

Engagement and Culture Redefined

(Or, Why Culture Belongs in the Boardroom)

Culture is the engine behind engagement. It is the power and the driving force, plain and simple. Employee engagement and culture get plenty of lip service in the business world, and plenty of books have been written on the subjects. We are not here to add hot air to the existing conversation. We are here to change the conversation completely.

This book is for those who are already convinced of and believe in the power of workplace culture. This book is for those who want to take action and transform culture and engagement in their organizations. This book is for those who believe culture should not be relegated to a back office, but rather invited with open arms (and a fistful of confetti) into the boardroom.

Supporting evidence abounds. It's widely accepted that positive cultures lead to more engaged employees, and more engaged employees sustain positive cultures. But it has also been proven that positive cultures and high levels of employee engagement drive tangible bottom-line benefits. An engaged workforce helps boost profits, increase employee loyalty and tenure, and heighten customer satisfaction.

Yet despite all the culture talk and widespread alarm around the engagement crisis in business, engagement levels remain stubbornly low. Why? Because most leaders are at an utter loss of how to affect real change in their organizations.

Before we dive too deep in the culture and engagement trenches, however, we should briefly define culture and engagement. Many books, articles, blogs, vlogs, podcasts, and academic pieces have been written about these topics, each with differing definitions. How many smart people does it take to define a pervasively common topic? A dizzying amount, apparently, for there is no public consensus.

For the purposes of this book, we studied hundreds of definitions and arrived at the following.

Defining Employee Engagement

We define employee engagement as an employee's emotional and intellectual connection with an employer, as demonstrated by his or her motivation and commitment to positively impact the company's vision and goals.

Not surprisingly, countless elements can impact positive or negative employee engagement, but we consider the most potent to be the following:

- *Strategic Alignment.* Employees can both verbalize and actualize the core business strategies.
- *Understanding of Success.* Employees understand their organizational, departmental, and personal success metrics and tangibly grasp their contribution to the company's overall success.
- *Clear Communication.* Employees trust the company because of coherent and frequent contact, timely feedback, and clear expectations.
- *Workplace Vibe.* The overall environment fosters effective work in everything from the physical workspace to interactions between employees.
- *Growth Paths.* Employees have the opportunity to grow their skills through new work challenges and positions over time, in both managerial and independent contributor roles.

Employers directly influence employee engagement, but workers remain independent, unique humans. What drives engagement for one person may be different from what engages the person sitting next to him

or her. Furthermore, what drives an employee's engagement today may not be the same thing that drove his or her engagement two years ago (or two months ago). One of the unending challenges as an employee or as a leader is the need to remain agile, constantly reevaluating what engages you, your team members, and your constituents.

Defining Workplace Culture

We define workplace culture as the customs, social expectations, and attitudes formed around work and personal interactions in the work environment.

The nature of our business exposes us to a wide variety of companies with all shapes, sizes, and cultural maturities. One of the first questions we always ask when we sit down with a new company is, "How would you describe your culture?" We quickly follow with a second question: "How would your employees describe your culture?" Child's play, right? Wrong. We are flabbergasted by how frequently and dramatically those two answers differ.

What's going on? Why would leadership ever tolerate such stark contrasts in how employees work alongside each other at the same company, in the same office, toward the same goals? More times than not, it boils down to a classic lack of intentionality. It is the responsibility of leadership to clearly acknowledge the workplace culture, facilitate discussions on its positive and negative aspects, and strategize and improve it over time.

Engagement in Action

Employee engagement looks different to everyone. Here are some examples from business leaders who understand the importance of culture and engagement to business success.

What do engaged employees look like?

Here is what prominent business leaders had to say.

- "Energized, aggressive, and creative. Culture means having a passion for our customers, colleagues, and company (3 Cs)." —Brad Morehead, CEO, LiveWatch Security
- "People who, when they get in the cars in the morning to go to work, look forward to getting there four out of five days. When they leave their jobs, they also feel like they have accomplished

something four out of five days.”—Hank Orme, Former President, Lincoln Industries

- “People who want to come do work they love with people they enjoy. Engaged employees like working with other employees who challenge them to grow, learn, and build excellence as a team.”—Nicole Bickett, Chief Administrative Officer, Mainstreet
- “One who routinely gives discretionary effort.”—Chuck Hyde, Soderquist Leadership
- “An engaged employee participates in and contributes to the culture of the company.”—Rob Edwards, Director of Engineering & Race Operations, Andretti Motorsports
- “An individual who clearly shows through his or her emotions and communications that he or she enjoys coming to work every day and feels empowered to make important decisions that impact the company.”—Wil Boren, Former Vice President and General Manager, Zimmer Biomet
- “An engaged employee is, first and foremost, aligned to the vision and mission of the company and aware of and energized by how his or her role fits into it. These qualities drive employees to achieve outstanding results for the organization, as well as his or her career aspirations.”—Blair West, Director of Corporate Communications at Cummins, Inc.
- “Someone who takes pride in her work, cares about what she’s doing, engages in customer communication, and is present in her conversations and work.”—Laura Angotti, Owner of Rowdy Sprout
- “An engaged employee is intrinsically motivated to go above and beyond on behalf of her employer. She is enthusiastic about the work she does and is an evangelist for her employer. She gets satisfaction from her work and takes pride in her contribution to the greater organization.”—Ellen Humphrey, Senior Vice President, Human Resources, Appirio
- “Someone who shows up with a great attitude ready to do whatever it takes to get the job done.”—Clay Robinson, Co-Founder and Owner, Sun King Brewing
- “An individual who goes beyond his job description to help others, seek out additional opportunities for growth, and contribute

to the culture both through active participation and interest in fellow coworkers.”—Jeff Rohrs, Chief Marketing Officer, Yext

- “Someone who is excited to come to work every day, believes deeply in our vision and mission, acts like a team player, has incredibly high expectations for himself and his colleagues, prioritizes what is best for our collective movement above individual goals or motivations, and operates with integrity at all times.”—Rebecca Thompson Boyle, Former Executive Director, Teach for America
- “Interested and enthusiastic about work, has meaningful relationships with colleagues and participates in the life of the organization, and willing to go above and beyond.”—Tom Froehle, Chair and Managing Partner, Faegre Baker Daniels, LLP
- “Engaged employees accept empowerment and drive innovation independently and as a fluid organization.”—Scott Kraege, Co-Founder and CEO, MOBI
- “Engaged employees are passionate about their work and feel they are making a meaningful impact on the organization. They have a strong sense of personal ownership and responsibility for the success of the organization. They feel connected to the mission and vision, and they go beyond their core commitments to help others and support the broader goals of the company.”—Terri Kelly, President and CEO, W. L. Gore & Associates

