

LEADERSHIP Excellence

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Engaging Greatness

Begin with a game of follow the leader.



by D. Luke Iorio and Zackarie Lemelle

WE HEAR A LOT ABOUT *ENGAGEMENT* today, for good reason. According to Right Management, 84 percent of the (disengaged) workforce is considering looking for a new job in the next 12 months. ISR research reports that high engagement companies improved operating income by 19.2 percent while low engagement companies declined 32.7 percent over 12 months!

Engagement is at the forefront of most strategic plans. Leaders know that *disengagement* causes lower productivity, increased turnover, and deteriorating morale. Since *engagement* previously focused more on *employees* than *leaders*, efforts focused on providing more recognition, more comfortable environments, better communication, more money and other perks.

Programs with such an *external* focus have become the norm. If these attempts were employed in your company, you probably saw a swell of improvement in morale, followed by a drop to a point lower than it was before your intervention. The reason for the ineffectiveness of employee-centered engagement approach is the focus on effect rather than cause.

First, be aware of a *hard-to-hear truth*: *as a leader, you are likely the cause of employee disengagement*. If you're *disengaged*, or *not as engaged as you could be*, a game of *follow-the-leader* ensues, and there's nothing you can do for people to sustain whatever boost in engagement you've seen based on *externally motivated programs*. The result: *employees who are so dissatisfied they can't wait for a turn in the economy to look for a new job*. Worse, many *high potentials*, in whom you've invested, will also look to leave.

As the leader, you need to change this dynamic. It's much easier to change *your* habits (and level of engagement) than to get others to change. In fact, this is a prerequisite before others will take your lead and change.

The Keys to Engagement

By definition, *engagement* is a person's willingness (motivation and buy-in) and ability (skills, knowledge, and application) to perform and contribute to a particular role, goal, or task. But there's another concept that few people understand—*Capacity*.

Fully engaged leaders are engaged in their roles, goals, and tasks, and have more energy available to engage. Capacity is the amount and quality of energy you currently have available to put to use (your potential). Your capacity is based on your life attitude and awareness—how you see yourself and others, and how you interact. It stems from your perceptions, thoughts, filters, values, beliefs, principles, assumptions, emotions, and behaviors.



Fully engaged leaders bring out the greatness in themselves and those around them. They're clear on who they are—their capacity. And they clearly choose how they want their capacity to be reflected in the way they lead and take action; their values, beliefs, vision, and purpose show up in how they communicate, make decisions, and interact with others. They bring out their greatness because they integrate all that they uniquely are into all that they do. The principles, actions, and individual are one in the same. This inspires employees to bring more of their own capacity into what they do and how they do it.

Begin with Leadership Engagement

Boost your leadership *capacity* and *engagement*. Here are six starting points:

1. Develop an acute level of self-awareness. Learn what your default tendencies are—the most typical way that you react to your circumstances.

Understand your perceptions and how you filter information. Know how these tendencies relate to your thoughts, beliefs, values, and how you see yourself. Consider these reactions, perceptions and filters and how they change at varying levels of stress. How often do you focus on what's wrong and find yourself in a reactive mode? How often are you excited, regardless of any challenges, and remain positive about what's right and what's to come?

2. Integrate your capacity into how you engage. Intentionally choose how your energy, values, purpose, etc. are going to show up in how you lead—and how you want to lead. Decide how you want these elements of yourself to be evident in your conversations, relationships, decision-making, and other aspects of your leadership role.

3. Observe. Become aware of others. Observe your team and colleagues—what drives and motivates them, and what disengages them? How do you contribute to either of these? What perceptions created those contributions?

4. Ask and listen. How often do you really sit back and listen to what employees are saying, not just their words, but their mannerisms and attitudes as well? Again, just become more aware and you'll take the first step to intervening in a positive manner.

5. Be a coach. Being a coach doesn't mean advising others on *what you want done* or *how you want things done*. Being a coach means engaging their greatness. Share what you've learned about yourself and ask for ways to improve. Coach them to be more self-aware and encourage positive communication.

6. Point out others' greatness. Make sure they know that you see them for who they are, what they're capable of, and that *you don't take them for granted*.

Now, choose a single starting point so that you can begin increasing your capacity and willingness to perform to the best of your ability. As you take responsibility for engagement, you become more engaged. Sustainable positive engagement that is *internally driven* (and externally supported) works for employees and for leaders. Even with just a few modifications in leadership style—using the six starting points—you'll witness a very different game of *follow the leader*, and you'll succeed at engaging greatness. LE

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ACTION: *Bring out greatness in yourself and others.*