenges.
- ___ If you have observed unethical behavior, report it to a trusted higher-up.

- ___ Give honest responses and constructive comments on employee surveys, especially about leadership-related issues.
- ___ If you aspire to a leadership role, work to maintain the highest standards of trust-building and confidence in all your relationships.
- ___ Other: _____

Manager Effectiveness

Ways to improve the quality of performance coaching and feedback you are receiving from your manager

If you feel that some of your manager's practices are causing you to be less engaged than you could be, consider the following checklist of actions you could take (independent of what your manager may do):

- ___ If you feel your manager is not giving you the feedback and coaching you need, ask for it.
- ___ Seek feedback from anyone with whom you interact, including customers, not just those who supervise you.
- ___ When seeking feedback, ask for specific examples of things you do well and need to improve. When problematic behavior is mentioned, ask for specific examples and suggestions for ways to make changes for the better.
- ___ Get to know your manager's top performance priorities and professional goals so you can better support them.
- ___ Take a more active role in your own performance planning and appraisal process by suggesting specific objectives and evaluating your own performance.
- ___ If you feel that your supervisor has given you performance objectives or appraisal results that are not clear, ask for clarification.
- ___ When changes need to be made in your performance objectives, request a meeting with your supervisor to update the objectives.

- ___ If you feel your strengths are underutilized, discuss with your supervisor ways to use more of your strengths on the job and spend relatively less time trying to improve weaknesses.
- ___ Ask for the opportunity to receive 360-degree developmental feedback from peers, superiors, and your own direct reports (if you have any).
- ___ Other: _____

Team Effectiveness

Ways to be a better team member and promote better teamwork

- ___ Consider the team's mission and objectives first, then your own.
- ___ Volunteer to assist other team members in challenging and stressful times.
- ___ Get to know the other members of the team better.
- ___ Know what your teammates are working on and how they contribute to team goals.
- ___ Be willing to share information with other teams rather than guarding it out of a desire for power.
- ___ Be willing to give and receive honest, constructive feedback.
- ___ Openly admit your weaknesses and mistakes.
- ___ If you feel other team members are not pulling their weight, be prepared to have a difficult conversation, letting them know how you feel and assertively asking for specific changes in their behavior.
- ___ Be open to different perspectives and diverse team members.
- ___ Be candid and passionate in your discussion of issues.
- ___ Willingly make sacrifices for the common good of the team.
- ___ Quickly and genuinely apologize when you say or do something inappropriate or possibly damaging to the team.
- ___ Commit to the decisions that are agreed on, even if you initially disagreed with them.

- ___ Be willing to put the most important issues on the table regardless of how difficult they may be to resolve.
- ___ Be slow to seek credit for your own contributions, but quick to point out those of others.
- ___ Be willing and able to use Web 2.0 technology to collaborate with other team members.
- ___ Don't sacrifice face-to-face communication by overrelying on electronic communication.
- ___ Be willing to meet members of other generations (and others with different perspectives) halfway.
- ___ Expand your network, get in the loop, and build relationships in other functional areas.
- ___ Other: _____

Job Enrichment and Professional Growth

Ways to create your own career growth or advancement opportunities

- ___ Keep your focus on mastering your current job before you focus on advancement opportunities.
- ___ If you feel your current job or assignment is not a good fit for your strengths and interests, take the initiative to meet with your supervisor to discuss your ideas for changing jobs, changing the way the job is done, or swapping jobs or assignments with a coworker.
- ___ Persevere until you find a job you love to do.
- ___ Set goals for things you want to learn and follow through by pursuing certifications and/or degrees; taking classes; attending webinars, seminars, and conferences; exploring information on the Internet; reading; and finding mentors.
- ___ Discuss with your supervisor the competencies and knowledge required for the job or role to which you aspire.

