



THE BIG E

What engagement at work
really looks like

by Laura Hamill, Ph.D.

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About the author

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Laura is the Chief People Officer at Limeade, an employee engagement platform that inspires people and companies to improve their health, well-being, performance and culture. She leads the People Team (Human Resources) while nurturing the Limeade culture of innovation, developing groundbreaking people practices and architecting employee engagement strategies for Limeade and its 150 enterprise customers.

She earned her Ph.D. in industrial/organizational psychology from Old Dominion University and a B.S. in psychology from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Laura lives in Woodinville, Washington, with her husband, two children and a very large dog.

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WHAT IS EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT?

Engaged employees have a deep, emotional connection to their work. They feel a sense of purpose and energy.

They never say, “That’s not in my job description. I’m not paid enough to do that.”

IT’S ALL ABOUT ENERGY...

People often confuse job satisfaction with employee engagement. But that burst of energy you feel actually comes from being engaged in your work — not just with how satisfied you are while you’re there.

It’s like being “in the flow” —when you get so caught up in what you’re doing that you lose track of time. You’re challenged, but not overwhelmed.

“ENGAGEMENT IS AN INDIVIDUAL’S SENSE OF PURPOSE AND FOCUSED ENERGY, EVIDENT TO OTHERS IN THE DISPLAY OF PERSONAL INITIATIVE, ADAPTABILITY, EFFORT AND PERSISTENCE TOWARD ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS.”*



WHAT DOES ENGAGEMENT LOOK LIKE?

Engaged employees are focused, energized and enthusiastic. And this leads to:

PERSISTENCE

- They work harder over longer periods of time, and won't give up when something tough comes along

INITIATIVE

- They take action early, without waiting for a manager to tell them what to do

ADAPTABILITY

- They can change with the environment – including interpersonal adaptability, learning, dealing effectively with unpredictable situations and solving problems creatively

UNDERSTANDING THEIR ROLE IN THE BIGGER PICTURE

- They go above and beyond, and see how their responsibilities impact the business

ROLE EXPANSION

- They think of the role broadly. They help others, fix mistakes someone else made and step out of the box of their role to solve a problem for the business

ENGAGEMENT EXAMPLES

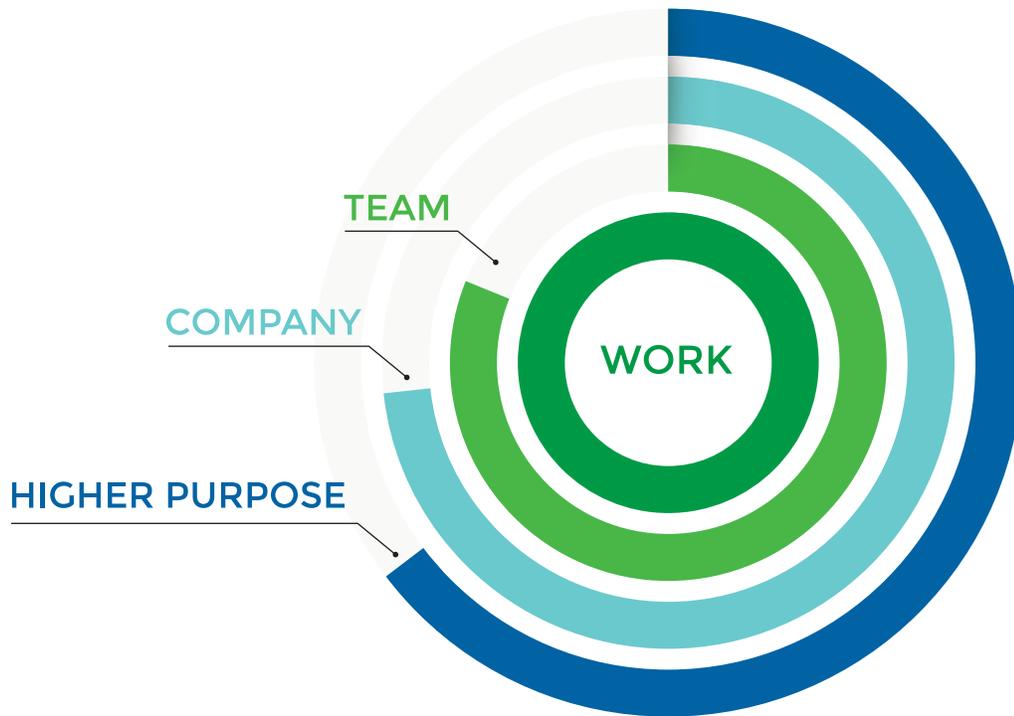


NANCY...WHO IS ENGAGED

- **KEEPS PLUGGING AWAY**, even when she faces obstacles
- **TAKES ACTION ON HER OWN** to solve a problem
- **IS FLEXIBLE** and can adapt to changes
- **GOES ABOVE & BEYOND**
- **DOESN'T THINK TWICE** about taking on a task outside the formal scope of her role

