

Book Excerpt

Ready, Set, Engage
By Stephanie Y. Oden

Chapter 1 – Manager in the Mirror

“New flavor of the month,” Harvey thought to himself as he entered the corporate meeting on Employee Engagement.

“Same old white bread, new packaging,” a co-worker had whispered in his ear as they walked through the door.

Harvey didn't really hear him. He was still focused on the shock of Sam's sudden departure from the company. Harvey had been mentoring Sam to take his position. He had been caught completely off-guard when Sam had turned in his resignation. One of the reasons Sam gave for leaving was that he didn't see any opportunities for him with Precision Industries. With this still on his mind, Harvey felt frazzled as he entered the room.

Harvey took an aisle seat near the back as the facilitator began her presentation. She made eye contact with him and the other participants as she spoke.

“Hello,” she said in a clear, straightforward voice, “I am Kathryn Fuller. I'm your facilitator for this seminar. Welcome to the RSE Path to Engagement.”

Harvey glanced through the handouts as Kathryn went through her introduction. *More paperwork*, he thought. *It never ends.*

The presentation began with a pie chart divided into three slices. The three sections were identified only by percentages: 29%, 17%, and 54%.

“The results of the 2004 survey published in the Gallup Management Journal® semi-annual Employee Engagement Index revealed seventeen percent of the workforce is actively disengaged.” Kathryn stated. “They are physically present but psychologically disruptive. They are unhappy and they insist on sharing their unhappiness with others. They do not limit their sharing to internal conversations with co-workers. Unfortunately, their dissatisfaction also comes across in relationships with customers.”

Harvey sat up in his chair. Was there a link between his top employee leaving and engagement? Harvey looked around at his fellow co-workers and noticed that many of the people in the room looked puzzled by this statement. There were a couple of whispers, but no one openly opposed the facilitator's statement and the group continued to appear focused on the speaker.



The facilitator continued, “Twenty-nine percent of employees are actively engaged; they are physically committed to their job and their company. Engaged employees tend to be two to three times more productive than other employees and are responsible for most of the innovation and the creative ideas in the company. You need more of this type of employee communicating to your customers. Research also shows that an engaged organization can realize double-digit improvements in productivity and profitability.”

This statement riveted everyone’s attention. Double-digit improvements in productivity seemed a bold prediction.

One of the participants stated bluntly, “Why should I care about the engagement level of the employees? I need a higher percentage operating income. I need more sales to more customers and lowered expenses.” Harvey recognized the speaker as Milton Hightower, Sr. Vice President of Sales and Operations for the Commercial Products Division. Milton’s negative tone surprised him.

Harvey sat up in his chair and leaned slightly forward as he braced himself for a response to the unsolicited comments.

“Maybe you are not quite convinced,” Kathryn said without appearing the least bit flustered by Milton’s outburst. “You always have a choice. My question to you, Milton, and to each of you in this room, is, ‘Are you satisfied with just twenty-nine percent of your employees focused on more sales, lowered expenses, customer loyalty and in general organizational longevity?’”

Without waiting for a response, Kathryn continued, “You will always have some level of actively disengaged employees, but what about the other fifty-four percent we have not discussed? This group is classified as not engaged. They are present at work and are committed at the lowest level. But they are in a holding pattern.

“As a member of the senior leadership team, you are the engagement agent. You can be the catalyst for transforming the not engaged in your company into engaged crusaders. What could you do if you had a workforce where seventy-one percent of the workforce was committed to sales growth, customer retention and company profit?”

“Disengaged workers cost the U.S. economy about \$300 billion dollars a year in productivity and there is a lower retention rate in companies where there is a low level of engaged employees. It costs on average about 1.5 times a current employee’s salary to train a new person. Productivity and new employee training costs have a direct impact on the bottom line. On the other hand, according to the same Gallup Organization research, engaged employees increase the company’s profitability and stay with organizations for a longer period of time. In regard to increasing sales, engaged employees create engaged customers.”



“Engaged customers keep coming back. They view the supplier/customer contract as a relationship and look for opportunities for mutual success. Repeat customers mean more sales and higher profitability potential. Engaged customers are likely to repurchase and tend to view your company as the perfect company/product for people like them.”

Kathryn paused to let the information soak in, and then continued, “You can achieve customer and employee engagement via the Ready, Set, Engage Path. This method, which I will refer to as the RSE Path, is based on these principles: To increase employee engagement, there has to be a focus on expectations and relationships. Likewise, to increase customer engagement, the organization has to focus on increasing customer confidence, high corporate integrity, product pride, and passion.”

“The path has three phases. The first stage on the path is *Ready*. As a leader, what level of engagement are you? Are you ready to look at the manager in the mirror? What manager do you see? Inspiring external changes begins with personal accountability and a commitment to continuous self-learning. Are you accountable to the board and to your employees? Do you have the courage to ask for feedback from all your customers? Another key element of this stage is an understanding of how your role and the role of your people fit into the corporate beliefs and values.”

