

## The Psychology of Engagement at Work: It's Fundamental

According to researchers at the Gallop Poll, only 30% of people are engaged at work. By engaged, we mean people who are loyal, productive, resilient, and able to deliver their best performance even in times of stress and huge demand. 30% is a truly frightening number. Gallop's exhaustive research goes on to indicate that another 55% of people are not engaged (we call those people ROAD warriors: Retired On Active Duty); and most dangerous of all are the 19% that are *actively* disengaged, spreading their disenchantment amongst the troops. We call that *toxic*.

What can leaders do to engage their teams? Hundreds of books and articles have been written on the subject. Whole industries have been built around answering the question. Assessments have been created (we've authored a few ourselves, including The Full Engagement Inventory. Visit for [www.wenrothgroup.com](http://www.wenrothgroup.com) for more information).

In this article, we present the Gallop research findings that outline twelve questions that best measure the core elements needed to attract, focus, and keep the most talented employees. We have found them to be extremely powerful, and use them actively as part of The Wenroth Group executive coaching process. Here they are:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my manager, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel my job is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?
11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
12. This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

Every one of the 12 questions was linked to at least one of four business outcomes: **productivity, profitability, retention, and customer satisfaction**. Most of the questions revealed links to two or more of these outcomes.

Of the 12, the most powerful questions are those with a combination of the *strongest* links to the *most* business outcomes:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my manager, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?

There is actually an order to the questions, and it relates to the order of moving from job assimilation to job mastery. It is a 4 phased journey and if a manager can help his or her organization move along that road, s/he will build a wildly successful and fully engaged team.

## **Phase 1: What Do I Get?**

When you first start a new role, your needs are pretty basic. You want to know what is going to be expected of you. How much are you going to earn? How long will your commute be? Will you have an office, a desk, even a phone? At this stage you are asking, 'What do I get?' from this role.

Of the twelve, these two fundamental questions are most relevant:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?

## **Phase 2: "What do I give?"**

You're on the job for a while. Your perspective changes. You start asking different questions. You want to know whether you are any good at the job. Are you in a role where you can excel? Do other people think you are excelling? If not, what *do* they think about you? Will they help you? At this phase your questions center on 'What do I give?' You are focused on your *individual* contribution and other people's perceptions of it.

These four questions measure Phase 2:

3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best everyday?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?

Each of these questions helps you know not only if you feel you are doing well in the role (Q3), but also if other people value *your individual performance* (Q4), if they value *you as a person* (Q5), and if they are prepared to *invest in your growth* (Q6.) These questions all address the issue of your *individual* self-esteem and worth. As we will see, if these questions remain unanswered, all of your yearnings to belong, to become part of a team, to learn and to innovate, will be undermined.

## **Phase 3: "Do I belong here?"**

You keep growing in the job, moving further down the road. By now you've asked some difficult questions, of yourself and of others, and the answers have, hopefully, given you strength. Your perspective widens. You look around and ask, "Do I belong here?" You may be extremely customer service oriented – is everyone else as customer driven as you? Or perhaps you define yourself by your creativity – are you surrounded by people who push the envelope, as you do? Whatever your basic value system happens to be, at this stage you really want to know if you fit.

These four questions measure Phase 3:

7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel my job is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?

## **Phase 4: “How can we all grow?”**

This is the most advanced part of the journey. At this phase you are impatient for everyone to improve, asking, “How can we all grow?” You want to make things better, to learn, to grow, to innovate.

This phase tells us that only after you have passed through the earlier three phases can you innovate effectively. Why? Because there is a difference between “invention” and “innovation.” Invention is mere novelty – like most of us, you might have devised seventeen new ways of doing things a few weeks after starting in your new role. But these ideas didn’t carry any weight. By contrast, innovation is novelty *that can be applied*. And you can innovate, you can apply your new ideas, only if you are focused on the right expectations (Phase 1), if you have confidence in your own expertise (Phase 2), and if you are aware of how your new ideas will be accepted or rejected by the people around you (Phase 3). If you can not answer positively to all these earlier questions, then you will find it almost impossible to apply all your new ideas.

These two questions measure Phase 4:

11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
12. This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

### **Where are You?**

Ask *yourself* those twelve questions. Your answers can give you a read on where you are on your own career journey. Perhaps your company is going through times of change and you find yourself languishing down in Phase 1, asking “**What Do I Get?**”. Change can do that to a person – you genuinely want to commit, but the uncertainty keeps pushing you down and down. (Quit telling me how great the future is going to be. Just tell me what is expected of me today.)

Perhaps you have just been promoted – you felt as though you were at mastery in your previous role, but now find yourself right back down at Phase 2 (“**What do I give?**”), with new expectations and a new manager. (“I wonder what he thinks of me. I wonder how he will define success.”) Yes, even when good things happen you can quickly find yourself at the beginning of a new road, with a long journey ahead.

### **The Focus of Great Managers is Fundamental**

Great managers take aim at Phase 1 and 2. They know that the core of a strong and vibrant workplace can be found in the first six questions:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?

Spend time focusing on these needs, find a manager who can meet these needs, and you will have the strength necessary for the long road ahead. Be a manager who meets these needs, and you will build a wildly successful and fully engaged organization.

\*Information in this article is adapted from the Q12 and First Break All the Rules by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman

For more information about Wenroth Group Executive Coaching, visit us at [www.wenrothgroup.com](http://www.wenrothgroup.com) and contact us at [info@wenrothgroup.com](mailto:info@wenrothgroup.com)