

## Are You Engaging the WHOLE Employee?

*Why Your Employee Engagement Efforts Might Not Be Enough...*

Over the past decade, companies who have embraced employee engagement as a means of attracting and retaining the best employees will be in a better position to capture their employees' discretionary effort (and help your bottom line).

However, despite some gains in boosting employee engagement in North America, a recent Gallup 2015 study still places employee disengagement at a whopping 68%. That means only 32% of people are engaged! Even the purported "best places to work" – Google, Intuit, Salesforce, etc. – don't have anything approaching 100% engaged employees. Why, when so much progress has been made, is this the case?

In my work as a writer of four books, and as the founder and CEO of the Employee Engagement Group ([www.EmployeeEngagement.com](http://www.EmployeeEngagement.com)), this question has nagged me. I know that engagement is an intrinsically good and important part of a company's culture and health, and is in fact, also good for the overall economy as it benefits society and the individual. And in thinking about the individual, I came to realize that most companies' engagement efforts have been focused on the workplace, not the whole person. That is a problem, and it's going to take a significant shift on the part of both individuals and companies to solve.

Think about it: at work, your level of engagement is dependent on a variety of factors: your confidence in senior leadership and your supervisor in particular, your connection to the overall company's mission, your salary and benefits, your friends at work and the corporate culture. Although technology makes it increasingly difficult, it *is* possible to leave these things at the office when you sign off for the day. What *isn't* possible is to leave what happens at home at the threshold of the office: your health and wellbeing and that of your children, or partner, or parents; your relationships with these important people and other non-work friends; your personal values and intrinsic motivators; your personal stress over your financial well being. These deeply personal factors, as well as fixed traits about you such as your age, ethnicity, and gender identity, are cornerstones of your life, and they may be affecting your overall engagement at least as much as the work-only factors.

The prevalent misconception is that work/life balance means "work is bad and life is good." But if that's true, what a miserable way to spend your adulthood! I think it's time for individuals to take a holistic look at what they're bringing to their jobs, and for companies to do a better job of considering the whole employee as part of their engagement efforts. There is a diverse group of under-engaged folks out there, whether they're slogging away in jobs they dislike or just entering the marketplace and unsure what compromises are appropriate. Some may be staying in disengaging positions out of fear or pessimism; some may be actively looking for a new job and not finding one because their attitudes don't appeal to hiring managers. Or some might simply lack the skills the marketplace now demands.

How can we empower this diverse group of employees to take control of their own engagement? I think it starts with acknowledging that our engagement at work often begins with the state of our personal lives- raging from joy to stress. If your partner is battling an illness or your child is struggling in school or your elder parent is moving into assisted care, these worries are going to erode your engagement at work. Even if you love your job. This in turn can create worries that you're not performing well, that you won't get that raise or that promotion because you've flat lined at work. A situation like this one requires two-way communication. I believe employees with significant engagement challenges outside of work need to make their managers aware of their circumstances, and work with them to make appropriate adjustments in tasks and/or expectations. Conversely, I believe that managers have a responsibility to create an atmosphere of empathy and trust in order for employees to feel comfortable approaching them.

My thinking on the topic of addressing the whole person is evolving, and is part of the research I'm conducting on my next book project, **i-Engage!**, *Your Personal Engagement Roadmap*. It seems to me that the only way to get that meager 32% engagement rate up is to give people the tools to move away from any apathy or helplessness they may be feeling, while arming managers with more insight into their people. After all, if you've only been managing 50% of the person, there's got to be room for improvement. In my view, it's all about increasing the degree of freedom that individuals have in the totality of their lives, while boosting the importance of leaders to exhibit empathy and trust in their leadership. Disengagement is a constraint; it's time to figure out how to loosen its grip.



**BOB KELLEHER** is an award winning author, thought leader, keynote speaker and consultant, and travels the globe sharing his insights on employee engagement, leadership, and workforce trends. Bob is the author of the nation's top selling employee engagement book, **LOUDER THAN WORDS: 10 Practical Employee Engagement Steps That Drive Results** and the soon to be released **Creativeship, A Novel for Evolving Leaders**.

Bob can be seen or heard on national media (most recently on CNBC, CBS Radio, Business Week, Forbes, Yahoo, and Fortune) and is a frequent guest writer on many national publications. He is also a contributing editor on Boston.com, Monster.com, and Hotel Executive.

Additionally, Bob is the founder of The Employee Engagement Group (<http://www.employeeengagement.com>), a global consulting firm that works with leadership teams to implement best in class leadership and employee engagement programs.