- ___ Before taking on a new job assignment, ask questions to make sure the job is one that will make good use of your talents.
- ___ If your career path seems blocked, or you can see no advancement opportunities, seek lateral or cross-functional assignments. Imagine ways you could actually create a new job or new assignment for yourself that meets the needs of the firm while making better use of your talents.
- ___ Learn how money flows through the organization, and what you can do to increase sales/profits or reduce costs.
- ___ Put yourself in the supervisor's shoes, and be prepared to explain how it would benefit your work unit or organization as a whole to change your job assignments, increase the variety of job tasks you perform, expand your responsibilities, or allow you greater autonomy.
- ___ Seek whatever training you need to earn the trust of your supervisor to delegate more to you.
- ___ Instead of getting too comfortable when you have mastered a job, keep yourself engaged by seeking new challenges.
- ___ Ask for feedback about performance issues that may be holding you back.
- ___ Informally interview people in positions to which you aspire, ask their advice, get a realistic understanding of their jobs, and seek a mentoring relationship with them where appropriate.
- ___ Explore the possibility of temporarily or permanently swapping jobs with a coworker.
- ___ Seek and propose mini-assignments that will help prepare you for a job that may not be currently available so you don't have to wait to try out pieces of the job.
- ___ Let your supervisor know your career aspirations, talents, and plans so he or she can understand how to help you.
- ___ Become an "intrapreneur" by identifying a new service or business idea that can make money for the company.
- ___ Think twice before quitting your job. First, meet with your supervisor (or a trusted coworker) to articulate your concerns, and ask for constructive ideas for resolving the situation.
- ___ Other: _____

*Feeling Valued and Recognized*Ways you can become more valued, better recognized, and rewarded

- ___ First and foremost, find out what your organization values and what specific results your supervisor expects from you.
 - ___ Be honest with yourself as you consider whether you are willing to put forth the effort required to achieve those results.
 - ___ Get your supervisor's input on what skills and knowledge you could acquire that will make you more valuable to the organization.
 - ___ Give value to get value: look for ways to share information and be a resource to coworkers.
 - ___ If you feel you are not receiving the information you need, ask your supervisor for the information directly and look for ways to stay plugged in through informal relationships throughout the organization.
 - ___ Speak up when you have an idea that you believe could bring value to the organization and be well-received by your manager.
 - ___ Let your supervisor know what form of recognition (e.g., public versus private, written versus spoken) you most appreciate.
 - ___ To get a better feel for the impact and value of your job, ask to sit in on a meeting with a customer or client.
 - ___ Ask your supervisor what criteria he or she uses to determine raises and variable compensation.
 - ___ When asking for a raise, think first about the value you have added and will add ("what's in it for them" instead of "what's in it for me").
 - ___ If you see a need for additional tools or equipment to do your job better, first do a cost-benefit analysis before you approach your manager with your request.
 - ___ When you have reached a goal, reward yourself with a special treat: take a day off, get a massage, or buy something you've been wanting.
 - ___ Other: _____
-

*Personal Well-Being*Ways to increase your own sense of well-being

- When you are justifiably annoyed, angry, or frustrated, speak up and assertively ask for what you want instead of suppressing your feelings.
- Realize your limits when dealing with stress and understand that you can choose how you respond to stress. A stress management class or seminar may help you learn to make those choices in a more conscious and controlled way.
- Take a time management class or seminar, or read a good book on the topic.
- When you can, delegate more of your work to reduce your workload to a manageable level.
- If you are in the habit of bringing work home with you every night, it could be a sign you need to delegate more, get help from coworkers, learn to manage your time better, or find more efficient ways of getting work done.
- Rein in the need for absolute perfection—know when good enough is good enough.
- If the demands of your job have become overwhelming, pursue possible solutions with your supervisor, including making potential changes in organizational work processes, eliminating unnecessary paperwork, taking a more efficient and organized approach to the job, managing time better, reassigning some job activities to others, or being reassigned to a less demanding position.
- When you need to have uninterrupted time to finish a large project or to complete several smaller tasks, block out the hours or days on your calendar ahead of time.
- Give yourself more uninterrupted time to get work done by resolving not to constantly check your e-mails and/or voice mail messages. Don't always answer the phone when it rings; let voice mail pick it up when you are extra busy.

