



Make *the* Shift

Going from an **engaged** workforce
to an **entangled** organization

Engaged. That word is thrown around almost unanimously to describe the type of employee most businesses aspire to have: the engaged employee.

—Thomas J. Walter



What's wrong with an engaged employee?

After all, an engaged employee is a productive employee, right? True, but as more and more organizations garner an increasing amount of engaged employees—whether through training, best practices, benefits or rewards—having a workforce full of them may not be a differentiator anymore.

Now that your biggest competitors' workforce engagement is rivaling your own, what do you do? Sure, through the right leadership and the right culture you can still earn successful results. But how do you get to that level of success that makes imitation impossible and competition irrelevant?

You make the shift from engaged to entangled.

Engaged vs. entangled

If the engaged organization is now average, then the entangled organization is the league champion, the number-one seed, the most valuable franchise. Where the engaged workforce competes at game time, the entangled workforce eats, sleeps and breathes organizational success, on and off the court—that is, before, during and after work hours.

Entangled organizations take the notion of employee engagement to the next level. They are invested in the success of the organization, the success of their team and the success of their products or services. They are so intertwined with their organization that their work and their personal life operate simultaneously. There is little to no differentiation between the two.

When considering present circumstances, while employees have taken pay cuts, watched their peers lose their jobs and seen their organizations struggle with the recession, there couldn't be a better time to consider your options. The direct correlation between poor employee morale and loss of productivity has resulted in companies increasing their emphasis on developing strategies and programs to keep their employees productive, happy and

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engaged. Many companies have become more transparent, increased communication and are listening closer to employee ideas, but is that enough to reach entanglement?

So, what does it take to move beyond simply engaging employees and getting their commitment? What does it take to build the kind of commitment and loyalty that propels performance beyond “normal” to “extraordinary” on a daily basis?

Leadership, not management

After 32 businesses and 35 years of “managing” people, I discovered that high-performance companies aren't run by managers. After all, who wants to be managed? To be managed is to be subservient. Instead, high-performance organizations are run by leaders. As such, employee engagement increases at the same rate that managers transition themselves into leaders.

Using Jim Collins' book, *Good to Great*, my corporate catering and events planning company made the shift. With the formation of great teams, our engaged workforce transformed Tasty Catering into

an entangled organization, enabling and encouraging our employees to utilize more discretionary thinking to better the organization and, in turn, better themselves. Here's our story.

The shift

Six years ago, our mid-level leaders came to me and said, “If you don't change the culture, we're leaving.”

This statement was very traumatic and troubling. Our mid-level leaders were in their mid-twenties, had started with us in their teens, stayed with us through college and, in some cases, stayed with us through graduate school. They were by all means engaged employees. In fact, they were a large part of my exit strategy. Yet, something caused them unrest.

The mid-level leaders explained that they no longer wanted to be told what to do. Instead, they wanted to be given clearly defined tasks with identified outcomes and measures and the freedom to pursue those goals however they chose. In short, they wanted to change from “command and control” management to “team leadership.” This was one of the most critical points in my entrepreneurial career. After contemplating our options, my response was, “Ok, let's try it.” It was the best decision we've made over the past six years.

To launch the transformation, our mid-level leaders purchased *Good to Great* in English and Spanish so our entire company could read it. They broke the “departments” into teams and had each team read the book chapter-by-chapter. The teams met weekly to discuss the chapters and how they applied to our company.

Each team provided a representative for the first Good to Great Council (this council continues to meet on a monthly basis). The representatives were chosen based on their personal core values of ethics and morals, not seniority. The attendees began to develop our culture, starting with the core values. The owners were witnesses,

not necessarily participants. The following is what evolved from four meetings over four months in 2006:

Core values:

1. Always moral, ethical and legal
2. Treat all with respect
3. Quality in everything we do
4. High customer service standards
5. Competitiveness: A strong determination to be the best
6. An enduring culture of individual discipline
7. Freedom and responsibility within the culture of discipline

The Hedgehog Concept:

- Best in the world at: Corporate catering
- Deeply passionate about: Growth
- Drives economic engine: Profit

Core purpose

To experience the thrill of success through teamwork, innovation and community involvement.

Big hairy audacious goal

To build a great enduring company with the most recognized and respected brand in our industry.

Vivid escription

We will enrich our employees and create loyal customers through strategic planning and profitable growth.

Getting to this point and building upon what our employees and leaders put together required—and still requires—work. By now, we were well on our way to becoming an entangled organization.

How to keep the culture alive

All companies have a culture. Some are toxic, some are moribund and some are dynamic. A dynamic culture allows employees to reach self-actualization, which, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, is the peak of individual performance.

The culture statement is posted in all common areas so that it becomes a living part of Tasty Catering. The members of any meeting of three people or more repeat the culture statement, each member speaking one line of the statement.

The shift has enhanced problem solving and decision making because employees make corrections throughout the workday by simply stating our core values. For example, if someone were to see another employee abusing a value, they would simply say, "Is that number two?" (meaning, core value number two, or "treat all with respect"). Rather than challenging the person, which can ignite a defensive reaction, it presents a rhetorical question that gives pause to ponder and then adjust.

Externally, Tasty Catering's customers and vendors are reminded of our ethical standards as they see them posted in our facility and on our website. Employees reinforce this through conversation by stating, when appropriate, that "we are always moral, ethical and legal," often citing specific examples.

The culture of discipline allows everyone to know and lead their area of expertise. Employees are free to do what they want in their area, but they are also responsible to their team and organization to ensure it's for the betterment of the organization.

The leader

More often than not, the shift all goes back to the leader(s). Had my partners and I not agreed to try an organizational transformation, we might not have had the kind of success we've experienced today. We probably wouldn't have made the leap from engaged to entangled, and we most certainly would have lost several employees in the meantime.

In the book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins states that Level 5 Leaders (the highest level) look outside to others when praise for the organization is earned and look into the mirror when criticism of the organization

is earned. They respect others for achievements and are, in turn, respected by their employees.

The greatest tool in the leader's toolbox is respect; therefore, the following must be clearly understood in order to gain that level of regard:

- A leader's title demands respect.
- The leader must personally earn respect on a daily basis.
- Respect is earned by strictly adhering to the company's core values and culture statement.
- Respect is maintained by practicing the traditional golden rule: "Do onto others as you would have others do onto you," as opposed to the new golden rule: "He who has gold rules."

Once you understand that respect is earned and not demanded, you can implement the following four steps for effective leadership:

- 1. Anticipate** – Anticipate the needs of your employees and, whenever possible, satisfy them. This will not only increase productivity and focus more of their discretionary thinking on enhancing the organization, they will also focus on anticipating the needs of your clients and the organization. Anticipatory leaders lead their employees; reactionary leaders are led by their employees.
- 2. Communicate** – Listen to your employees. What do their motions say? Allowing them to easily communicate will free their brain of disruptors, such as projection, fear, anxiety and mistrust. After listening, speak honestly and clearly. The leader of the organization may not be able to satisfy everything that is communicated, but clearly worded explanations of their thoughts are what is expected.
- 3. Delegate** – Explain in detail the expectations for each employee member to that employee member. At the same time, explain how their work will benefit the organization and then return to ben-

