

Member's Quarterly

Spring 2017 Edition

Feature

The Science Behind Passion at Work

How do you handle the global crisis in employee engagement?

I am just going through the motions. I meet my targets but I feel unfulfilled." A senior administrator from a well-respected university shared this with me after I had spoken to a cross-section of the campus about our research on passion at work. She was puzzled over how others (i.e., colleagues, students and stakeholders) perceived her. They thought she was passionate but she disclosed she felt like she was on autopilot. She no longer felt the fire in her belly.

The research is clear. There is a global crisis in employee engagement. Most research shows that well over 70% of employees are not engaged at work. Surprised? The numbers are large and so are the implications. We also know that passion drives productivity, innovation and ultimately performance. More disturbing for me, however, is to consider all the people leading unfulfilled lives at work. If I think about how many hours most of us spend getting to/from work as well as our hours at work, that's a big percentage of our day to not feel uplifted.

So what can we do about this crisis? We can study the science and learn strategies that will make our lives at work more satisfying. For the last 15 years, we have collected data on how people experience their work. From this data we have developed a model as well as a 30-question survey. At the heart of our discoveries are the two key drivers of passion at work: Meaning and Progress. Simple, isn't it? Simple but profound and more challenging to execute due to existing habits and firmly entrenched practices.

Discovery #1- Meaning: To feel fulfilled at work, people have to experience their work as meaningful either to themselves or someone they care about. People need to feel connected to purpose. When they ask themselves, "Why do I do this?" They need to have a simple, clear answer: "Because it matters to ... my family, my community, my country." The university administrator valued what her university contributed to her community. However, her own work responsibilities seemed to add value only indirectly. In essence, she did not see the inherent value of her work output in serving her community. Instead, she helped maintain a bureaucracy that continued to grow without adding real value.

Discovery #2-Progress: Even if you see your work as highly meaningful, like a marketing director who believed in her product, on its own, meaning does not create passion. People also need to see progress. People need to feel impact and experience forward movement. Progress is an essential ingredient for engagement. The marketing director needed to see signals of progress such as client feedback on their social media sites, steady increases in sales, execution on new ideas for product enhancements and ultimately increased market share. The administrator, without a connection to meaning, felt disconnected rather than engaged.

Discovery #3, Actionable Drivers: Our research clearly illustrates that there are certain disciplines (21 to be exact) that organizations need to consistently apply to drive a sense of meaning and progress. These drivers include vision and values, resourcing including employee-friendly policies, communications and team support plus an ability to master your work and have autonomy over a good portion of it. When these 21 drivers are maintained, a beautiful domino occurs. For those who report high driver scores, you ultimately see great loyalty, advocacy and satisfaction.

We move from higher drivers to higher meaning and progress to more passionate engagement to higher engagement outcomes.

Any organization can have passionate employees.

Continued...



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All you need is to create the conditions for high Meaning and Progress through consistently applying the 21 drivers in a disciplined and authentic manner.

The university administrator rediscovered her passion after she convinced the university to conduct a value chain analysis that led to streamlining the bureaucracy so it was more service-orientated. The marketing director also rediscovered her passion when the company formalized customer feedback and incorporated it into their business planning approach.

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