- ___ Plan your vacation and reserve your vacation days as far in advance as possible. Then take your vacation! You earned it and you need it.
- ___ If you are a chronic multitasker, you may be burning yourself out and actually becoming less competent. Try doing one thing at a time and giving it your full attention.
- ___ Pursue outside interests or activities that relax and reenergize you.
- ___ Get out of the office for lunch or walks to break the routine and clear your mind.
- ___ Lead a more healthy lifestyle: monitor more carefully what you eat and drink, exercise more, get more sleep, get plenty of sunlight, and lose weight if necessary.
- ___ Other: _____

Prioritizing to Take Action

Go back and review all the actions you checked, select three actions you are ready to take now, and list them below:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Questions to Stimulate Career Self-Management

For managers who want to challenge employees to become more engaged by taking charge of their own career management in the organization, and, as well, for individual employees who need to challenge themselves, here are some questions that may be helpful:

1. What talents or abilities would you most like to use at work?
2. What abilities or skills would you like to develop?
3. What have you done lately to develop or improve your skills and abilities?
4. What kind of new challenge would you like to take on?
5. What would you most like to learn?
6. What obstacles do you face in learning what you want to learn?
7. Based on the objectives you set in your last performance review, what actions have you taken to reach those objectives?
8. Do you know what others think of your performance and attitude? If not, how can you find out?
9. Do you know whether you are satisfying customers (either internal or external)? If not, how can you find out?
10. How does your work increase customer satisfaction? How do you know for sure?
11. What more could you do to increase customer satisfaction?
12. What ideas do you have for better serving customers?
13. Have you asked others for their feedback or taken part in a 360-degree feedback process?
14. Would you like to be mentored? If so, in what competency or topic?
15. Have you built good relationships with coworkers?
16. Have you thought about a new way to address a challenge or problem we have?
17. Are you doing everything you can to master new technical challenges, processes, or tools?
18. Have you attended a professional seminar in the last six months? If so, what did you learn?
19. Do you read or listen to audiobooks or podcasts? What have you learned lately?
20. Have you considered joining professional associations as a way to learn and grow?

21. Is there anything you are good at in your leisure time that you could do more of at work?
22. What was the best job you ever had and why?
23. Would you say you have responded positively to changes in the work environment in the last year?
24. Who do you think has greater control over your career progress, you or someone else?

Overcoming Habits of Mind and Behavior That Limit Your Engagement

Sometimes the obstacles to increased self-engagement are more deeply embedded. The fact is, many people engage in self-sabotaging behavior that their managers are ill-equipped to help them resolve.

COMMON SELF-LIMITING BELIEFS OR MINDSETS

As we have emphasized in our discussion of senior leaders' mindsets, the thought is the father of the action. This holds true for all of us as we face our daily challenges at work. Below we have listed just some of the beliefs that can limit our effectiveness, grouped within the six engagement drivers. There may, in fact, be certain circumstances where employees may be justified in holding some of these beliefs. But as you will see, all of the beliefs can be dysfunctional when they indicate an overly cynical or naïve outlook, as the case may be. In either case, the employee holding these beliefs may be seriously distorting reality.

Self-limiting beliefs about senior leaders

- All senior leaders are dishonest.
- I cannot trust anyone in authority.
- Senior leaders are only motivated by greed and self-interest.
- Leaders are always right.
- Leaders are always honest.
- Leaders don't care about employees. They only care about the bottom line.

Self-limiting beliefs about managers

- ▶ My manager's job is to keep me motivated.
- ▶ If I need feedback, my manager will provide it.
- ▶ Management will initiate career discussions and plans charting my career progress.
- ▶ My manager is too busy to meet with me.
- ▶ My manager isn't interested in my ideas.

