

## Get to the Core of Employee Engagement

As a manager, do you deal with detached employees? Are you constantly wondering how to keep some people motivated and engaged?



Late last year one of the authors (Joe) spent 45 minutes with an employee discussing their loves/ passions and the needs they were fulfilling. This employee realized that his passion for running, writing, motor bikes and photography driven by his core needs for freedom and creativity. Once uncovered, we were able to ensure his roles at work fulfilled these needs. Later I found out that he was seriously considering an outside offer, and this exercise convinced him that he really wanted to stay. And, his engagement and performance has been double what it was. This, and many similar stories we could tell, illustrate that greater employee commitment and engagement are available to the manager who asks.

Back to answering the original question - the source code of your employee motivation is likely not more motivational speeches, pay, or an employee recognition lunch . . . nice as those things are, they do not get to the core of sustained engagement.

### **Build Your Band of Believers**

Beyond ideas and capital, as manager you have to surround yourself with people who are fully engaged in your business. Every successful and transformational leader has a band of believers who have faith in a dream and make it a reality. Whether it is Bill Gates, Paul Allen and Steve Ballmer leading the group of original 11 Microsoft employees, or Mark Cuban and his band of buddies starting Broadcast.com, they realized that they could not do it alone. They had to be surrounded by people with the same passion and drive they had.

How do you build this band of believers? That is the question that every thoughtful leader grapples with. We know money only satiates, it doesn't motivate in the long term. So what is the answer?

To build your band of believers you need to connect them to something deeper than money. Beyond possible riches, you will build your band by engaging them in the work itself. Quite simply, they have to love what they do!

### **It's About the Love**

It almost seems corny and self-evident that people will be more engaged when they are doing what they love. However, a recent study sponsored by the Society of Human Resource management showed that up to 80% of employed adults are somewhat to totally dissatisfied

with their job and career. As someone who has helped people shape their careers over the last decade, this study supports my own observation that most adults are in the midst of a mediocre career - with some ups and some downs. They are wishing for a big payout so they can get out of having to work, and on to doing what they love and want to do.

Given this pervasive career dissatisfaction, it's clear that those leaders who are able to get people fully engaged in work they love will have a huge competitive advantage. It is the difference between an ineffective or mediocre manager, and being a success.

Many managers believe that people have to be constrained and to some degree controlled to get the work done. They believe there is not a way to marry what they want to do with the work that simply needs to be done in the workplace. This is represented by a remark made by a manager I worked with who had high employee turnover, "People can do what they want on their own time" he stated, "but when they are on the job they are mine and better do what I say and need done".

As a leader and employee, you will have profound success if you can answer the following question: "How do I ensure that people in my organization, including myself, are fully engaged in the work and doing what we love?"

### **Uncover the Core**

In our book, "Make It Work: Navigate Your Career Without Leaving Your Organization," we introduce a powerful concept that is helping thousands of people re-engage and find sustained success in their company. And companies are realizing huge benefits. This concept is called "passionate core". Simply put, each of us has two or three unique needs that have to be met in our job. These core needs are really the source of our motivation. When these core needs are being met we have exponentially more mental and physical energy. When the core needs are not being met, we go through the motions, not really satisfied with our work regardless of the money or recognition that our company throws our way.

Given that everyone's core needs are different, uncovering them requires some introspection. By introspection we're not talking about delving into childhood experiences or taking a pilgrimage to Tibet. What we do mean is that you need to uncover the needs that your passions are helping fulfill. Let me explain.

Each of us participates in activities we are passionate about. Whether it is sailing, chess, golf, movies, reading, playing with your children, riding a Harley, swimming, jogging or cross stick, we love doing it. You know it is a passion if you think about the activity a lot, and you use your discretionary time and money to pursue the activity. You may even dream of making a living through your passion, but instead find yourself "stuck" in your job and company.

Now here is the critical yet largely unknown truth - you are passionate about certain activities because the activities are helping you fulfill your unique core needs. For example, your passion for travel, fixing old cars and skiing may be fulfilling core needs you have for challenge and

experimentation. And another's passion for gardening, reading and cooking may be fulfilling core needs they have for learning and creativity. Once you know what a person's core needs are, you gain incredible insight into what makes them tick - the source of their motivation. And, you will know what needs must be met in their work for them to be fully engaged.

Start with yourself. You can uncover your unique core needs by listing the activities you are passionate about, and for each one asking yourself: what does this activity do for me personally? In completing this exercise you will notice that each of the activities you love to do is meeting a couple of the same core needs.

This exercise may reveal that the accountant who spends her weekends mentoring young children and volunteering at science camps has a core need to learn and share knowledge with others. The manager with a passion for playing basketball and baseball, and volunteering as a youth counselor, has a core need for competition and new challenges. And the trainer who is constantly fixing old cars and completing cross word puzzles has a core need to solve problems. In each case, discovering the person's core needs provides powerful self-awareness. You now know what makes them tick, and can answer the question – what will fully engage this person in their work?

### **Channel the Core**

As a leader, your goal is to channel each person's core needs in benefit of the company. By bringing their core needs into the workplace, you are tapping into exponentially more of their mental, physical and emotional energy. This energy is free for the taking. People want to bring themselves and their core needs into their work.

For example, you can engage the accountant with core needs to learn and share knowledge by asking her to research a topic, or find and apply industry best practices. She would also be a great mentor to new employees. The manager who has a core need for competition and challenge would be very engaged by a stretch goal, or to be the “best” in a specific area. The trainer who needs to solve problems could be asked to solve critical and complex issues that you and others don't have the patience for.

As an employee, leader and consultant, Joe has realized tremendous returns after helping people bring their passionate core needs to work. I have also used this to engage people in other settings, including my four children.

For example, one day I needed to get the weeds pulled in my backyard. It was a large task for anyone, but seemed an especially insurmountable task for my four children ages 8, 7 (twins) and 4. However, I did not have to threaten and push at all. I simply appealed to each of their core needs. For eight-year old Sydney who has a core need for autonomy, it was the sense of enjoyment she gets from pulling weeds and accomplishing something by herself. For seven year old Tate, who has a core need for competition and to be the best, I challenged him to pull the biggest pile of weeds. For seven year old Kennedy, who has a core need to help and nurture, I discussed that weeds slowed the growth of flowers and that she needed to help the

flowers grow by getting rid of the weeds. For four year old Davis, who is showing a core need to affiliate, I told him he would be able to “play weeds” with his siblings. Appealing to their core needs, along with lots of cool-aid, got the weeds pulled.

The passionate core is such a simple yet powerful concept. The level of satisfaction and engagement a person derives from their job is directly proportional to the degree to which their core needs are being met. To apply the power of passionate core needs, start with yourself by answering the following questions:

- What do I love to do? And for each thing you love to do, ask:
- Why do I love this activity - what does it do for me personally?

After you surface your core needs you’ll see that you have only been happy in your job and career when these core needs have been fulfilled.

Working from your inside out, you need to help your employees uncover their core needs and bring them to work. As authors, we have helped people shape their careers over the last decade, this study supports our own observation that most adults are in the midst of a mediocre career - with some ups and some downs. They are wishing for a big payout so they can get out of having to work, and on to doing what they love and want to do.

*CMP Authors: Joe Frodsham, President, and Maryanne Pina, Director of Client Research and Ft. Worth Office*

CMP is a talent and transition firm in the business of developing people and organizations across the full talent life cycle – from talent acquisition and leadership development, to organization development and career transition support.