

# FOCUS**ED**

Engagement After 90 Days

The First 90 Days

Best Practices in Employee  
Training

Maintaining Engagement

Volume 16 | Issue 1



ENGAGEMENT AFTER 90 DAYS  
**A Key to Success**

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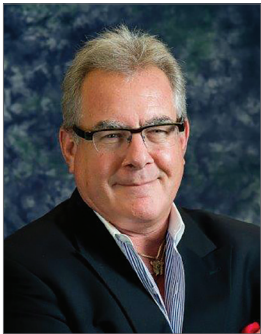
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Employee

# ENGAGEMENT

→ *After 90 Days*



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**E**ngagement has become the key measure of employee attitudes in the last few years. A company's culture is more and more focused on increasing the level of engagement of the individuals that work for said organization. This metric has been correlated with improved service and product quality, an increase in a customer's intent to buy again, and overall improvement in organizational results. No wonder it has become such a hot issue.

Employee surveys of 15 or more years ago were designed to focus on staff satisfaction with the expectation that a more satisfied team would drive results and reduce turnover. But it was determined that satisfaction was simply not enough. I could be satisfied with my job but still not fully engaged in carrying out the responsibilities that it entailed. We witnessed operating environments where staff satisfaction was high but customer intent to return was low. Commonly called a "Country Club" environment.

So industry moved to the measurement of engagement. If one is fully engaged, customer satisfaction follows. Studies have shown that lack of engagement costs the economy billions of dollars. And companies are trying to address this challenge. But maybe not as effectively as possible.

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Let's look at what happens when an employee is hired. Companies put together very specific training plans and periodic checkpoints to assess the trainee's progress. These plans are coupled with job descriptions that are reviewed and studied. Some organizations assign a "buddy" to the new team member to help with cultural integration, as well as helping with the attainment of the training learning "gates". These gates precipitate reviews with rating and feedback as to progress to becoming fully trained. At which time the new team member gets a full work assignment. Success...maybe.

I say maybe because I wonder if the 90-day experience of the trainee is in any way consistent with what that individual will experience within the

employee and his / her trainer, HR executive, "Buddy", supervisor and manager. Just consider the number of communication points that occur during this first 90-day period. Sometimes these happen daily or multiple times a day and can include such things as pats on the back for achieving the assessment points and a "celebration" at the end of the period. That is if they made it, which most often happens.

So, now the training is over and the "real" world takes over. No more daily reviews. Your buddy has moved on. The supervisor has other things to attend to. The daily plan that was present during the training period is also gone. In essence, the rug has been pulled out from under your feet. And with that, it is often shown

*Some organizations assign a 'buddy' to the new team member to help with cultural integration.*

organization once the training period is over. In reviewing the training period, one thing really stands out, and that is heightened focus and frequent contact between the new

that controlled turnover happens right after the training period is over. Acclimation is sometimes more difficult than initially perceived.





The idea of a training period is designed for skill transference, culture introduction and setting the foundation for real engagement. As noted above though, the change experienced after the completion of the training period is so great that it undermines the efforts with respect to culture and engagement? Skill transference and development can be measured. Increased skill level can, over time, also be relatively easily assessed. Attitudes and “buy-in” are more difficult. This is specifically the area where many organizations fall short.

After the 90 days, what happens or can be done to further support and promote attitude and “buy-in” (read: engagement) that were part of the

expected outcome of the training period? I would suggest that the experience of the first 90 days needs to somehow be perpetuated. The regular feedback and measurement of meeting delivery or product standards coupled with regular assessment of engagement levels should be integral if companies want to achieve results that outstrip averages. There may be other approaches or methods that can be used to better align employees' day-to-day operational perception with that of the 90-day training period. Some might include:

- Team feedback sessions
- Regular reviews of customer feedback



- Increased frequency of engagement surveying
- Team goal setting sessions, internally and between the various departments that a group interacts with (in the past we have developed inter-departmental contracts for deliverables)
- Employee input into community involvement efforts

This is just a brief summary, but when looking at the new demands of today's workforce (think millennials), for an organization to sustain an engaged staff, models of the past must be updated. The reality of the cost on either partial or non-engagement is

simply too high. As more products/ services come to the market and features begin to resemble each other, the differential advantage has been, and will continue to be, your staff's attitude. With an economy that is overwhelmingly service oriented, the emphasis must be SERVICE, and the only way to achieve superior, competition winning service is with an engaged team.