Self-limiting beliefs about teamwork and coworkers

- ▶ I can't trust any of my team members. They are all only looking out for themselves.
- ▶ Everyone on my team is incompetent.
- ▶ The only way to get something done is to do it myself.
- ▶ If I share information with coworkers, they will use it against me.
- ▶ People who work from home or in remote locations are not really part of the team.

Self-limiting beliefs about job and career growth

- ▶ I own my job.
- ▶ That's not my job.
- ▶ If I perform well, I should get a promotion.
- ▶ After a certain amount of time in a job, I should get a promotion.
- ▶ When I complete my degree, I should get a promotion.
- ▶ All opportunities for promotion or horizontal movement in the organization will be posted.
- ▶ I should be paid or promoted based on job tenure.
- ▶ I can depend on my employer to provide opportunities for continual learning.
- ▶ Career paths and ladders should be defined and clear.
- ▶ If there are no job vacancies in the organization, it's unlikely a job can be created.

- ▶ My success depends more on improving my weaknesses than leveraging my strengths.

Self-limiting beliefs about being valued and recognition

- ▶ I don't deserve praise . . . I'm just doing my job.
- ▶ Praise is counterproductive—it just goes to people's heads.
- ▶ If I don't hear from my manager, it means I'm doing a good job.
- ▶ I'm not paid what I'm worth.
- ▶ No one cares about my ideas.
- ▶ People in lower-level jobs or support roles are a lot less valuable.
- ▶ New hires have to earn respect.

Self-limiting beliefs about personal well-being

- ▶ I must work as many hours as possible, even if it means sacrificing my health and time with my family.
- ▶ I cannot delegate for fear that the work won't be done right.
- ▶ “All work and no play” makes me more valuable to my employer.
- ▶ I can't afford to take vacation time.
- ▶ To keep up, I have to take work home every night.
- ▶ If I don't work when I'm sick, my work won't get done.

Other self-limiting beliefs

- ▶ Life should be fair.
- ▶ Change scares me and I must resist it.
- ▶ My employer will take care of me.
- ▶ I can expect long-term employment with my current employer.

You may have other self-limiting beliefs to add based on your own work experience. Our point in showing these is to bring to the surface

some underlying assumptions that put a ceiling on our own capacity to self-engage and to provide a list of issues for managers to openly explore with employees.

COMMON SELF-DEFEATING HABITS

In survey comments, we found ample evidence that employees and their managers are acting in ways that sabotage and complicate their relationships and thus undermine their own efforts to stay engaged and cause others to disengage. We have observed these same negative habits of thought and action in our years of professional coaching. We present them here as a checklist to help you evaluate whether any of them may be inhibiting your own efforts to self-engage, or the efforts of those around you. We also show actual selected survey comments, some referring to the respondent himself or herself, and others to a manager or coworker, that serve to illustrate each of the habits:

___ **Avoiding conflict**

Fearing escalation of emotion or possible rejection to the point of avoiding confrontations necessary for moving forward

Illustrative survey comment

“Those of us who are not comfortable speaking up publicly or have questions need to trust our managers; knowing they will in turn deliver our message/suggestions correctly without divulging our identity or adapting/editing the message for the benefit of the receiving party.”

___ **Win-lose**

Needing to win so badly that someone else must lose; making every interaction an adversarial one

Illustrative survey comment

“My manager does not pull her weight. She always wants others to help her do her job—she’s a bully, bossy, disrespectful, insulting, always trying to put fellow employees down by insulting them.”

___ **Perfectionism**

Feeling a need to be perfect to the extent that it may create fear of failure, extreme self-criticism, or criticism of others

Illustrative survey comment

“My manager perpetuates and reinforces a negative work environment, admonishing all who did not meet the perfection he expects.”