NED...WHO ISN'T

- **FREEZES UP**, and can't move the work forward when he hits roadblocks
- **WAITS FOR MANAGERS** to tell him what to do
- **IS EASILY DISTRACTED** and paralyzed by change
- **DOESN'T GO BEYOND HIS ASSIGNED TASKS**
- **REGULARLY** says things like "that's above my pay grade"



LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Engagement isn't an all-or-nothing game. Different levels of engagement (or disengagement) are always at play.

So, an employee can be invested in her work but not in the company she works for. Or she might feel connected to her team but not feel aligned with her higher purpose.

WORK ENGAGEMENT:

How an employee is connected with the actual work she does. If she doesn't feel a strong connection to her work, then consider re-designing work to better reflect her talents and interests.

TEAM ENGAGEMENT:

How an employee is connected with her immediate work group. To create a stronger connection, the team must be aligned to a common goal, have a supportive manager and feel they're all contributing and working well together.

COMPANY ENGAGEMENT:

How an employee is connected with the company. If she doesn't feel a strong connection to the company, consider focusing on leadership's ability to create a shared vision and bringing employees along to achieve it.

HIGHER PURPOSE ENGAGEMENT:

How an employee is connected with her higher purpose for work. To strengthen a weak connection, employees need to feel that their work is contributing to something bigger than themselves, even bigger than the company strategy. This can be a higher purpose that the company is trying to achieve – the company's mission or reason for existence.

WHY ENGAGEMENT MATTERS

COMPANIES WITH HIGH ENGAGEMENT:

OUTPERFORM THE STOCK MARKET ¹

More than

65%

have **higher shareholder**
returns than average

ARE MORE LUCRATIVE ²

78%

more profitable and
40% more productive

HAVE STRONGER INTERNAL METRICS ³

5x

more likely to achieve **high**
performance with high
engagement

BENEFITS OF AN ENGAGED WORKFORCE:

PERFORMANCE ⁴

Employees with the highest level of
commitment perform **20% better** and are

87%

less likely to **leave**
the organization

SAFETY ⁵

5x

less likely to have
a safety incident

GROWTH ⁶

Firms with engaged employees
have stock price growth nearly

2.5x

that of peers

¹ Macey, Schneider, Barbera and Young, 2009

² Aon Hewitt (2009). What Makes a Company a Best Employer?

³ Gallup, Inc (2011). Employee Engagement.

⁴ 2007 SHRM Research Quarterly, Leveraging Employee Engagement for Competitive Advantage: HR's Strategic Role.

⁵ SHRM "Employee Engagement and Commitment," Robert J. Vance Ph.D.

⁶ Giving Everyone the Chance to Shine, Hay Group, 2010.

ALIGNING ENGAGEMENT WITH ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

Many leaders assume employees are responsible for bringing engagement to the table — so they hire for passion or energy. But once these enthusiastic employees start working, your organization needs to support them in ways that keep them engaged.

HOW MUCH SUPPORT DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION PROVIDE? The resources, communication, reinforcement and encouragement you give your employees ultimately helps them become engaged.





ELEMENTS OF SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT

AUTONOMY

Employees need to have autonomy to make decisions and “own” aspects of their work

CHALLENGE

Employees need to feel challenged with meaningful work

FEEDBACK

Employees need to receive feedback

MANAGER SUPPORT

Employees need to have a manager that supports them

- Employees are **more productive, efficient and loyal** when they have a strong relationship with their manager
- Employees who rate their manager as excellent are **5x more engaged** than those who rate their manager as poor¹
- Managers account for up to **70%** of variance in employee engagement²

You can think of these variables as the “engagement climate”— does it feel like a place where I can be engaged?

LET’S TALK ABOUT HOW THIS SHOULD ALIGN WITH YOUR CULTURE...

ALIGNING ENGAGEMENT WITH CULTURE

YOUR CULTURE NEEDS TO ALIGN WITH THE ENGAGEMENT CLIMATE YOU'RE CREATING.