Hope you all enjoy our latest edition which deals with this topic. **UF**

Best regards,

Mark

# THE FIRST 90 DAYS

By Barry Kaplan

**T**here's nothing like starting a new job! In life, there are very few moments where you get to start over with a clean slate. Starting a new job is one of those moments where the past is left behind and all is fresh and new. Because of that “new” feeling, most people come into new jobs excited. Some people come into new jobs a little scared. However, nobody comes into a new job bored, disinterested or disengaged. While most companies look at engagement from the employee's perspective, they sometimes fail to look at it from their own perspective. It is not just a matter of asking whether the employee is engaged, it is ALSO a matter of asking whether the company is providing the opportunity or environment for the employee to be engaged.





*“...new employees have control over their engagement...you have control over whether you provide the environment for them to be engaged.”*

## The Offer

So the key to an employee's level of engagement in the first 90 days is to maintain that excitement and keep from doing the things that would start to detract from it. And the process starts before the employee starts—when you make the hire.

As an HR professional, I believe that the two happiest conversations you get to have with people are when you offer them a job and when you give them a raise in pay. Therefore, if at all possible, make those offers in person. Let the person see that you are just as excited as they are. If you can't make the offer in person, at least make the offer over the phone. Try to match, or even exceed, the excitement you receive from the future employee. Then, because all job offers need to be formalized in writing, when you send the offer letter in an email, maintain that excitement. Let the new employee know how excited you are that they are joining the team.

## Prior to Day 1

Now, most job offers have a time period between the acceptance of the offer and the actual start date of employment. Keep up the employee's engagement by making a call or sending a note prior to the start date. You want the candidate to think “wow, they are just as excited as I am.” There may also be times when the new employee asks if there is anything they can do



or read prior to day 1. This is a little trickier to navigate, but you need to be prepared. Because the employee most likely will not have signed their Employment Agreement yet, be



Careful about providing materials and content that are sensitive or company confidential. On the other hand, you don't want to do anything to temper their excitement. So be prepared to provide something that will allow the new employee to learn something meaningful that has been approved by your company's HR department. Also, keep thinking to yourself that anything that tempers excitement, tempers engagement.

## Day 1

Treat the first day, and the first 90 days, as a test for you and the company as much as it is a test (or probationary period) for the new employees. On day 1, meet the new employees at the door. You would have informed the employees what time you expected them to be there. You need to be waiting for them. Walk them to their office/cube/work stations. Make sure that whatever computer equipment, clothes, tools the employees need, are ready and that they are tailored for them. While many companies give out some sort of swag on day 1, this isn't about material things or monetary investment, this is about emotional investment by the company. You absolutely want them to think that you care as much about them starting as they do. Ask yourself this question, "Am I showing that the company is as engaged with them as I want them to be with us?"

Besides the excitement level you want to show on day 1, the other major item is "the plan". At the beginning, I wrote that employees may come into the job a little scared. What they are afraid of is the unknown. So make as much of the process, their first day and their first 90 days as "known" as possible. Have a plan of what they need to learn and what they need to do to





be successful. Make sure the plan is discussed and agreed to. Your goal and their goal need to be aligned if there is to be true engagement.

## Day 2 through Day 90

While most companies have orientation/onboarding plans, they may not treat these as engagement plans. As a result, certain items are left out. Ask yourself these questions about the onboarding:



Does it promote a sense of team and community?



Does it contain a series of quick wins and successes that will allow the employee to feel that they have immediately contributed?



Does it provide for feedback from peers and management to ensure that if things aren't going well, they are immediately corrected, and if things are going well, there is positive feedback?

A new employee should never have to ask the question, "How am I doing?" Or to put it differently, an engaged employee should always know how they are doing.

At UniFocus, we have conducted extensive research into the engagement levels of tens of

thousands of employees. Through this research, we have found that there are four statements that employees make that help truly measure the engagement level. These statements are:

- My co-workers treat me fairly and make me feel part of the team.
- Working at this company makes me feel that I am accomplishing my personal and professional goals.
- I feel that I am a valued and appreciated employee.
- I would recommend this company as a good place to work.

How engaged an employee is, is a measure of what extent they agree with those statements.