___ **Entitlement mentality**

Feeling too much reward too quickly with too little effort

Illustrative survey comment

“There is also a noticeable sense of entitlement or a false sense of importance amongst some of my coworkers in my immediate area leading to minimal, passive work and short attention spans on their duties.”

___ **Victimized**

Blaming outside circumstances or other people for not taking action

Illustrative survey comments

“I’ve been struggling with standing up to coworkers who take credit for work I have done, and then the supervisors encourage their behavior. It would be wonderful if we knew who to talk to in times where work conflict arises.”

“I feel like I am being taken advantage of every day.”

___ **Stuck in the comfort zone**

Having a need for security that is so strong that it inhibits the need to take risks, change, and grow

Illustrative survey comment

“Managers need to empower associates to be risk takers. They can preach it, but sometimes they don’t practice it all that well.”

___ Rational to a fault

Lacking empathy and having difficulty accepting human foibles and failures

Illustrative survey comment

“The leaders of the organization inspire employees through executing effectively on a day-to-day basis, but do not inspire through strong conventional management techniques like empathy, career pathing, and any kind of personal connection.”

___ Emotional volatility

Losing control of emotions and abusing coworkers, taking unreasonable risks, or making impulsive decisions

Illustrative survey comment

“My supervisor needs to be better with people. He is very disrespectful and seems to verbally abuse people who are not so aggressive. He rarely shows respect to low-level employees when his supervisors are not around.”

___ Knowing it all

Having an excessive need to be right and impress others with knowledge

Illustrative survey comment

“My manager is a technical expert on how to do my job. Unfortunately, that means he only allows me to do things his way, which he believes is the only right way. That makes the job less interesting and me less motivated.”

___ Withholding information

Hoarding information to gain power instead of sharing it to gain trust and teamwork

Illustrative survey comment

“Information flows up, but honest information does not flow down. Favoritism and the ‘Good ‘Ol Boy’ network is very prevalent.”

___ **Withholding praise**

Being reluctant to recognize others or express appreciation

Illustrative survey comment

“I love working here, but I wish I could be recognized every once in awhile by the doctors on a job well done.”

___ **Faultfinding**

Having a negative and overly critical attitude in general and toward others’ ideas and initiatives

Illustrative survey comment

“I speak for all of the cooks when I say that we do not feel appreciated when we do a good job, and we get negative criticism when we make a mistake instead of positive. There is too much negative vibe in the kitchen, especially coming from the executive chef.”

___ **Sucking up**

Being so concerned about how they look to higher-ups that they focus on looking good at the expense of actually achieving something

Illustrative survey comment

“I feel managers are overwhelmed with those who play favoritism to them, and do not see the little guy who works hard and gives it their 100 percent and more.”

___ **Talking too much**

Violating confidences or simply turning people off by talking when they should be listening

Illustrative survey comment

“My immediate supervisor does not exercise confidentiality. She talks about other workers with other coworkers.”

Passing the buck

Failing to take responsibility for oneself or blaming others for our mistakes

Illustrative survey comment

“The goals set by managers are at times unrealistic, and then we as a department feel the blame will be put on our laps rather than the person who set the goal in the first place.”

Claiming unearned credit

Taking credit for others’ ideas or accomplishments

Illustrative survey comment

“It is hard when you do your best and someone else is always taking credit for the job you did.”

Did you see a few habits that come close to describing some of your own past behavior? If so, you are not alone. Most of us must “own up” to behavioral tendencies that we would like to change, but struggle to do so. We suggest that you select one or two to work on and ask a trusted coworker to help monitor your behavior and give you feedback and support when you slip into old, self-defeating habits.

Common Self-Engagement Challenges: The Four Generations

Each employee’s challenges are individual ones, not generational, as we have emphasized before. Nevertheless, there

may be value in presenting a few of the more common challenges that arise among various age groups. Our intent in the lists below is to alert you to needs that frequently occur and should be addressed, not to reinforce assumptions and stereotypes that may not necessarily apply to any given employee within these generations.

