

TALK FOR ENGINEERING CONFERENCE – ENGNET - 11 OCTOBER 2011

What is the source of greatest frustration in business in South Africa.

There are many. However, the number one reason why people leave their jobs in South Africa, is not because they are underpaid, nor because they are unhappy with work conditions or complaining about the canteen

it is because they hate their managers. they do not leave that companies they do not leave their brands, they leave relationships

That is the sad reality of business and management today

A man in a hot air balloon realized he was lost. He reduced altitude and spotted a woman below. He descended a bit more and shouted, "Excuse me, can you help? I promised a friend I would meet him an hour ago, but I don't know where I am."

The woman below replied, "You are in a hot air balloon hovering approximately 30 feet above the ground. You are between 40 and 41 degrees north latitude and between 59 and 60 degrees west longitude."

"You must be an engineer," said the balloonist.

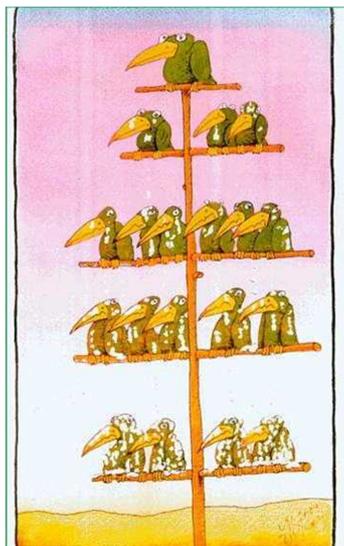
"I am," replied the woman, "How did you know?"

"Well," answered the balloonist, "everything you told me is, technically correct, but I have no idea what to make of your information, and the fact is I am still lost. Frankly, you've not been much help so far."

The woman below responded, "You must be in Management."

"I am," replied the balloonist. "But how did you know?"

"Well," said the woman, "you don't know where you are or where you are going. You have risen to where you are due to a large quantity of hot air. You made a promise which you have no idea how to keep, and you expect people beneath you to solve your problems. The fact is you are in exactly the same position you were in before we met, but now, somehow it's my fault!"



WHAT MAKES A PERSON PERFORM SUPERBLY IN THEIR JOBS?

Here is a hint: it is not money in the bank, fame, trophies, or rank, as much as those may matter.

Many people do not finish first but nonetheless achieve greatness and long will be remembered, while many who do finish first will never be called great and will soon tumble into oblivion.

Intelligence is overrated, Talent is overrated. What really matters is what you do with what you've got.

If you hold nothing back, if you take chances and give your all, you will glow in the eyes of the world, in the eyes of those who matter to you, and in your own eyes as well.

The more a manager can help the people who work for him or her to *glow*, the greater that manager will be, and the greater the organization as a whole. Put simply, the best managers bring out the best from their people. This is true of rugby coaches, big-company executives, and small-business owners. They find and mine the gold that resides within everyone.

Managing in a way that brings out people's best is a critical task. More than any other quality, it takes heart to be such a manager.

The five steps in the Cycle of Performance, and what they will teach you, are as follows:

1. **Select:** How to put people into the right jobs so that their brains light up
2. **Engage and Connect:** How to overcome the powerful forces that disengage people in the workplace both from each other and from the mission of the organization, and how to restore the force of positive connection which is the most powerful fuel for peak performance
3. **Play:** Why play, or work that engages the imagination, produces advanced productivity, and how managers can help people tap into this very productive yet undervalued activity of the mind
4. **Strive and grow:** How managers can create conditions where people *want* to work hard.
5. **Glow:** Why doing well - shining - feels so good. why giving recognition and noticing when a person's beams is so critical, and why a culture that helps people being inevitably produces a culture of ongoing excellence.

Each step is critical in its own right and translates into actions a manager or worker can *do now*. Each step builds upon the other. *The most common mistakes managers make is to jump in at step four and to ask people to work harder, without first having created the conditions that will lead workers to want to work harder.*

There is no point in challenging employees to exceed their personal best if they haven't first been placed in the right job, found a safe and connected atmosphere within which to work, and being given a chance to imaginatively engage and contribute to the design of the task.

