

An Interview with HRD Press Author – Peter Garber



Peter Garber has authored over 40 products related to soft skills and human capital development, including [50 Activities for Employee Engagement](#) and 25 Legendary Leadership Activities. He has 30 years of human resources experience in one organization, both as a generalist and as a specialist in organizational development. We caught up with Peter to share best practices in employee engagement.

Is employee engagement just another word for employee motivation? Can you tell me how they're different?

Obviously they are related, but the difference is that engagement is more of a management function. That is, the leaders are responsible for creating an environment of engagement. It is not always realistic to expect employees to be self motivated, despite the culture in which they work. Employee engagement is all about creating the environment that gets employees to exert discretionary effort.

How is engagement level reflected in business metrics?

As I've already mentioned, it all ties back to discretionary effort on the part of employees. This could be observed best in a service you receive. You can tell when you are dealing with an engaged worker; we all want to do business with employees who have the earmarks of being engaged: positive about their tasks, achieving and surpassing performance standards, and they convey commitment. You can't even begin to measure what the payback is!

I recently read a comprehensive industry study of global employee engagement levels. This source quoted findings that fewer than 1 in 3 employees are engaged, worldwide. What does this mean about the potential for productivity gains?

Well, I think you are leading to an important conclusion. The reason we care about employee engagement is not just because we want to create a "kinder, gentler" workplace. Ultimately, we want our employees to become more effective and (therefore) impact the bottom line. We want everyone to feel important, relevant and engaged, but at the core, these are business initiatives. Even social service agencies have an objective to serve their client.

Is the trend over the last generation of employees entering the workforce to exhibit "free agent" mentality at odds with high levels of engagement?

Part of the pay back from engagement is retention. The difference in mindset of what retention means is changing. For example, I have worked with the same company for 31 years. I doubt my kids will do the same. That doesn't mean that retention isn't important. Even if you can get 3-5 years of great performance from an employee, that is still much better than many turnover rates for companies with low engagement these days.

Is training the natural solution for an organization to attempt to create a more engaged workforce?

This depends entirely on the conclusions drawn by a gap analysis or organizational assessment. If they indicate that employee training is an issue, then it should be addressed.

What is the best strategy for an organization to use with un-engaged employees?

A gap analysis, assessment or some other way of gathering data is the logical starting point. You can also talk to people, and conduct focus groups. But the bottom line is that you've got to ask and measure, and follow that up with a strategic plan that has resources backing it.

Thanks for your time, Peter. Many of Peter Garber's books can be found on www.hrdpress.com