

The Art of Employee Engagement

How to inspire emotional commitment
to your organization and its goals

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Dedicated to
Henk van Faassen

Colophon

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Introduction:

Ask yourself a bigger question

Do you enjoy the work that you do? Does it get you out of bed in the morning because you *want* to, or because you *have* to? Personally, I enjoy fixing things: I love a good old human-resource (HR) challenge; the more complex, the better. I have got quite good at this over the years as well—if I can say so myself. It usually does not take me very long to figure out where the organizational struggles are and how to organize a team to come up with a plan and solve them together.

For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated with “personal development.” I suppose I was bound to be interested in the subject with a psychologist father and teacher mother. It still remains one of my favorite topics when it comes to reading books and articles, attending seminars, and watching films, and submersing myself into individual coaching. I consider myself blessed for being able to pursue this passion professionally as well by practicing HR management.

My goals had been selfish up until a few years ago, I suppose. I wanted to climb the HR career ladder as fast as possible and to

have an increasingly large positive impact on people and processes. As my career progressed, organizational challenges got more complex, and I enjoyed the puzzle of coming up with solutions for them. However, once I had achieved the corporate role I desired, the jobs with different companies became similar, as did their challenges. I still got the satisfaction of fixing things, but it was almost like a puzzle I had already completed several times over, which didn't make it as exciting as it used to be.

Reaching my original career goals made me look beyond my personal, selfish reasons. It offered me a new perspective that was larger than just myself. This new perspective would later also inspire this book. I started asking myself bigger questions, like "Why does HR matter?" and "What do the companies I work with contribute to the world?" "What do I want to be a part of?" and "Is this it?"

Is This It?

It was the second time in my life that such reflective questions shook up my world. The first time was in my early twenties. My life got turned upside down, and as a result, I discovered that HR is my true passion. I decided to dedicate all of my time and energy to this extraordinary profession. The second time was in my late thirties, almost twenty years later. I had achieved everything I had set out to do. I have an amazing wife and two beautiful girls. A loving family and a handful of awesome close friends. My career goals had been achieved, and I have met some very talented professionals in the process, some of whom I consider friends as well. Perhaps it was an early "midlife crisis" when I found myself thinking, "Is this it?"

This Is It

Coming back to my early midlife crisis, the short and sweet answer to the question, “Is this it?” was “Yes.” I realize that this may sound unsatisfying and oversimplified, but it’s true. Many (self-help) books have been written with suggestions on what to do if you find yourself in a midlife crisis. You will most likely find them in the popular psychology section of any bookstore. However, this book is *not* about solving *your* midlife crisis. If I am completely honest with myself, I guess this book is about solving *mine*, and in the process, I’ll share with you what I have learned so far.

“This is it” can be a hard truth to accept for some people. If it leaves you hungry for something more, as it did with me, my advice is to look for meaning beyond yourself and find ways to give back. What I personally consider profound and meaningful is to improve the quality of people’s lives at work within organizations across the world. With this book, I feel both challenged, and excited at the same time, to share my lifelong passion with you. It’s one thing to acquire a level of expertise, but it’s another to trust my thoughts on paper for readers—like you—to consider.

Your Work

We all spend a significant part of our lives at work. You contribute your time, energy, and creativity to the organizations that you are a part of. While some of us work for companies we love, in jobs that are great, others work jobs they hate for companies they dislike. Now, here is a question for you: Which organizations do you think are more successful? The ones where

employees love what they do or the organizations in which employees dislike their jobs? It is common sense, right? It's obviously the organizations with the committed employees who enjoy what they do that are more successful.

What about your own job? Are you emotionally committed to your organization and its goals? If you are, then you probably get up out of bed in the morning because you *want* to. If you aren't, then you are more likely to hit snooze for as long as you can, until you really *have* to get up. Do successful companies employ more "want-to" employees, or "have-to" employees? You guessed it.

So why is it that some companies can manage to inspire the emotional commitment of their employees, and some cannot?

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Employee Engagement:

How to attract,
retain, and motivate
employees

Employee engagement is the emotional commitment that employees have with your organization and its goals. During the industrial revolution in the late 1700s and early 1800s, companies did not nearly give as much attention to employee engagement as they could have done. Back then, organizations did not need to. People were just glad to be (barely) making a living. Engagement was basically a *transactional contract* and came down to “Work for Pay”; nothing more and nothing less.

Nowadays, with modern civilization at its peak in most economically developed countries, company perks and incentives to motivate employees have just about been exhausted. Many of these benefits have also been widely adopted across different industries in one form or another. Thus, such

Employee engagement is the emotional commitment that employees have with your organization and its goals.

benefits hardly distinguish your company from the competition. The differentiator that remains for organizations to attract, retain, and motivate employees is an *emotional contract*.

Ultimately, any organization (big or small) is merely a group of people using the available technology and know-how to work toward a common goal. When you over-simplify it like this, the question of whether you would want this group of people to feel emotionally committed to your organization and its goals becomes an obvious “yes,” of course. People determine the success of any organization. Engaged employees are a competitive advantage for companies.

According to studies by Gallup, companies with engaged employees, outperform those without by a staggering 202%(!). A significant amount of research has been conducted in this area. Employee engagement leads to lower attrition (25%), higher profitability (22%), and lower absenteeism (37%). The Gallup Employee Engagement Index reported that only 33% of workers are engaged in their jobs. Gallup estimates that disengaged workers cost U.S. businesses as much as \$350 billion a year.