And, the statements are as true for a tenured employee as they are for an employee in their first 90 days. So going back to the onboarding/engagement plan, here is how the earlier questions tie into these statements:

- Asking if the plan promotes a sense of team and community, ties into statement #1: "My co-workers treat me fairly and make me feel part of the team."
- Asking if the plan contains a series of quick wins and successes, ties into statement #2: "I feel I am accomplishing my personal and professional goals."



- Asking if the plan provides feedback, ties into statement #3: "I feel I am valued and appreciated."
- If the employee responds positively to all of those statements, they probably would recommend the company as a good place to work (statement #4).

Outside of work, when you hear that someone got "engaged", you

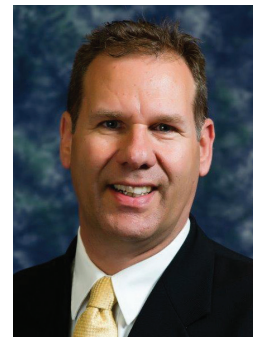
realize that engagement is between two people. The same holds true at work. An employee is engaged to the company and the company is engaged to the employee. As you have been able to tell from this article, new employees have control over their engagement. What you have control over is whether you provide the environment for them to be engaged. **UF**

### About the Author

*Barry Kaplan has overseen UniFocus' Human Resources and Organizational Development activities since joining the company in 2011, bringing 25 years of leadership experience.*

*Barry previously worked as director of training with the Heymann Group before leaving to lead HR and OD improvement activities in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Australia. He also worked at Bowstreet Inc., and Groove networks prior to managing the Global Training Development efforts at Symantec.*

*An eight-year veteran of the U.S. Navy, and winner of the prestigious Navy Achievement Medal, Barry received his M.A. in Adult Learning/ Continuing Education from the University of Phoenix and is a member of the Society for Human Resource Management.*



Barry Kaplan, Sr. VP,  
UniFocus

# BEST PRACTICES

## *in Employee Training/Engagement*

(Hint: It's an Ongoing Process)

Contributors:

Debbie Brown, VP of Human Resources  
Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts

Christine Andrews, VP of Human Resources  
Hostmark Hospitality Group

Mike Siegel, VP of Operations  
Huntington Hotel group

**P**roper onboarding and training of new hires is a crucial process for any organization and particularly in complex service-oriented businesses like hotels. But what happens once their formal training is done? We spoke with human resources experts at a global hospitality brand and two third-party hotel management companies to gain their insights on the best ways to prepare new employees and keep them motivated and performing at their best. Our experts include Debbie Brown, Vice President of Human Resources, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts; Christine Andrews, Vice President of People and Culture, Hostmark Hospitality Group; and Mike Siegel, Vice President of Operations, Huntington Hotel Group.

## What is your company's protocol for employee training and orientation? What is your preferred method for delivery?

Debbie Brown (DB): Our two-day orientation is a great way to get new employees teed up. They partner with a designated trainer – a fellow line employee to whom we pay a premium – and they're in a classroom with other new employees, which allows them to bond as they review standards and policies and procedures. We bring in the general manager, human resources manager, operating manager and others to tell their personal stories and make connections with people they

might not interact with every day. The designated trainer stays connected with the new employee for 90 days. So much of our training is on the floor and while delivering service, and it's not complicated. There are core standards employees have to know and follow, but we tell them to throw it out the window if their intuition tells them to read the guest differently.

Christine Andrews (CA): Our hotels range from small select-service to large full-service hotels and resorts,







and from global brands to independent. As a result, nothing is cookie-cutter, including our onboarding. Our human capital tool has electronic onboarding to ensure compliance that all new 'artists,' as we call our employees, are not only receiving and signing the right documentation but are introduced to Hostmark from the initial hiring process. The onboarding tool helps us build and foster a collaborative relationship with all of our artists and help them understand they're not only part of the hotel but the larger Hostmark family as well. Some of the major brands for which we operate hotels provide great online resources that help teach the brand way but it's important we put the Hostmark touch on that. The brand provides the guidelines, and we color in the lines.

Mike Siegel (MS): We use an electronic solution that disseminates all the different documents for the onboarding packets to the associates, which they digitally sign and review with their manager. They also complete a set of five online video classes that range in topics from wage and hour to ethics to harassment training, and they're tested on the video content. After that, it's on-the-job training.

