



# It's up to leaders to engage employees in their vision

By Susan Brooks

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A new gift shop opened in a huge mall. Eye candy sparkles everywhere I look. Bright lights make each piece of merchandise come alive. Displays are inviting, begging me to step in and take a closer look. And so I do. The store is huge. So much to see, so little time.

But once the glory of colors and splash brought me over their threshold, all went dark in a matter of minutes. The sales counter, which spread half the length of the store, had three very young girls leaning against the wall like mannequins – arms crossed, each sleeping with their eyes still open. Their boredom bored me and took the life out of this potentially exhilarating experience.

Not willing to give up too easily, I forgave the initial nongreeting and strolled on over to the sleeping beauties with a simple question about a gift item. With barely a bat of an eyelash, one girl answered me with a perfunctory, monosyllabic answer. At that point, I carefully returned the item to its display and quickly walked out the door.

Gallup research shows that only 26 percent of employees are fully engaged and 55 percent are not engaged at all. They are at work physically, but not mentally or emotionally. Nineteen percent actually are disengaged unhappy and spreading discontentment and sabotage wherever they go.



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According to Gallup, these workers complain about everything. They don't know what's expected of them, their bosses don't listen to them, and they cost employers \$292 billion in absenteeism, mistakes, and hiring and firing consequences.

You can tell your staff what you expect, but you can't force them to shine. How many times have you walked into companies dazzled by their mission statement hanging on the wall, only to find a lackluster reception? You simply cannot mandate service excellence. Why? Because service is an act of the heart. And unless the heart is actively engaged, the "it's a job" mentality exists and persists.

Every person is motivated somewhere in their lives. The challenge at work is to create an environment where people are motivated about work priorities, right? Right! One of my most pragmatic, no-nonsense clients mentioned (at the risk of being ridiculed by others in the leadership group) that "according to Dr. Phil," our job as leaders is to find the "currency" that engages every individual on the team. OK, so Dr. Phil can hardly match the professional credentials of Gallup, but hey! The message is still valid.

What are we doing that motivates our staff? And, perhaps more important, what are we doing that de-motivates our staff? How motivated could an employee be when a directive informs him that "starting immediately, for an indefinite period, all staff are



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expected to work and get overtime pay for a six-day work week”? This employee already works full time, goes to night school, and has one child with another on the way. Sure, the extra money will help – but the cost to his relationship, family time, study time and self-renewal time will be devastating. Not only is he de-motivated, he’s angry that he had no options, no discussion, no right of refusal.

Tom Rath, a New York Times best-selling author, states in “*Vital Friends*” that people with friends at work are more satisfied and more productive. “Real energy and motivation occurs when people are in connection with each other...they are seven times more engaged in their job, they get more done in less time, have fewer mistakes/accidents, they are more engaged with their customers (yea!) and more likely to be creative thinkers.”

It’s all good if we as leaders use a regular staff-meeting time to put “the talking head” aside. Weave your agenda with inspiration and ice-breaker exercises, and invite guest speakers from other departments or leaders in the community to attend as a resource. When meetings are fun and eventful, motivation and connection are the rewards.

It’s up to us as leaders. We hold the vision. The owner of the aforementioned gift shop must have pictured her merchandise selling itself. I’m sure your vision is just like mine: Our staff can hardly wait to get to work to greet our customers with an over-the-top service experience and top-quality product. Customers are so appreciated, they tell everyone they



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know about our company. And our staff feels ownership in our success, recognized and rewarded for their contribution to growth. It's all about the heart connection, starting with you and me.

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