How to Facilitate Engagement

Employee engagement is facilitated by addressing psychological human needs that are as old as time. It is only the context in which companies choose to address these needs that has changed. With all of the technological developments and automation rapidly changing the way we work, organizations continue to rely on people for their creativity, problem-solving abilities, and innovation. Hence employee engagement does not just pass the test of time, but I believe it will only become even more significant as modern society continues to develop and evolve.

There's one challenge, in particular, with engagement: You can't *make* people be engaged with your organization. There is no magic wand that instantly creates engaged employees. Much like a romantic relationship; you can't make somebody love you, even if you really want her or him to. However, what you can do is set the scene. You can organize your company in such a way that it allows for employee engagement to thrive.

Much like a romantic relationship; you can't make somebody love you, even if you really want her or him to.

This book will help you set the scene. On the pages that follow, I will share my recipe for engagement. I call it the Engagement Method, and it is based on five principles. The Engagement Method has worked for people and organizations across different industries all over the world. Through the Engagement Method, your organization will be able to inspire the emotional commitment of its employees. This will improve the quality of people's lives at work and create a more successful organization at the same time.

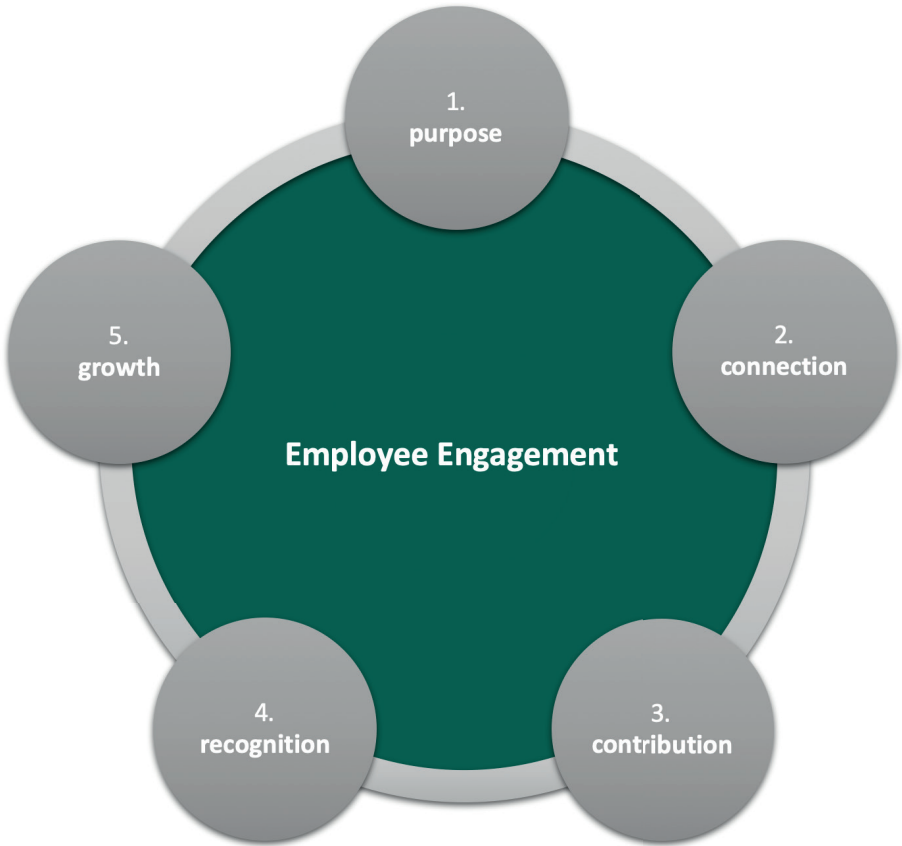
The following are the five principles that comprise the Engagement Method:

1. Engage through **Purpose**. Understand who your organization's customers are and why you serve them. Offer employees certainty and a sense of pride through the clarity of why your company exists, and what it aspires to contribute to the world. Great goals make great people; people can't hit what they do not aim for.
2. Engage through **Connection**. The quality of your life is determined by the quality of your relationships. Companies are like social networks, and individual employee behavior is what shapes company character. "The way we do things around here," will decide where your organization is going. Listen in order to understand and not to respond.
3. Engage through **Contribution**. This is about how your day-to-day responsibilities matter to "the bigger picture." Also, you need to be very clear on roles and responsibilities so as to preempt conflict situations within your organization. Finally, don't mistake activity with achievement and remember that subjectivity measures nothing consistently.

4. Engage through **Recognition**. Salary needs to make sense, just so that it does not disengage employees. Recognizing contribution through praise and respectful feedback for reflection is important. The greatest recognition you can achieve is autonomy: The trust and freedom to act. That which gets rewarded gets done!
5. Engage through **Growth**. Invest in the growth and health of employees. Inspire trust to think and share independently. Company innovation happens through employee growth. Invest in knowledge and skills to develop people, as well as your organization. Nature's binary law states that if we are not growing, we are dying.

We will explore each of these five principles in-depth, with practical, and easy-to-understand examples, as well as suggestions for action. Leadership is also deeply rooted in each of the five principles. Rather than addressing the significance of leadership separately in each of the principles, I am dedicating a specific chapter to it.

I encourage you to read the principles of the Engagement Method chronologically. They are intentionally set in a specific order. The principles are sequential, and each one builds on the next. Similar to building a house; don't bother working on the roof without the walls and a solid foundation in place. Now, without further ado, let's get going! **Purpose** is the first principle, and it is fundamental.



The Engagement Method

Five principles to
inspire emotional
commitment to your
organization and its
goals