

Member's Quarterly

Spring 2018 Edition

Feature

Peg Your Progress

Action alone is not enough

A high degree of progress is critical if you want your employees to be passionate about their work. My ongoing research continues to bear out its essential role in generating a passionate workforce.

The defining event for me came when a business partner and I were discussing the key components of being fully engaged in work. The partner spent a lot of time thinking about the importance of meaning and the need to see your work as meaning-filled. He also reflected a lot on the need for action. In fact, he had created a model that defined passion at work as high meaning supported by high action. Brilliant!

We observed that when we act to support the things that are most meaningful to us, we feel congruent and aligned to our values, our purpose and our goals. During our conversation, I began to feel the model wasn't quite complete. I considered my seven years as a corporate manager in a large organization and the main reason I had resigned.

The years I invested working for that company bore much fruit for me personally. The job itself was fulfilling. I worked on many exciting projects with some amazing people and honed my leadership skills through many lessons learned. I enjoyed dedicating myself to realizing the potential of my teams and fulfilling our mandates. We all worked hard, cared a great deal about our work and took many action steps to ensure our mutual success.

Naturally, there were also many frustrations. This particular company was extremely bureaucratic. In addition, it was permeated with politics. When bureaucracy and politics are combined, it can create an environment in which people feel they must trudge through heavy, sticky mud as they try to execute the actions they believe are key to advance their meaningful goals and objectives.

The longer I worked for that company, the more this environment weighed on me. Taking action required significant energy in this culture. I began to notice that full engagement in my work was more difficult to achieve. I began to complain to my boss that "change around here is too slow and fraught with political landmines." I complained that "our leaders don't have the courage to do the things that will bring their stated end results into reality more quickly."

We all worked very hard, did what we believed were the right things and certainly we had some impact, but we wanted more and we felt unsupported by our environment. We knew we could achieve our goals and realize our vision, but the effort required to navigate the bureaucratic, political culture was exhausting, and advancement — at least to us — seemed excruciatingly slow.

As I reflected on this experience, I discovered what was missing from our discussion. Action alone is not enough. Action needs to produce a sense of progress!

I thought about my teams and other caring, conscientious people who'd worked with me over the years. When people care a great deal about something and take action in support of it, they expect their efforts to move them closer to achieving their goals in a timely manner. Plus, there is an expectation and hope that this forward movement will hold significance. In other words, the outcome the action produces will represent something meaningful in and of itself. To experience a true sense of progress, actions must create meaningful results and become building blocks for further action so that over time, goals are achieved.

When this happens, we feel like we're making progress. It's not enough to just "do stuff." We must feel our actions are moving us onward, closer to our goals and objectives. As we journey toward our goals, we scan our environment looking for signals of progress. Sometimes we do this quite subconsciously such as



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when we anticipate feedback. But when we receive positive feedback in the form of recognition or sometimes a simple word of appreciation, we experience a "hit" of progress. This hit of progress is like an energy booster. It uplifts us and encourages us to persevere. Without a sense of progress, people cannot fully invest or engage in their work.

Make a practice of pegging your progress. Make note of what you moved forward today. Celebrate an obstacle you have overcome. Notice the small wins. Pay attention to progress. The more progress you see, the more engaged you will be!

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