



## **Engaged for Life**

**by Simon Bailey**

**Organizations that understand how to engage the hearts and minds of their employees and customers will thrive in every economy.**

Employees today are being asked to do more with less. The good news is that they are more willing to go the extra mile when they know that their hard work is respected, valued, and sincerely appreciated by the management. Now, for the bad news:

According to a recent Gallup study of some 300,000 organizations, if you have an average-size organization of 100 employees, 60 of your people are not doing their best work. In other words, they have no passion about the organization's goals and they are unclear about the significance of their daily contribution. Furthermore, if your company is similar to those Gallup has surveyed, you have 20 employees who are "actively disengaged." They're just showing up for a paycheck and waiting for the economy to rebound so that they can find work at another company.

What this means is that 20 percent of the people you work with are carrying the load for the 80 percent who are just showing up every day with batteries loaded, but no current running. This is a situation that ultimately leads to customer defection because employees are responsible for engaging customers in the products and services of their company. Are you actively engaged in your job and organization? You can re-engage yourself and others who have emotionally disconnected from the organization by keeping the following in mind:

Leverage human energy to ensure customer and employee fidelity. In order for your organization to thrive in the new global economy, you need to understand how successful companies—like Southwest Airlines—invest in their workforce to deliver superior results and create customers for life. The co-founder, president, CEO, and chairman of the board of Southwest Airlines, Herb Kelleher, once asked a friend who had just started a

business, "So how's it going?" The friend groaned, "Herb, I'm spending 99.9 percent of my time on people." Herb said, "Only 99.9 percent?"

Employees are customers too. How much time do leaders spend with their teams? Some leaders spend their entire day in meetings — planning future meetings to discuss strategy. There should be only one strategic objective: finding and retaining customers. Leaders often forget that employees are consumers who buy products, use services, and have a network of family and friends who do the same. Word of mouth advertising is still the most powerful marketing for any organization. Employees who are actively engaged never stop selling their company or telling someone about their work experience, since the majority of our lives are spent working at the place of business. Arie de Gues, former executive of Royal Dutch Shell Oil said, "Organizations tend to die early because their leaders and executives concentrate on production and profit, and forget that the organization is an institution...a community of human beings."

Identify innate abilities and align roles with those strengths. Every person who is hired into an organization wears an invisible sign that echoes the words Tom Cruise said to Cuba Gooding Jr. in the movie Jerry Maguire: "Help me help you." How can you help employees to help you? Make sure they are in positions that will best channel their human energy, which, in turn, engages customers. To ignite the engagement revolution, you must understand the ARC of Engagement®, which simply means Attraction + Retention + Connection = Loyalty.

In order to keep them, you must continue to do whatever you did to first attract people to your organization. Attraction is the foundation of any relationship. Employees enjoy working for organizations that recognize their hard work and achievements, and they take pride in going above and beyond the call of duty. Most organizations spend significant dollars on recruiting, reviewing, and relocating human capital to their organization to sustain their competitive edge in the marketplace. Yet these same organizations, after they have attracted and courted individuals send them to an orientation, give them a desk, a telephone, a PDA, and say, "Go forth and conquer." Many employees who've experienced this sink-or-swim, do-or-die style of leadership ultimately leave. If dissatisfied customers tell six to eight of their friends about their buying experiences, imagine how many employees will share with others their experiences as an employee.

Walk a mile in their shoes. You will only improve a customer's experience to the degree that you improve the employee's experience. The next time someone on the executive committee wants to know what the sales, marketing, and purchasing departments really do with the company's money, invite them to leave their air-conditioned offices and go on sales calls, experience a marketing meeting, or place supply orders. You would be amazed what this will do for morale. Employees who work in these roles every day will see this as a sign that their leaders care about them, and this ignites them to care for the customers.

Retention works both ways. In his book, *The Loyalty Effect*, Fredrick F. Reichheld notes that the result of turning five percent of ordinary customers into return ones leads to an average increase in profit per customer of 25 percent to 100 percent. Many organizations

make the mistake of spending all their resources to attract new customers, with little attempt made to retain the current ones. Employers must start with first things first, and the initial task is to ensure that there is internal loyalty on the part of the company employee before launching a campaign to develop external customer loyalty. Just imagine the savings to the bottom line when employees stay with companies because they are genuinely happy, not just for the paychecks and benefits.

Tell everyone you work with how much they are valued. Everyone has an emotional bank account that accrues interest over long periods of time — if regular deposits are made to it. True engagement is unscripted and unrehearsed; it flows from the center of your being and connects with the spirit of another human being.

Every day you have the opportunity to connect with your employees and customers. When someone authentically connects with you through words, deeds, and actions, it sets off a positive emotional reaction. Meeting attendance can soar just by having an enthusiastic meeting staff. Passionate suppliers create a great need for their products and services. According to the Gallup poll, if all 100 employees were "fully engaged," meaning doing their best work and happy about it, your customers would be 70 percent more loyal, your turnover would drop by 70 percent, and your profits would jump 40 percent.

Simon T. Bailey is author of *Release Your Brilliance* and leading expert in unleashing human potential, he is an international speaker, author, and business consultant based in Orlando, Florida. He can be reached [www.SimonTBailey.com](http://www.SimonTBailey.com).