*In short: Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts starts its onboarding with a full two-day classroom orientation that its VP of Human Resources calls "a fairly religious experience," while Huntington Hotel Group and Hostmark Hospitality Group lean more on technology. But all three agree that a blended approach to training is best.*

## Once an employee is on board after 90 days, how often do you address training or refresh the messages delivered during orientation?



CA: This is an area that will depend on the property, but it is important that training doesn't just end after the initial effort. The on-the-job training has to be continuous as it affects the quality of experiences we are providing our guests.

DB: Four Seasons provides the onboarding experience, then the hotel determines how that designated trainer stays in touch. That could mean pulling them back into the classroom. We encourage a culture of continual feedback. Many of our hotels make everyday feedback a practice. Millennials engage with that kind of feedback and it improves performance. In addition, every time we get people together in our hotels there's a learning component. That could be a daily briefing at the front desk, but someone is always in charge of conveying the learning tip of the day. It's always framed in a positive way, for instance, "how can we help you improve performance?"

MS: Marriott and Hilton mandate on-the-job, brand, service, and technical training for the hotels we manage and operate on their behalf. We use their LMS system to make sure that training is up to speed, whether it's training on rewards, hospitality or cleanliness, then Marriott and Hilton come in with a QA process in which they review and ensure all of that is done. We have found that to be very effective.

*In short: Whether it's pulling employees back into the classroom or providing frequent, informal feedback, training needs to be an ongoing process, long after the initial 90 days.*





“ We celebrate employee birthdays once a month and all anniversary dates, and hold an employee appreciation week each year. ”

**What benefits are derived from a consistent focus on employee engagement? Is there anything formal that you do to foster it? What type of information is communicated?**

CA: We have found that engagement improves retention because it helps foster the work environment, and people want to be engaged. They want to be active. Hostmark partners with UniFocus on an annual engagement survey and we are working to add more formal touchpoints a couple of times a year. All of our hotels highlight an Artist of the Month or Artist of the Quarter. We also have a Make Your Mark recognition program to bring attention to instances in which artists demonstrates Hostmark's core beliefs in the workplace. We're in the process of creating a Facebook-like internal communication tool available to our artists to help them connect, share and communicate what's going on within Hostmark.

We've initiated Promise Committees on the property level and at the home office that are part of Hostmark DNA. Their purpose is to keep our mission and core beliefs alive and well, tracking and improving what we provide our artists, our guests and our communities. Each location creates a promise activity calendar of community events, and three weeks each year all Hostmark properties are focused on the same type of event, such as a back-to-school drive in August.

MS: Huntington conducts an engagement survey once a year to track engagement at our hotels and highlight opportunities. We celebrate employee birthdays once a month and all anniversary dates, and hold an





employee appreciation week each year. Managers at each location determine an activity to show their appreciation – it might be washing their employees' cars, or hosting an outing. And we share the news of these events through a quarterly newsletter. In each issue we choose an employee to profile and share what makes them unique.

DB: Four Seasons has been able to correlate our employee engagement satisfaction scores very directly to our guest satisfaction scores. You can't always tie it to profitability because of market factors, but if you go on the premise that if you treat employees well they'll treat your guests well, we have the data to make that clear. The real engagement comes from following the golden rule in every interaction that we have. That has been Four Seasons' mantra since the company was founded. We make



sure our managers are agile in the way they manage and lead rather than sticking to the script.

*In short: Efforts to monitor and improve employee engagement pay off in higher retention and more satisfied guests.*

“...but if you go on the premise that if you treat employees well they'll treat your guests well, we have the data to make that clear.”

## What do Millennials look for in terms of engagement and training? How are their needs being met within your organization?

MS: With our share of millennial employees growing, most of the effort our organization is spending with UniFocus has shifted towards their needs. In fact, the most compelling argument to partner with UniFocus was the mobile aspect of its Time and Attendance solution and the ability to communicate with staff via their mobile device, which is an essential feature for a millennial workforce.

CA: Millennials want more frequent feedback. We're changing the formal review process from once a year to more of a performance manage-

ment process with more frequent formal touchpoints. We're also focusing on how to identify the high-potential people who want to grow and help develop a path for their success. We strive to help our artists be the best they

can be in their current roles. Training comes into play here, too – we need help our managers cultivate the feedback, coaching and mentoring skills

they need to be effective in this new performance management process.

