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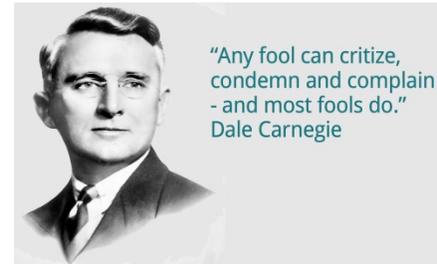
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Troubleshooting Employee (and employer) Disengagement

An update on a classic management primer

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The extent of employee disengagement is a hot topic right now in business and HR circles. An Internet search will produce hundreds of articles highlighting the problem and proposing solutions. According to Gallup's 2013 *State of the American Workplace* report, there is one engaged worker left in the country: a self-employed mindfulness instructor in Key West, Florida.

Seriously, that highly referenced Gallup report finds that only 30 percent of U.S. workers are "engaged," and fully 70 percent are either "not engaged" or actively "roaming the halls spreading discontent." Besides teaching us how to win friends and influence people, Dale Carnegie & Associates has also conducted its own major study telling us essentially the same thing. Oh, and did I mention the \$550 billion lost annually in productivity?

So why all the disengagement? That same Internet search will turn up myriad explanations: lack of autonomy, too much autonomy, no break room ping pong table, etc. But experienced troubleshooters focus first on the simplest and most likely area of a problem. In a typical worker's universe, the component most likely to make or break job satisfaction is her (or his) manager, from whom she derives direction, re-direction, and approval. This is backed up in the 2012 Dale Carnegie Training study *Engaging Employees: What Drives Employee Engagement and Why It Matters*. The number one finding is "relationship with immediate supervisor."

What are the requirements for providing direction, re-direction, and approval? Humanity. Of course a manager needs standard management skills and the technical knowledge related to the business at hand. But what many lack are the social skills required for any other successful human interaction, which collectively can be referred to as humanity.

Jim Harder has been administering the Gallup survey since 1997. He says that improving employee engagement depends upon having managers who can connect with and care about their subordinates. We might call this *employer* engagement. Victor Lipman is the author of *The Type B Manager*, a contributor to *Forbes* and *Psychology Today*, and the founder of Howling Wolf Management Training. In his experience, "almost without exception," successful managers possess these five personal attributes:

- They are good listeners and hear what others have to say.
- They are perceptive and able to understand the sometimes subtle issues.
- They are open communicators: approachable, candid, and easy to talk to.
- They are of calm demeanor, not prone to excitability.
- They are genuinely concerned about their direct reports' wellbeing, and they keep their word.

Compare these to a sampling of Dale Carnegie's famous 30 rules for, among other things, becoming "a better executive" (read *manager*), published in 1936:

- Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.
- Become genuinely interested in other people.
- Make the other person feel important — and do it sincerely.
- Begin in a friendly way.
- Show respect for the other person's opinions. Never say "You're wrong."

Dale Carnegie has been troubleshooting employee disengagement since before the publication of his signature book, long before the term was a corporate buzz phrase. And isn't it interesting that eight decades later the respected business training organization he founded has determined that the top factor in 21st century job satisfaction, i.e., *employee engagement*, is "relationship with immediate supervisor."

Sometimes the answer *is* found in the obvious places.

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