



WORKPLACE SEPTEMBER 14, 2019

# What Engaged Employees Do Differently

BY KEN ROYAL



## STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Most employees are not engaged
- Managers create the conditions that promote employee engagement
- Asking employees the right questions is key

Most employees are not engaged -- only 15% worldwide and just 34% in the U.S. are

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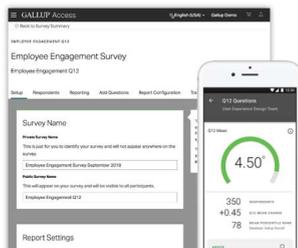
What are they doing that the others are not?

Gallup, no stranger to the topic of engagement, finds there are several patterns of behavior unique to highly engaged employees, including:

- Despite challenges and barriers, the engaged don't often let problems become an excuse for inaction or destroy their ability to perform.
- They seek ways to operate at their best, which means they focus on their strengths and don't spend too much time trying to do what does not come naturally to them.
- They are intentional about their engagement. They have a plan and independently, proactively try to improve their engagement rather than expecting someone else to engage them.
- They take accountability for their performance instead of blaming others when things don't go as they want.

## Are Employees the Only Ones Responsible for Engagement?

The natural question, therefore, is why not just teach workers to overcome barriers, focus on strengths, draft a plan and take accountability? Why make engagement part of a manager's job?



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It's part of a manager's job because Gallup finds that 70% of the variance in a team's engagement is related to their management. Managers create the conditions that promote the behaviors of engaged employees (or just the opposite) with the relationships they establish. The manager is either an engagement-creating coach or an engagement-destroying boss, but both relationships affect employee behavior.

Coaches empower workers to take on challenges and use their strengths, which engages workers. Engaged workers don't need or want a boss, but they will seek out

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... which can create learned helplessness, discouraging the discretionary effort that engaged employees exhibit, and ultimately disengaged employees who don't own their own engagement.

As a result, they actually teach their employees to need constant managerial intervention because they can't overcome obstacles, plan, take accountability or operate with their strengths on their own. They have to be bossed, because that's the environment their managers have established.

Both kinds of relationships require a manager's close involvement, which is why managers have so much influence over engagement. But the kind of involvement is very different. The difference is especially noticeable in a key way: Coaches individualize, and bosses generalize.

## The manager is either an engagement-creating coach or an engagement-destroying boss, but both relationships affect employee behavior.

All people have innate qualities that enable them to excel in particular ways. Matching those strengths to task or role can create extraordinary performance outcomes, and employees who work with their strengths tend to be more engaged than others.

Generalization blurs those differences. Bosses who generalize will have trouble capitalizing on strengths and may be unable to detect engagement problems.

Individualization allows managers to see workers' unique qualities as well as their engagement needs, which are different from worker to worker, day to day. That perspective helps them help workers articulate their own engagement needs. There's an exceptionally effective tactic for that, which managers can adapt for workplace engagement: the Socratic method.

## Managers Must Ask Engagement-Oriented Questions

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... as such -- to help workers think through challenges and solutions, analyze their performance and plan their approach to their work.

These questions are always influenced by the human element of engagement, the foundation of [Gallup's Q<sup>12</sup>](#) engagement assessment. Employees perform at their best when these elements are fulfilled. Coaches incorporate these elements -- sometimes directly, sometimes obliquely, as the individual requires -- to connect workers to their own engagement.

### Gallup's Q12 Items

	Q12 item measuring engagement	Employee need being measured
<b>Basic Needs</b>		
Q01.	I know what is expected of me at work.	Focus me
Q02.	I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.	Free me from unnecessary stress
<b>Individual</b>		
Q03.	At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.	Know me
Q04.	In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.	Help me see my value
Q05.	My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.	Care about me
Q06.	There is someone at work who encourages my development.	Help me grow
<b>Teamwork</b>		
Q07.	At work, my opinions seem to count.	Hear me
Q08.	The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.	Help me see my importance
Q09.	My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.	Help me feel proud
Q10.	I have a best friend at work.	Help me build trust
<b>Growth</b>		
Q11.	In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.	Help me review my contribution
Q12.	This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.	Challenge me

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"This report has been on your desk for a while now. Are you having trouble getting the information you need to complete it? Do you know what's expected of you? Does it seem so low-priority you can afford to put it off? Do you need help?"

Those are process-oriented questions, but they all connect to engagement elements as well: access to necessary materials, having clear expectations, connecting tasks to the organization's mission or purpose, proof that the manager cares.

Questions like those give managers perspective on each worker's employee experience and facilitate individualization and advocacy. Employees' answers direct them to align their day-to-day work with their engagement. Just having the conversation empowers workers to overcome obstacles, focus on their strengths, take accountability and proactively improve their engagement.

Those, of course, are the behaviors associated with highly engaged workers. They don't surface by accident. Those behaviors are a result of environmental conditions constructed and maintained by managers.

That's why those behaviors can't be taught to or demanded from employees. Those behaviors are a spontaneous outcome of relationships that managers must carefully tend.

So, while it's instructive to look at the behaviors of highly engaged workers to understand what they do that others don't, the lesson to learn is not to be found just with the employees. It's also to be found with the manager.

As of now, only 15% of workers worldwide have managers who enable the behaviors of engagement. That doesn't give leaders a very large group to learn from -- but it does show that it's time to start learning.

### **Learn more about what it means to own your own engagement:**

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about what makes certain workplaces exceptionally engaged.

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Gallup <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/266822/engaged-employees-differently.aspx>

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