DB: Millennials have driven us away from an annual approach to anything. They need constant feedback and they have short attention spans. If on Monday a high-potential millennial employee says they're interested in cross-exposure or transitioning into another department, we have to act fast. It used to be that we promoted people when they were 110-percent ready. Now, we look at people who are 80-percent ready. Our millennials say, "I'm close enough, let's go." Jobs have to have meaning for them. Meaning leads to pride. And so we approach every job that way. We're customizing the experience for our millennial employees like we do with our guests. We apply that customization to how we pay and reward people, and we give them as much empowerment as we can. For instance, employees can access the HR system and add to their own development plan. There's transparency in our technology. And we're mindful to have millennials represented in every decision-making group we have.

*In short: Motivate millennials with constant feedback and mobile, transparent technology.*



## What do you find to be the best way to keep your finger on the pulse of your organization? How have recent technological developments changed how managers engage with employees?

DB: One of the best ways to check the pulse is just by looking into someone's eyes and asking how they are doing, how their kids are doing, is their work environment comfortable. At the same time, it's also important to use communications technology that our employees want to use, enabling them to text any schedule changes, for instance. Workplace communication today is more mobile and more transparent. Employees can access technology for information if they can't reach a manager. Using technology, and transparency in technology, helps people feel very connected.

MS: We have a guaranteed open-door policy with everyone, and make sure our regional teams are on property once a month. In addition, we have an outside service that maintains our hotlines for anonymous calls from the standpoint of complaints or ethics issues, and we make sure our employees know that's available. Our high morale and tenure numbers speak well of our results.

DB: Workplace communication today is more mobile and more transparent. Employees can access technology for information if they can't reach a manager.

CA: Technology is critical in today's work environment in providing access to information and resources. With the increased use of technology, there are some negative impacts in the way we communicate with people – particularly in coaching, performance and/or development opportunities. When people tend to rely solely on technology to communicate because they are comfortable with it, dialogue may be faster but not necessarily better. A lot can be misinterpreted in the written word, whether in texts or emails. Nothing compares to sitting down and having a conversation with someone either over the phone or face to face. We can't forget that we need to connect personally with those we support and work with.



In short: To monitor the pulse of your organization, an open door is the best policy. Embrace technology, but not at the expense of face-to-face conversation. UF



A photograph of a man and a woman, likely restaurant staff, smiling and looking at a tablet. The man is on the left, wearing a white shirt and a light-colored apron. The woman is on the right, wearing a white top and a light-colored apron. They are both smiling warmly at the camera. The background is blurred, showing warm lights and a red sign, suggesting a restaurant or cafe setting.

# MAINTAINING Engagement

By Dr. Daniel Mount

**T**he pattern is a familiar one in engagement research. When looking at job tenure, employee engagement is at its highest when the employee is new, drops off dramatically in the first year, and then slowly rises with the long-term employee.



In work with two companies, the percentage of engaged employees in moving from the initial employment category to the less than one year category dropped by 26% for one company (from 42% to 31% engaged) and 27% for the other (from 56% to 41% engaged). In both cases, as evidenced repeatedly in many studies, engagement then slowly rises with time in the job.

is a behavioral question) and actionable. While all the items are part of the engagement index and this highly correlated with the index, the most correlated of the items changes over tenure of employment. The most correlated item in the first year of employment is the item that addresses whether the employee feels special and valued. The most correlated item for the longer-

*‘ The most critical part of the employee first-year experience is assuring them that their work matters and that they are a special and valued employee. ’*

So how does a company keep the “shiny-new lustre” perceived by the new employee? We start by looking at the engagement index items of feeling like a part of a team in the workplace, feeling like a special and valued employee, feeling like the employee is accomplishing their personal and professional goals, and recommending the hotel as a good place to work. The first three items are psychological (recommending

tenured employees is whether they feel that they are accomplishing their personal and professional goals.