Traditionalists (born 1945 and before)

- ▶ They may feel that younger leaders do not value their knowledge and experience enough to tap it before they retire.
- ▶ Rigid organizational policies may inhibit flexibility regarding options to full retirement that would allow them to continue to contribute.

Boomers (born 1946–1964)

- ▶ Because some often judge Millennials and Xers as lacking their work ethic and initiative, they may be reluctant to engage with and mentor them, or be mentored by them in new technologies.
- ▶ They may be cynical about how seriously the organization is about capturing their knowledge and providing ways for them to leave a legacy.
- ▶ Some are frustrated by organizational practices that limit their options for phased retirement and continuing part-time or consulting options.

Gen Xers (born 1965–1980)

- ▶ Independence may cause some not to identify with and be loyal to the organization.
- ▶ Need for autonomy may cause some to be reluctant team players.

- ▶ They may be easily discouraged by fewer career path options and feel blocked as older Boomers postpone retirement.

Millennials (born 1981–1994)

- ▶ Some may initially struggle without sufficient performance coaching, feedback, and mentoring.
- ▶ Without clearly stated goals, some may flounder and not take the initiative.
- ▶ Because many are more oriented to immediate gratification and short-term timelines, they may have difficulty focusing on long-term goals and rewards.

Self-Engagement Challenges in Turbulent Times



We have touched on most of the issues below in previous chapters, where we presented actions that leaders and managers can take to address them. Now we suggest that you consider these challenges from your perspective as an individual employee. As you review the list, ask yourself, “What could I do, independent of any action higher management might take, to claim some sense of mastery over the situation?”

- ▶ You may be less likely to take the risks necessary for creating the innovative ideas needed to survive tough challenges.
- ▶ Your fear of job loss may result in being increasingly distracted and spending more time worrying, swapping

rumors, and speculating in hallway conversations about what might happen.

- ▶ Strong emotions may result in increased conflict with co-workers.
- ▶ Budget cutbacks may increase turf battles and in-fighting over limited resources.
- ▶ Staff reductions will increase individual workloads, which may lower morale and lead to burnout.
- ▶ Increased workloads may lead to less time spent exercising, unhealthy eating and drinking habits, sleep loss, less time spent with family and friends, and overall reduction in personal well-being.
- ▶ A natural tendency to withdraw in times of crisis may inhibit you from expressing your concerns and ideas.
- ▶ You may assume that stalled company growth will mean little or no career growth.
- ▶ You may switch your focus to seeking new job opportunities elsewhere.
- ▶ Fewer opportunities to celebrate individual and team success may reduce the level of “psychic reward” that motivates continued achievement.
- ▶ The organization’s failure to confront poor performers may become even more demotivating to you and other better performers.

► THE CHALLENGE OF CLAIMING FULL PERSONAL POWER

Despite our best intentions and efforts to be more engaged and fulfilled in our work, all of us are capable of undermining ourselves. There are common mindsets and patterns of behavior that are particularly self-sabotaging, which we will present in this section. First, to pave the way for assessing those behaviors, we address the funda-

	Can Control	Cannot Control
Take Action	Mastery	Ceaseless Striving
No Action	Giving Up	Letting Go

Figure 10.1 The Personal Power Grid

mental questions of “What can I control?” and “What actions can I take?”

The Personal Power Grid (Figure 10.1) is basically a tool for diagnosing how constructively and effectively we are dealing with the challenges we face. Whatever the issue may be, we either have some control in addressing it or we have no control. Another choice we have is to either try to take action to deal with the challenge or take no action. Depending on our choices, we find ourselves in one of the four situations indicated by the quadrants. There are two healthy choices: Mastery (taking action on the things we can control) and Letting Go (not trying to control what we cannot control). The other two choices are problematic: trying to take action on what we cannot control (Ceaseless Striving) is a recipe for frustration, and not taking action on what we can control (Giving Up) is abdication. These last two quadrants represent choices that allow the individual to stay in the realm of “victimhood,” where it is easier to blame one’s circumstances, one’s employer, one’s manager, or one’s coworkers rather than try to master the situation or let it go.