The goal for every manager is the peak performance of his staff.

What is meant by peak performance - is *consistent excellence with improvement over time at a specific task or sets of tasks. Those three factors - excellence, consistency, and on-going improvement.*

The Gallup organization definition of a strength is a consistent, near-perfect performance in an activity.

Everyone has it in them to deliver peak performance defined in that way. To achieve peak performance in this way each person just has to find the right place, the right job, the right conditions, the right fit. Here's where the role of manager becomes so critical.

Top managers follow a cycle of five specific steps which may be summed up as follows:

1. SELECT

Jack Welch "Getting the right people in the right jobs is a lot more important than developing a strategy."

Before a person does anything, he should figure out what he *should* do.

managers can help employees achieve peak performance by making sure they select a job or task that meets the following three criteria:

- (1) it is something he is good at;
- (2) it is something he likes to do;
- (3) it is something that adds value to the project or organisation

Where these three elements intersect, it creates a magical field, or sweet spot, In which consistent excellence can happen.

This step is pivotal since it influences everything that follows. Yet it is often overlooked. Millions of employees underachieve simply because they stumbled into the wrong job and never got out of it. It is critical that a manager know her people well enough to help them get into the right slots in the organization.

It is a sad fact that the average South African male will change his career seven times during his lifetime. Obviously, these statistics offset by the fact that many of our labour force are unskilled and they change jobs repeatedly. From Gardner, to taxi driver, to shebeen owner; however, there are many professionals who have left their chosen careers as doctors, lawyers and engineers to try something which is more fulfilling or satisfy.

While selecting well is crucial, many people get it wrong.

According to a 2005 Harris Interactive survey, 33 percent of the 7, 718 employees surveyed believed they had reached a dead end in their jobs and 21 percent were eager to change careers, while only 20 percent felt passionate about their work. ⁱ

If you are in the wrong job, you will find it very difficult to want to work hard, and a manager will battle to cheerlead employees who are in the wrong spot in the organization.

How to Recognize the Wrong Match

As a manager, be on the lookout for tell-tale signs of a wrong fit.

The simplest way to know if somebody is in the wrong job, or is not in a sweet spot:

- he is bored
- he is frustrated
- she is trained
- he is unfulfilled

For example, you can tell if a person is not in the right role if he feels no enthusiasm for what he's doing, if his mind never lights up, if he never gets excited about his job, if he chronically complains.

This doesn't mean he's a dull person or that the line of work he has chosen is intrinsically dull, just that he's not assigned to the right task.

One way you can tell if your employees are in alignment with the steps to high-performance is to see if they are having fun.

The wrong fit makes the person feel dead in her work, unable to sink the teeth of her imagination into a task. Everybody does better work when they are able to use their brains fully and activate their creative side.

How to Make the Right Match:

1. The structured interview

The goal is for employees to spend as much time as possible at the intersection of three spheres:

- what they like to do,
- what they are most skilled at doing,
- What adds value to the project or organization?

How do you find that out?

There are many tests and tools. While these can be valuable, they should not be the first step. The first step is much simpler. Learn to ask the right questions of your staff.

A good example of really well thought through interviewing questions has been developed by Dr. Edward Hallowell in the Hallowell self-report job-fit scale [see the attached report for information].

2. Find the Flow

Dr Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has studied the concept of flow extensively, has shown that a person most often enters flow when he engages in a task that is both challenging and within his skill set.

Identify where your staff find themselves in a constant state of flow

3. Know your employee's strengths

I recommend that you read "now, Discover your strengths" by Marcus Buckingham of the Gallup organization. Your copy of the book will provide a free Clifton strengths finder online test which will be helpful in assisting your employees to discover his innate talent.

2. ENGAGE AND CONNECT

Step 2, engagement is the fuel of the process. If we do on a daily basis what we love - we are emotionally engaged to our jobs, colleagues, managers etc.