For example, we know feedback is an organizational requirement for engagement. Well, your company's culture dictates whether employees give meaningful feedback or not. Do they feel comfortable telling the truth? Or would they rather sugarcoat their opinions so they don't rock the boat? This is especially important if your business strategy requires employees to learn and innovate.

ENGAGED EMPLOYEES SHOW PASSION, DRIVE, OPTIMISM AND RESILIENCE – BUT THEIR SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT RELIES ON ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND CULTURE.

ALIGNING ENGAGEMENT WITH WELL-BEING

Well-being is an employee's quality of life – how “healthy” she is physically and emotionally and whether she's improving and living the best life she can.

WHEN PEOPLE FEEL THEIR EMPLOYER SUPPORTS WELL-BEING, THEY ARE:*

38%

more engaged

18%

more likely to go
the extra mile

28%

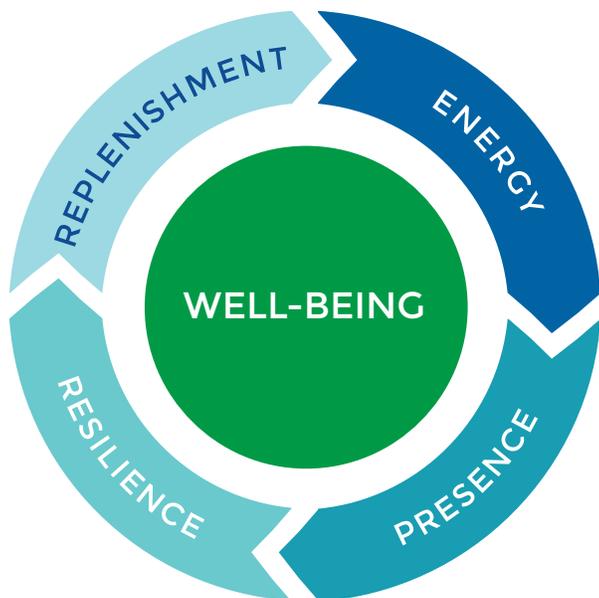
more likely to
recommend their
workplace

17%

more likely to still
work there after
one year



IMPORTANCE OF WELL-BEING AT WORK



ENERGY

- If an employee has a high degree of well-being, it's easier to sustain physical and emotional energy at work.

PRESENCE

- Employees also have to be physically healthy to be engaged and productive at work.

RESILIENCE

- Resilience is about being able to recover quickly from difficulty and to persist despite obstacles. Employees who have high well-being are more likely to be resilient.

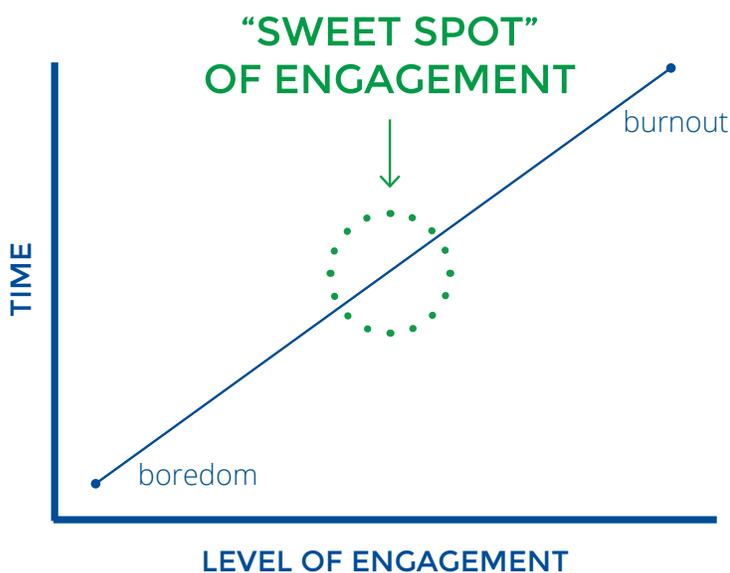
REPLENISHMENT

- Lastly, well-being has to be replenished.

THE SWEET SPOT OF ENGAGEMENT

Employees might quit for two reasons – they’re either disengaged or working so hard that they burnout. So how do you find that sweet spot?

Employees who are deeply invested in their work have a higher risk of burnout and exhaustion. That means your most engaged employees have the potential to become too engaged. It’s up to you to make sure they have the time to recharge — and that they take it.



