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Carrying the Torch



So what is all this hype about employee engagement anyway? We have real work to do, right? We hear so much about what was once called “soft skills”... and is still considered fluff by some. Yet now we have analytics in the workplace

that demonstrate “for real” that the more people are truly engaged in their work, the more it impacts the business bottom-line in a favorable direction.

Think back over your career, your community involvement, your friends, and those groups of people or one-on-one relationships that have been meaningful for you. What was it about the person, the people or the situations that stood out and created a positive memory? As the saying goes, “I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” — Maya Angelou

When we think about public service, many of us are drawn to the field, not only for a paycheck, but to make a difference in quality of life for those we serve. This also includes our co-workers. If we focus on our commitment to service, focusing internally as well as externally, the positive energy will impact the commitment level of employees.

True engagement is not a separate process. It is a part of who we are. Do I take the time to understand what makes my co-workers tick? Do those around me (above me, beside me, reporting to me) feel that I am approachable? Do I value their feedback? Do they welcome my feedback? Do we have the tough, but needed, conversations? Do we have each other's back, in a good way? Are we allowed to have differences of opinion if demonstrated in a productive and healthy manner?

Engagement encourages personal responsibility for creating a healthy work environment. Are we all

doing what we can to influence the work atmosphere in a positive direction? Though we each have different personalities, are we focused on the “we” as well as the “I” at work? When I need to make a decision, am I thinking about the impact short-term, as well as long-term?

To intentionally build engagement on a daily basis, think about the qualities of those who have been influential in your life. Here are some characteristics of leaders who build commitment, resulting in an engaged environment:

- **Values:** “Walking the walk” – I hear what you say and I see what you do, and they match.
- **Vision:** Is this demonstrated with how we prioritize activities each day?
- **Effectiveness:** Are we aligning how we spend our time with what we say is most important?
- **Collaboration:** Are we truly seeking input?
- **Servant Leadership:** Do we see our leadership role as helping those on the front lines clear obstacles to be better able to perform?
- **Continuous Improvement:** Are we still learning and modeling humility no matter the level or position?
- **Emotional Intelligence:** Am I self-aware? Do I understand my impact on others?

Any time I have a concern for things that could improve, do I look at my part and try to adjust to produce a better outcome? This is true responsibility for engagement. There are only two things we can really control — our actions and our reactions. This creates a wave of personal responsibility which ends up impacting productivity, retention, fulfillment and the health of the organization...not the “soft stuff”... this is a courageous calling for leadership.