If people do what they love, they feel connected to others and to a mission, and they achieve at the highest levels. They are inspired and inspire others.

On the other hand, we all know what it is like to be next to a truly negative person. We call them VDPs -- very draining people

A positive work atmosphere is not a frill. It leads to heart health commitment, which can become contagious. It's a workplace imperative that drives the bottom line.

Unfortunately, business today leads people to disengaged, or disconnected - emotionally alone, isolated, exhausted, anxious, and afraid - with no idea how they got that way or what to do about it.

Employees are too mentally overloaded or too stressed to connect. Restoring their connectedness creates positive emotions that catalyse superior performance.

Positive emotion can be a manager's greatest ally, his very best tool in ensuring continued.

Engagement, or connection, refers to the emotional connection an individual feels with a colleague, his manager, his brand, his customer or his job description. It is without a doubt one of the most powerful predictors of loyalty and commitment. The more intense the connection, the more effective the employee will be. Intense connection generates positive energy, and the more positive energy a person brings to work, the better work he will do.

Or, as I often say, it leads to happiness. And happy employees produce happy work. Happy employees have happy customers.

On the other hand, disengagement refers to the emotional distance between groups of people. Disengagement is one of the chief causes of substandard work in the modern workplace. But it is also one of the most easily corrected.

The Three Types of Employees	
1	ENGAGED employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.
2	NOT-ENGAGED employees are essentially "checked out." They're sleepwalking through their workday, putting time -- but not energy or passion -- into their work.
3	ACTIVELY DISENGAGED employees aren't just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.

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Therefore, promoting positive connections of all kinds within the workplace should be a top priority for managers. Identifying disengagement, and intervening to create connection where disengagement is found, can quickly lead to improved productivity.

What is the biggest mistake that management makes? They treat people like commodities. They treat people like numbers, not like people. It is just that simple.

- CLAY MATHILE, *Former owner; Iams*

Of all the elements in the Cycle of performance, this step, engagement, requires the most skill and patience from managers. It is therefore where the cycle most often goes wrong, but it also packs the greatest power to drive the cycle to excellence.

This principle of engagement, or connection, is very powerful. Research has shown that, "a person is about 15 percent more likely to be happy if a directly connected person ... is happy." But it doesn't stop there. The happiness effect for a friend of a friend is 10 percent. Research also shows that if you are managing others, *they will perform better if you yourself are happy and show your joy. They will also perform better if you help them to connect with others.*ⁱⁱⁱ

Connection, both to a person and to a project, is crucial because when a person connects with another person or a task, his mind changes for the better.

However, where engagement is weak, you will normally find fear within the organization. And fear is the great disconnecter. It is rampant in modern organizations.

We've grown so accustomed to fear that we hardly notice it, be it fear provoked by a

report in the newspaper that another company has closed down, or a rumour that jobs will be lost because Wal-Mart is moving into the country.

Fear is the great disabler, more dangerous today because it is so widespread. Not managed correctly, fear can hold you or your employees back more than any other single force. There is no greater cause of underachievement than fear.

Many employees are afraid to make a mistake. Some of this fear may be due to their genetic makeup. But some of their fear may also be due to their manager's style. Worrying that their job is in jeopardy, these workers play it safe. They play not to lose, rather than to win, which leads them to fall far short of what they could do,

What they fear may vary. It may be disapproval, a poor result, criticism, looking stupid, going beyond their comfort zone, making others look bad

If employees believe everything is riding on the outcome of their performance, fear can freeze them up and lead them to perform poorly.

A word about optimism. It can catapult peak performance. And as a manager, if you model an optimistic attitude, it becomes viral.

Fear is a short-term motivator but a long-term disabler. Here again brain science shows us why. As fear mounts, the brain's deeper centres take over.

High-level thinking (which requires imagination, mental flexibility, focus, memory and anticipation, the ability to listen and to change one's mind, the ability to take in new information quickly and synthesize it into something useful) takes place in the higher parts of the brain, the cerebral cortex.

The deeper centres of the brain regulate our more primitive, survival-related activities, like breathing, body temperature and heartbeat and reflexive behaviours.