YOUR ORGANIZATION IS THE MOST VULNERABLE FOR LOSING EMPLOYEES WHEN:

- They don’t feel trust in the workplace
- The basis for trust is compromised
- They don’t feel supported by their organization (especially their manager)
- They discover an alternative company where they’ll feel the positive effects of engagement

10 TIPS FOR IMPROVING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Now that we know what employee engagement looks like, it's time to improve it. Not only will your employees thank you, but your executive team will, too.

HERE'S HOW ...

67%

of your workplace
isn't engaged...

Let's change that.

1

CARE FOR PEOPLE AS INDIVIDUALS, NOT JUST EMPLOYEES

Individuals feel more valued when their organization considers the whole employee – their health, well-being and performance. And feeling valued is an important precursor to employee engagement. Some things to acknowledge include an employee's:

- Life outside of work
- Aspirations
- Strengths and weaknesses
- Development and personal goals

At Limeade, some of our favorite ways to show we care about the whole employee include:

- Time off to recharge
- Stress relief breaks
- Healthy activities at work
- Flexibility

2

BE THOUGHTFUL ABOUT JOB DESIGN (AND REDESIGN)

It's easy to spend a lot of effort trying to measure and improve engagement, without even considering the actual work employees do. Often, little thought has been given to the actual design of the job – *what are the business problems being solved with this job? Is there the "right" amount of ownership? Is there a balance of challenge and accomplishment?* If employees indicate they're bored or not challenged, re-engage them by redesigning their roles.

3

VALUE THE MANAGEMENT FUNCTION

Managers play a huge role in employee engagement (remember those stats on page 7?). And just as employees need to feel valued, so do managers. Uphold high standards for your managers and don't force people to manage if they don't have the ability or desire. But for those who do, here are some ways to support their growth as a manager:

- Provide training and support
- Articulate expectations of their role
- Arrange new manager meetups
- View them as employee advocates
- Ensure they're working to create trust

4

ACTIVELY SUPPORT GROWTH & LEARNING

To feel engaged, employees need to feel like they're developing and growing. This means creating opportunities for movement (not just up), learning new skills, understanding career aspirations and providing feedback. Which brings us to...