So the item to focus on in the first year of employment is the feeling for an employee of feeling special and valued. In a factor analysis completed in development of the engagement index, most all of the survey items that “loaded” onto the special and valued factor began with

the words, "My direct supervisor....". Survey items included such questions as, "My direct supervisor respects me," "My direct supervisor listens to me," "My direct supervisor treats me fairly" and, "My direct supervisor tells me how I am doing." No matter the specific question, the key here is that the feeling for an employee of feeling special and valued in the first year of employment rests primarily on the supervisor-employee interaction. Supervisor-employee interaction can be managed to a great degree. Policies can be implemented that mandate interaction such as periodic reviews during the first year of employment – most likely more frequently than currently takes place. These reviews should emphasize not only work performance, but how the

employee is acclimating to the work environment, are they feeling like a part of the team; do they feel their work is valued. Employees must develop a sense of trust with their supervisor, and be able to feel that they can openly bring issues, problems, or concerns to their supervisor's attention without fear of retribution. Supervisors must be trained (or reminded of that training!) on how to interact with employees on a daily basis. Listening is not simple nor is it a science. It is an art that can be developed.

Recognition is an important piece of the puzzle in making an employee feel valued. Research has shown that recognition is different things to different people and takes many forms. At its most base level, it is often





just thanking an employee for a job well done or simply acknowledging that you have observed their good work. Reward theory suggests that individual accomplishment should be recognized immediately.

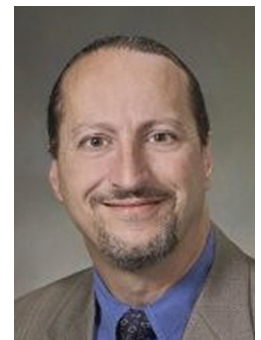
The most critical part of the employee first-year experience is assuring them

that their work matters and that they are a special and valued employee. Companies may not be able to completely eliminate the first-year drop in engagement but they can certainly reduce the size of the fall by focusing on their supervisor-employee interactions. **UF**

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### About the Author

*Dr. Mount, Associate Professor, at Penn State University's School of Hospitality Management, has over twelve years of hospitality industry experience. He is a Certified Hotel Administrator (CHA) with a D.B.A. in International Business from United States International University, an M.B.A. from Michigan State University with a specialization in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management, and a B.S. in Finance from Minnesota State-Mankato. Dr. Mount currently teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in Advanced Hotel Operations, International Hotel Operations and Service Management at Penn State. His major areas of research include service quality, employee satisfaction, and the development of new methods to apply survey data. He has published 35 articles in leading research journals, such as The Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research, the Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality and The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Quarterly.*



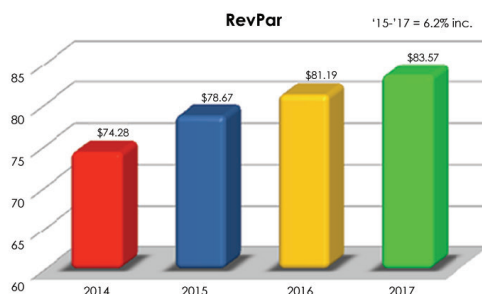
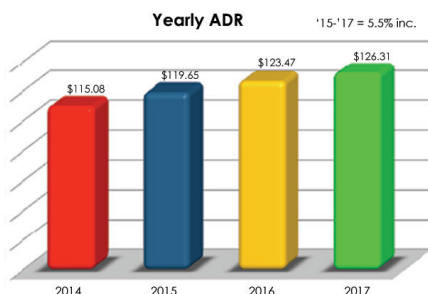
Dr. Daniel J. Mount,  
CHA

# ENGAGEMENT STATS\*

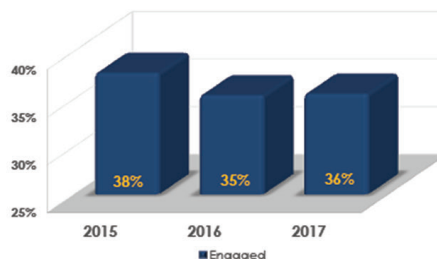
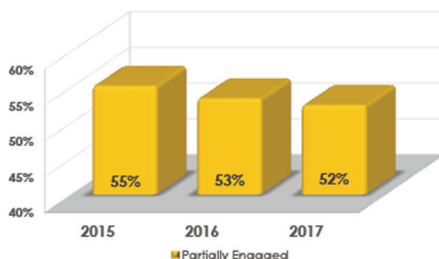
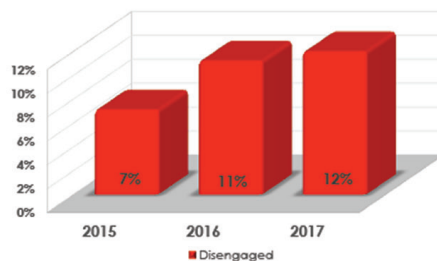
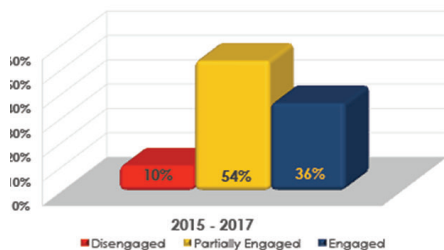
In looking at the industry as a whole, and then at each of the two main segments depicted, Disengagement increased over the last three years at a time when the industry performance from a revenue and revenue per available room point of view, was improving. One would expect an opposite trend. Only in the limited service segment did Engaged Staff increase, but not as much as Disengaged.

