

Trust and Engagement

Use these keys to successful change.



by James K. Dittmar, Kenneth R. Jennings, and John Stahl-Wert

CHANGE IS THE NEW NORMAL. GAINING and maintaining a competitive advantage requires the ability to respond and adapt to market pressures with agility and speed.

Yet most companies fail to achieve successful, sustained change 70 percent of the time. When leaders attend to the relationship between trust and engagement, they increase the success of their change initiatives and secure competitive advantage.

Engaged employees are committed to and passionate about the vision, mission, and values. They give far greater “discretionary effort” and engage their talents to ensure team success.

Unfortunately, only about 25 percent of employees are truly engaged (and only 12 percent are fully engaged)—leading to lost productivity, poor results, and failed change efforts. Exceptional companies with engaged workers experience a 50 percent higher employee and customer retention, 38 percent greater productivity, and 27 percent higher profits (Gallup).

Disengagement cuts productivity. Disengaged workers might show up on time and do what is minimally required, but their psychological, emotional, intellectual and imaginative selves never make their way across the company doorstep.

Engaged employees are fully committed to organizational success, passionate about what they’re doing, and fully aligned with and supportive of mission and values.

The best leaders assume responsibility for worker engagement: they create a culture in which workers choose to give their whole selves. Leaders don’t engage workers! People engage themselves when they discern and discover that the place they work and the leader they serve is trustworthy.

Creating and maintaining an engaging culture is a challenge of trust between individuals, groups, and organizations. Warren Bennis says, “Trust is the emotional glue that binds leaders and followers together.” Trust creates engaged employees.

Trust is a function of a leader’s capacity to close the credibility, or “say-do,” gap between leaders and colleagues. Employees develop trust when they believe that they can depend on their leaders to do what they say (“aligned character”), and when their organizations show the discipline and management capacity to follow through with the plans and commitments (“aligned execution”). Employees who trust their leaders and their organizations are creative, willingly take risks, and collaborate.

Beyond the “communication gap” lies the real tap-root of the problem—a “say-do gap.” Communication alone can’t close this gap: it exists because the things the leader communicates are not true! Closing this gap requires character and discipline.

Trust is a real and concrete resource, as real as liquid assets, as concrete as infrastructure, as verifiable as product inventory. Trust can be gained and earned. It can grow, compound and appreciate, and being trustworthy can be learned and mastered.

Credibility is also an operational challenge. Can the enterprise be trusted to hold fast to its purposes, plans, strategies, priorities, and timelines? If people decide to believe the strategic plan and serve it, will this lead to reward down the line?

For example, if the value statement says, “Our customers come first,” do those who put customers first get recognized and rewarded? Or, if management places priority on redesigning an inventory system, does staff get the support and release-time they need, or does it get pulled away to “urgent” matters?

Extraordinary breakthroughs are produced by engaged people who wake up thinking: “I’m going to make a difference today!” “My job is my passion!” A company that fosters such thought—and creates a culture where people bring their whole selves to the job—has the clear advantage. LE

Jim Dittmar is chairman of Leadership Studies at Geneva College. John Stahl-Wert and Ken Jennings are the co-authors of *The Serving Leader and Ten Thousand Horses*. Email Dittmar (jkd@geneva.edu), Stahl-Wert (john@johnstahlwert.com) and Jennings (ken@3rd-river.com) or visit www.tenthousandhorses.com.

ACTION: Create a culture of engagement.

Six Disciplines

Leaders seek excellence.



by Gary Harpst

IS EXCELLENCE IMPORTANT to you? Do you want it to be? Although leaders vary in their definitions of excellence, and how best to achieve it, most agree that excellence is a never-ending pursuit and that whatever their challenges and opportunities are today, they will be different tomorrow.

Leaders often face nine challenges:

- **Communication**—people lack clarity and direction, limiting innovation
- **Accountability**—measurements of and responsibility for results are insufficient
- **Engagement**—people don’t seem to care as much or aren’t sure of their role
- **Alignment**—activities aren’t connected with mission and strategy
- **Direction**—disconnect between planning, strategy and execution
- **Transition**—a desire to “pass the torch” successfully
- **Control**—things “feel” out of synch
- **Frustration**—excess friction at work
- **Risk Management**—profit variability versus growth rate.

Your challenge at the moment is a symptom of a deeper need to systematically increase your capability to address future challenges.

An excellence program is an organized approach to grow leaders’ ability to deal with an ever-changing and challenging environment. The program needs to grow with the business and enable leaders (and employees) to align their plans and activities to support the strategies and achieve goals.

Master Six Disciplines

Learn to master six disciplines:

1. **Strategy**—*Decide what’s important* (and by implication what’s not important) so you can aim the allocation of resources—time, money and creativity—toward this end. In this annual discipline, leaders systematically and regularly review and renew their mission, values, strategic position, vision, their most vital few objectives—and agree what to stop doing.

2. **Planning**—*Set goals that lead*. Well-defined goals are among the most effective tools available to any leader—yet most leaders don’t set goals that lead their people in the right direction. The