5

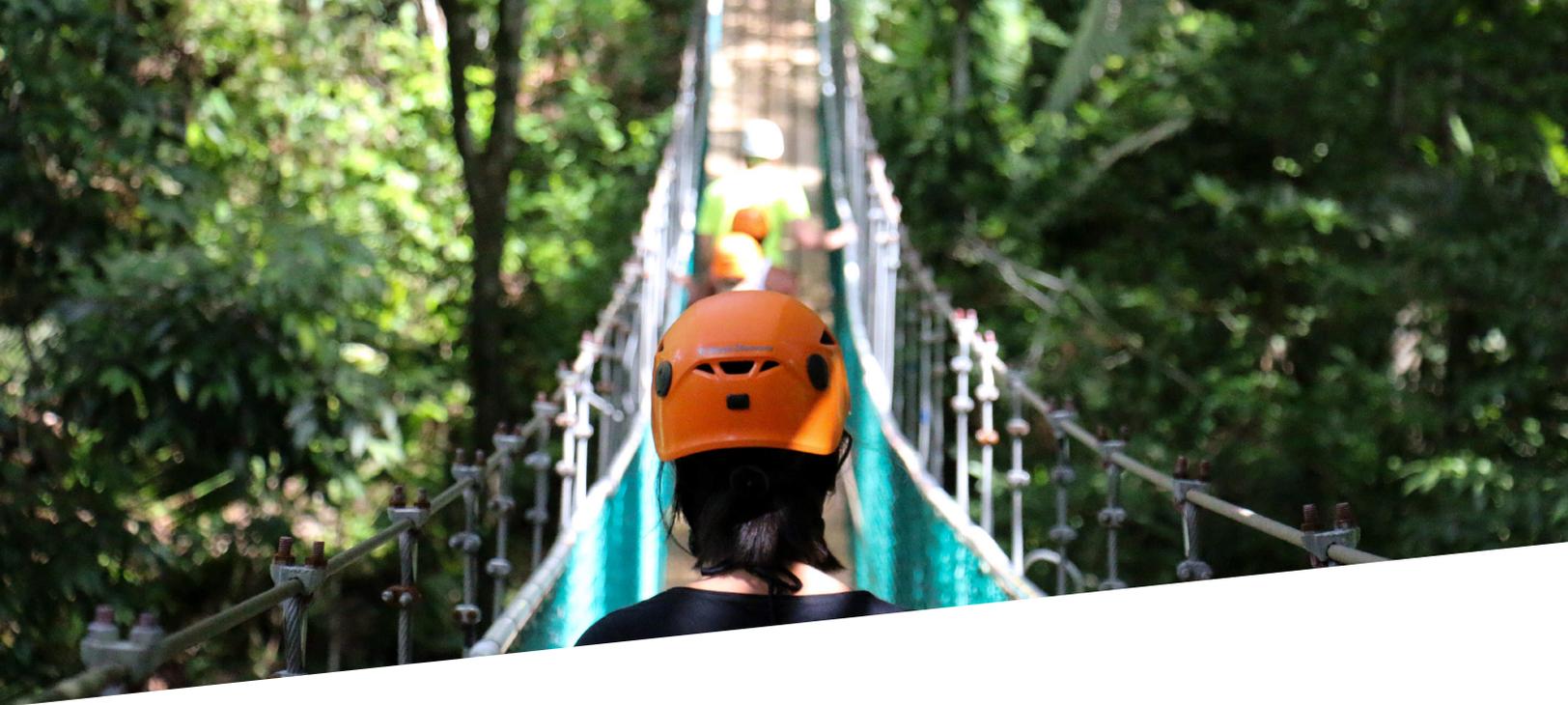
PROVIDE REGULAR FEEDBACK

Employees need feedback about areas for improvement. Having a meaningful “norm” about giving feedback (timely, specific and actionable) helps employees see a clear path toward their own professional development. Think beyond positive feedback – employees crave clear, constructive suggestions.

6

GIVE EMPLOYEES A VOICE

This means creating mechanisms for employees to have a say – informal or formal, qualitative or quantitative (optimally it's a combo of all four). Do you have an employee survey? Can employees talk to your CEO? Is it OK to speak up about a difficult topic at your all-staff meetings? Do you ask for employee suggestions before rolling out a new program? You need to create these mechanisms and forums for employees to have a voice — but most important, you need to listen to what they say and take action.



7

CREATE CLARITY AND CONNECTION WITH THE MISSION

Employees need to feel a connection to your organization's reason for being. And it's especially important they see how they contribute to it. Some employees may feel far removed from the mission of the company. For example, how does an accountant understand how her work contributes to a non-profit's mission of ensuring all people are able to live their fullest lives? The accountant's manager can show her how the work she does ensures the organization's financial stability, which is integral to its ability to serve clients.

8

GO DEEPER WITH EMPOWERMENT

Ideally, employees should feel they have the authority to make decisions that impact their job. And when they do, they feel a greater sense of ownership and commitment to their work and organization. How do you create this? By empowering employees. Push decision-making and autonomy to the front lines (your greatest assets). Consider creating processes where managers can sign off on top level strategies so employees can run with their work without feeling micromanaged.

9

FOCUS ON LEADERSHIP

The quality of your organization's leadership can either support engagement or be an engagement inhibitor. Organizations have to ensure that employees believe in leaders and the direction of the company. Leaders also must be honest communicators and create trust throughout the organization. Make sure they walk the talk and understand what's expected of them.

Remember: leaders themselves need to be engaged. Disengaged leaders become obvious to the organization and have a negative impact on others – and can even constrain the rest of the team's engagement.

10

IDENTIFY CULTURAL BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

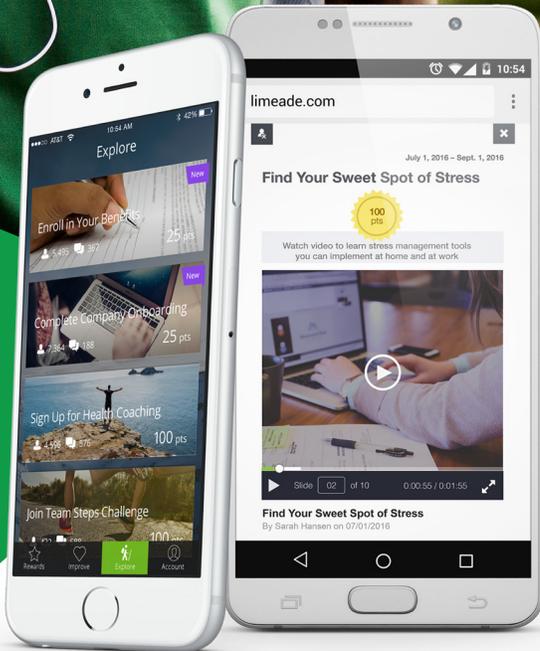
Become more intentional about building a culture that aligns to your business strategy and supports engagement. Start by conducting a culture audit to see which aspects of your culture are supporting engagement and which might be getting in the way.





LET'S TALK

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