If these numbers continue, this can be costly, especially as % unemployment decreases and committed staff will be harder to find. Further, lack of engagement bodes poorly for the customer's service experience. This data should raise concern and hopefully focus the industry on ways to establish and maintain high levels of engagement.

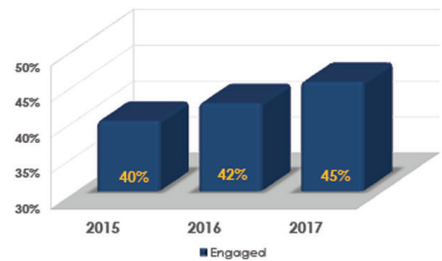
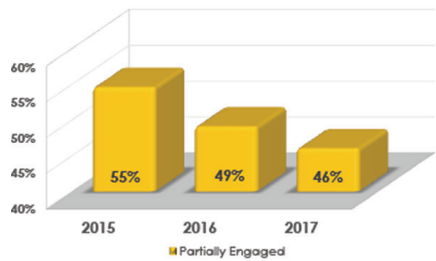
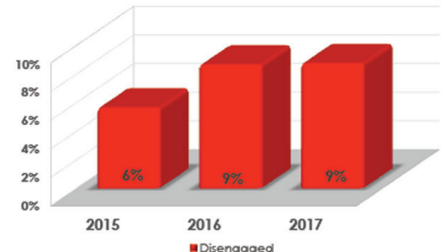
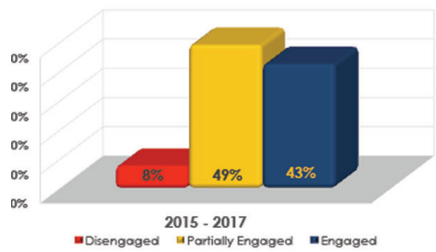
## Industry Revenue



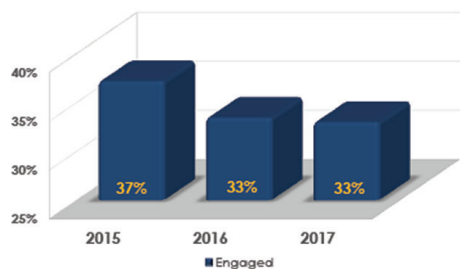
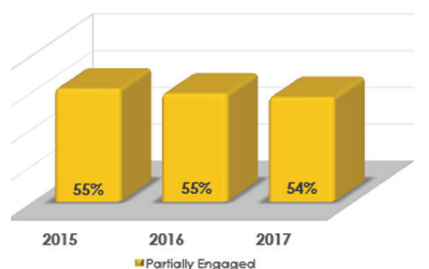
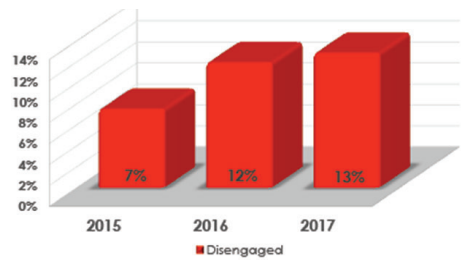
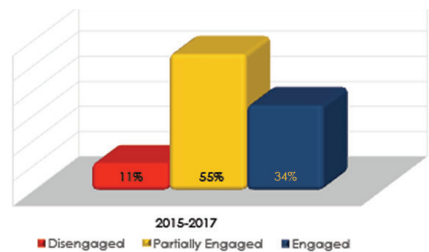
## All Properties



# Limited Service



# Full Service



\*Compiled by Shana Schlabach from UniFocus surveys of over 56,000 employees in both full- and limited-service hotels.

# UNIFOCUS

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