

# engagement



ARE YOU  
PART OF  
THE LUCKY  
13?

trie, your love monday mentor

When I was graduating from college and seeking my first “real” job at age 21, the last thing on my mind was engagement.

I don’t mean of the marrying kind, but of the type that refers to how interested, dedicated and enthusiastic I would be in the position I landed.

I simply wanted some type of work I wouldn’t dread doing, that would provide respectable pay and would get me launched as an independent adult. Clearly my aims were not terribly high or focused.

Nowadays, a day doesn’t pass where I don’t have a conversation, read, write or think about the importance of employee engagement and why it seems illusive for so many workers and organizations.

The notion of “employee engagement” was still taking shape during my initial job hunt, with the first official definition of the term being coined by William Kahn in 1990 as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances.”

Earlier concepts such as employee morale, job satisfaction, work ethic, the Hawthorne Effect and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs all contributed to this realization that employees who are fully absorbed in, enthused about and recognized for their work tend to perform better, be absent less, catalyze creative thought and innovation, and drive success in an organization.

So why are some employees so very engaged while, according to Gallup, 87 percent of employees worldwide are not? Certainly, a great deal of engagement comes from within. It stems from an internal decision to take responsibility for one's actions, decisions and attitudes; to commit to learning from every situation and to honing one's skills continually; to approaching everything with joy and enthusiasm; and to giving 100% all the time. Oh, and having fun along the way is highly recommended.



There are external factors as well. Gallup's research indicates that employees are most likely to be engaged when their managers regularly provide them with opportunities to do what they do best. Increasing individuals' business acumen also enhances their level of engagement as does showing employees how their efforts have meaning and directly connect to organizational strategy and success.

However, not everyone has such a professional environment, and some of us could stand to shift our personal mindset. Here are a few suggestions if you, a coworker or loved one are not part of that lucky 13 percent of engaged employees:

- Identify the source of disengagement. This is critical. Too often we allow one negativity bleed into other areas and make us feel like everything's bad. It's much easier to find more meaning at work when other aspects of life are happier, more balanced and enriched.
- Once you understand really why you are disengaged, if it indeed is work-related, see if it's something you can address with your boss or HR director. Maybe a conversation is all that's needed to make a key tweak.



- If a conversation doesn't solve it, try looking within to boost your engagement: get clear on your mission and goals so you know where to focus and what to reach for; identify what you can learn from and contribute to this job; and figure out how to maximize the experience or find a new job or career more suited to your personality and skills.
- Seek out a career coach or sage mentor who can cheer you on, let you vent and help you discover your inner answers and next steps.

Looking back when I was fresh out of school, engagement actually did matter. I just didn't know it, and I certainly didn't have much of it. The job I ended up getting was with AT&T in a New Jersey town where I knew no one. I was much younger than the next youngest employee, and I wasn't together enough to appreciate the opportunity before me.

In the 18 months I spent there, the 35-year-old guy in the next cube never made eye contact with me let alone said hello, and I missed the comfort of college and my friends. I returned to school for a Master's degree, a little more maturing and discovery of what engagement meant for me.

Today, I'm a career transformation coach, who gets to help other people love what they do and actually look forward to starting their workweek. I also write, advocate for animals, train and teach. I am the poster girl of joyous engagement! And you can be, too.