What follows is an example of a dilemma faced by an employee who feels frustrated about her career goals and must make a decision about whether and how to constructively engage. As you can see, four options have been identified:

Challenging Situation

Employee wants a promotion from an hourly to a salaried position, but feels she has been unfairly discounted as unqualified.

	Can Control	Cannot Control
Take Action	<i>Employee researches skill gaps and discusses with her manager how to improve.</i>	<i>Employee complains about the situation and randomly applies to unrelated job postings.</i>
No Action	<i>Employee just waits for manager to recognize her potential.</i>	<i>Employee resolves to make incremental job moves instead of one big move to the desired position.</i>

As you think about a dilemma that is standing in the way of your own engagement or the engagement of a direct report, consider using the blank grid below to flesh out the decision to be made and confront the responsibility we all have for taking constructive action if we can.

The Challenging Situation		
	Can Control	Cannot Control
Take Action		
No Action		

We hope this worksheet helps in identifying specific actionable goals and results in employees taking more responsibility for their own self-engagement.

► THE LIMITS OF SELF-ENGAGEMENT

Despite our best efforts, some employees will not rise to the level of full engagement. They may simply be in the wrong jobs, too distracted by personal life challenges, or too resistant by reason of their beliefs or work ethic. As managers, the trick is not to give up on disengaged employees too soon—not without having explored ways to effectively address these issues.

We need to also acknowledge that the wisest and most adaptive decision for some employees may be to pursue employment in other organizations where the fit may be better and they can start fresh with a new manager.

Where does self-engagement end and engagement attributable to manager or leader actions begin? We will never know the answer, but we must always pursue it. As Ferdinand Fournies has pointed out, there are 16 reasons why employees don't do what they are supposed to do, and only one of them lies outside the power of the manager to influence.²

► FINAL THOUGHTS

Psychologists describe patients who exhibit self-defeating behaviors to which they rigidly adhere as having character disorders. To the great frustration of those around them, they don't see their behavior as dysfunctional or unacceptable, often being perplexed and defensive when others question their actions. They tend to resist well-intentioned attempts to help them examine and address their behavior, often leaving them socially outcast.

In our many years in consulting we've seen our share of employees with what might be called "engagement disorders." These employees are typically quite unhappy with their lot (at work and often in life) and go out of their way to express their displeasure to any and all around them, including customers who (surprise, surprise) are not

crazy about hearing their stories of woe. They seem to live by that old aphorism: “Chaos, panic and disorder—my work here is done.” Even the best of managers can be frustrated by their immovable attitudes, leaving these miscreants in an inevitable slide that ends with a pink slip and two weeks’ severance pay.

Don’t succumb to engagement disorder!

Like many of your colleagues, you may have had a tough break or two in your career—horrible manager, corporate downsizing, or incompetent leadership at the top of the house. And we know that getting a paycheck from an employer who is passionately working to develop the six universal drivers we’ve discussed would make your work life a lot more productive and enjoyable. Many workers are in the same crowded boat these days. This doesn’t mean that you or your coworkers have to suffer from an engagement disorder. The truth is:

- ▶ In spite of these bad breaks you still have a choice about how you comport yourself.
- ▶ You can still go to work with the attitude that you will do the best you possibly can.
- ▶ You can continue to learn and develop your skills.
- ▶ You can find others at your place of work who share your interest in creating a better workplace and would be willing to champion and work toward this important goal.

And if these efforts don’t help you succeed at your current place of work, you can rest assured there are places where a self-engaged employee is valued. We hope that whatever situation you find yourself in right now, you will see that much of what you do, and how you respond to the environment around you, is in your hands.

The choice, ultimately, is yours.