When a person feels fear beyond a certain level, the brain shifts to red alert. Deep centres of the brain, like the amygdala, the hypothalamus and the locus coeruleus, light up. Higher cerebral thinking (appreciating irony, laughing at a joke, concocting a new idea) ceases, as the brain must now devote its full attention to the perceived threat.

If there were a leopard about to jump out at you, this would be good. You would not want to be appreciating irony, laughing at a joke, concocting a new idea. You'd want to be either fleeing or killing the leopard. An aggressive manager can elicit the same response. Excessive fear renders peak performance neurologically impossible and even average performance difficult.

Useful fear or worry can be distinguished from harmful fear or toxic worry by what each does. Useful fear and worry lead to problem solving. Toxic fear and worry freeze people up, drive them into isolation, reduce their intelligence, and render them far less effective than they otherwise could be.

Because toxic fear usurps the higher regions of your brain, redirecting their neurons to the perceived danger, you lose your sophisticated brain and enter into a primitive state. You become rude, dictatorial, aggressive, dogmatic, deaf, non-empathic and also stupid. This is because your brain has directed its resources to supporting your panic system.

Survivalist, low-level thinking is the great danger of fear-filled work environments. People lose the very tools that they need the most: their ability to hear and listen to others, their creativity, their flexibility, their empathy-even their memory.

How to Build a Positively Connected Workplace

Make it a priority to connect.

Marcus Buckingham, author of "Now, Discover Your Strengths", and "First Break the Rules" believes that the proportion of praise to criticism should be at a ratio of at least 5/1.

- 1. Notice and acknowledge people.**
- 2. Allow for people's eccentricities and habits.**
- 3. Encourage everyone to have human moments.** People should be having human contact at least once every few hours.
- 4. Encourage people to recognize stress within themselves.** When they start to feel it, urge them to stop what they're doing and take a short break. Many of the most disconnecting episodes - flare-ups, arguments - occur as a direct result of stress.
- 5. Praise others freely and genuinely.** Just about everyone needs and appreciates authentic praise, even over trivial matters such as how they dress or what they said at the last meeting. People who can give praise freely are like cultivators of a great garden.
- 6. Encourage people to reach out.**

3. PLAY

all managers recognize the importance of hard work. But not enough managers recognize the importance of play, or imagination, in ensuring top performance.

How is play defined?

It is a zone in which the imagination and creativity is engaged. It is where imagination becomes involved.

Sadly, we are not a community which truly encourages creativity and imagination. In South Africa our educational system discourages creativity. at the age of five - 95% of children are creative; at the age of 15 - 15% of children are creative. However, only 5% of adults are considered to be creative. In many ways we have trained the creativity right out of our children.

It is interesting to note that 3M Company use children at the age of 15 or 16 to help them with their product development. They truly harness creativity and have become recognized as one of the truly creative companies.

Play is the most advanced, productive activity the human brain can engage in. When workers seem dull or apathetic, it is usually not because they are *innately* dull or apathetic.

It is usually because play is missing from their work and they are not engaged in creative problem solving. Play is sometimes considered trivial in the workplace, but it is not. If you value play and promote it, it can transform your organization.

People at play produce creative results and leap from the routine to the exceptional. Without play, peak performance is impossible. Play is what humans can do and computers can't. Play is the activity of the mind that allows you to dream up novel approaches, fresh plans.

Play leads to all great discoveries.

The opposite of play is doing exactly what one is told to do. It leads to robotic behaviour, unquestioning adherence to the rules and an inability to deviate from standard operating procedure no matter what. Life without play is a oppressive, mechanical existence organized around doing the things necessary for survival.

Play stimulates the secretion of brain-derived neurotrophic factor, or BDNF, a recently discovered molecule that triggers the growth of nerves in the brain. Play also stimulates the amygdala, which is a clump of neurons deep within the brain that helps regulate emotions and exerts a beneficial effect on the prefrontal cortex in the brain. The prefrontal cortex is especially important at work because that's where decision-making functions are regulated.

play drives creativity. Of all animal species, humans are the biggest players of all. When we play, we are engaged in the purest expression of our humanity, the truest expression of our individuality.

How to Encourage Play

As a manager, there are many steps you can take to encourage *play*.

Here are some practical suggestions:

1. Ask open-ended questions, those without a yes/no or other specific answer. Open-ended questions engage the imagination.
2. Consider having a silly day of some sort now and then. It must conform to the basic rules and values of your organization's culture, of course. But make it fun. For example, a company have started a "Bad Dress Day." The idea was to come to work dressed as unattractively as you could (or dared).
3. Read a book on creative- thinking techniques.
4. Give your people some time to go somewhere away from work and think. This will stimulate their thoughts. Send them anywhere but work.

4. GRAPPLE AND GROW

Step 4, grapple and grow, naturally follows from play.

Play leads a person to "get into" a task and, fueled by that feeling, to work harder and harder.

It's important to remember that grind comes with every job: going over spreadsheet numbers if you are an accountant, updating schedules if you are a project manager, correcting legal briefs if you are an attorney or marking exams if you are a teacher.

No job is free of such tasks and no one enjoys them, which is why enthusiasm for one's work can diminish over time. When that happens, managers incorrectly tend to think their employees don't have enough commitment (so they simply drive them to work harder and harder, creating burnout). But the problem is not employee commitment.

Rather, it is being made to work on a task they can't do well, or trying to fix a weakness over which they have little or no control. In fact, most people love to work, given the right conditions. This means that if employees have selected, connected, and played well, grappling and growing in the job will be far easier.

When managers ensure that employees work on tasks that suit their skill levels but still challenge them, that they work in an environment where they feel trusted, and that they feel open to play and think creatively, the slog of any project becomes bearable. Doing so will increase the chances that your employees will want to work hard.

As somebody continues to grapple and work hard, she makes progress and advances. She gains "mastery". *Mastery means making progress at a task that matters to you and is challenging.* It does not necessarily mean that you become the best or an expert. It does mean that you feel a sense of well-being and accomplishment. And it is good for business!

Managers are important because they can help almost any employee to develop and achieve the feeling of mastery. Nothing matches the feeling you get from making progress at a task that is challenging and matters to you in terms of building confidence and motivation.

Therefore, one of the most helpful skills a manager can develop is the ability to challenge the right person at the right time to contribute something that is important to the life of the company.

From a strictly neurological perspective, grappling (or struggling) will lead to growth. Let's say you're trying to memorize a telephone number. At first, you need to write it down. The nerve cells involved in learning that number fire a neurotransmitter, glutamate, to get the process started. If you never dial the number again, nothing changes.

But, if you use the number, if you struggle to memorise it, the synapses enlarge and the connections between the nerve cells involved become more securely established. This is excellent news. Grappling is good. And if they follow the steps in the Cycle of performance, your people will *want* to work hard.

In the brain, this positive process of "good stress" involves long-term growth and development of new neurons. Or, as the neuroscientists say, neurons that fire together wire together. Practice not only makes perfect, it makes new neural connections.

At first the process may hurt, because growth usually does hurt. It may lead employees to complain or even to hate their manager for an afternoon, but it will still can lead to growth. And, after it is over, employees are glad to have undergone it. In other words, good stress is good.

Bad stress causes the opposite response. people may be permanently damaged by it, even traumatized. They may be disabled by it. In any case, they suffer, you suffer, and the bottom line suffers.

The crucial strategic move for managers is to make sure your people are making progress at whatever they're doing. Make sure they are engaged in an activity that matters to them, draws upon their best abilities, and challenges them without being beyond their reach. This opens the door to flow, that wonderful state in which focus becomes total and peak performance ensues.

Edward Halloweel urges managers to help people preserve what he calls "C- state" and to stave off "F-state."

C-state is where we do our best work. It is characterized by adjectives that begin with the letter cool, calm, collected, concentrated, convivial, cooperative, curious, creative and careful.

F-state, on the other hand, is characterized by adjectives that begin with the letter F: fearful, frantic, frenzied, forgetful, feckless, frustrated, and about to utter another F-word (the four lettered one).

How to Help People Grapple and Grow

Following are steps you can take to help your employees grapple with the demands of the job and achieve consistent progress:

1. Before you ask someone to work harder, ask yourself "Is she in the right position?"
2. Always be on the lookout for frustration or lack of progress in a person's work.
3. Encourage grit, and model it.
4. Try not to use fear as a management tool.

5. Cultivate C-state
 - Put photographs in your workplace of people, places and animals you love. When you feel F -state coming on, sit back for a moment and gaze at them.
 - Keep a joke book in your drawer. Humour is a great antidote to F-state.
 - A quick burst of exercise – After three minutes, your brain chemistry will change and you will return to C-state.
 - Have a few minutes of silence. During that time you might meditate, or you might simply sit in silence, but try not to sulk. Rather, try to clear your mind.
 - Speak to a friend. This is best in person, but phone will do. E-mail or texting will not do. Speak about something trivial and insubstantial. This also will refresh your brain.
 - Go outside. You don't have to go for a long walk, but just ten minutes outside will put you in a different frame of mind.
 - Keep a crossword or other puzzle book in your drawer. Five minutes on a puzzle will reset your brain.
 - Ask for help. It is important that managers let people know it is not only OK, but desirable to ask for help when you need it. F-state is a time you need it.
 - Build boundaries according to the needs and flexibility of your job. Encourage people to have set times when they switch off e-mail or close their doors for a half hour of concentrated work or thought.
6. As a manager, have conversations with your people about how they are using their time at work. Be flexible enough to help them create the best conditions under which to work.
7. Try to keep people working at the intersection of three spheres: what they're good at, what they like, and what adds value to the organization. When they get off that spot, brainstorm ways to bring them back.
8. Allow people to be themselves rather than conform to some corporate stereotype.
9. As a manager, it can help to get a second opinion. If someone continues to make no progress despite all the work he is putting in, and if you have exhausted your bag of tricks, then before you move him elsewhere ask for another manager's advice.

5. **GLOW**

Step 5, glow, is what happens as employees work hard and advance,

As they gain recognition, which affirms what they have done is valuable, they experience one of the greatest feelings a person can have.

As a manager, you can help people to shine by providing them with praise, rewards, and awards for a job well executed,

People who glow want to keep on glowing. They are motivated. They feel connected to the team, the group and the organization. They become extremely loyal and want to help others in the organization advance.

Here are some tips for promoting shine in your people.

1. Recognise effort, not just the results. Praise works.
2. Notice details. Specific praise is much better than generic praise.
3. Try to provide the praise in person, rather than through email.
4. Try to make the staff look good, not bad. Scoring points off others always has long-term negative consequences.
5. Recognition is the very best way to get the best out of your staff.
6. Bring in the marginalised staff. In most companies, about 20% of people feel devalued and disengaged. Not only is recognition important for the 20%, it is good for the other 80%, as well, as positive energy will pick up momentum in the company

ⁱ The New Employee/Employer Equation survey conducted by Harris interactive, incorporated, 2005, quoted in the <http://www.management-issues.com/2006/8/24/research/attitude-and-engagement-creates-turbulence-in-corporate-America.asp>

ⁱⁱ Cost of disengagement in the United States was estimated to be US\$ 250-360 Billion (Gallup research USA 2005). Additional costs (work place injury, stress, sick leave, breakages, etc.) could well have totaled US\$1 trillion (10% U.S. GDP). The cost of sick leave in South Africa in 2005 was R12 billion with an average of 5,7 days taken per person. This is a clear sign of disengagement.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler, Connected: the Surprising Power of our social networks and how they shape our lives, p 305

ADDITIONAL READING

Marcus Buckingham, Now, Discover Your Strengths, 2005

Tom Rath, Vital Friends. 2006

David Rock, Your Brain At Work, 2009

John Medina, Brain Rules, 2010