

Passion Trumps Engagement™ ...And Annihilates Satisfaction!

**“Based on *The Passionate Organization*” by James R. Lucas
President & CEO, Luman Consultants International, Inc.**

#1 THE PROBLEM:

The “buzz” in organizations for a long time has been around the concept of “employee satisfaction.” In a way, it makes sense; it became a parallel for “customer satisfaction.” There are companies making a good living off of measuring, assessing, and reporting on this supposed driver, “employee satisfaction.”

But this metric is defective for a number of reasons – two of which I will mention here:

- ⊗ There is no apparent connection between employee satisfaction and organizational performance. In spite of years of use and mounds of data, there is no convincing correlation between this metric and better results.
- ⊗ People can be satisfied because we’re paying them well or they have good benefits or they like someone at work or the logistics are easy – none of which mean anything for their commitment to deliver value. At the low end, they can be satisfied because we’re taking care of them and not expecting much in return.

Employee satisfaction may not be a bad thing, but it could be a huge distraction from giving people what they really need at the core – to make a difference, to do valuable work, to count. And it could be a bad thing if it shrinks people’s souls and the organization’s performance.

Perhaps because of some of these defects, some firms have begun promoting “employee engagement.” “We want your people to have more than ‘satisfaction,’” they say. “We want your people to be engaged with their jobs.”

Now, this is certainly an improvement, if we’re looking to have more productive employees and better results. The concept of people working hard at their jobs because they have a strong connection with their work makes a lot of sense. But if our goal is a better organization producing better results, we still have problems. I will name just a few:

- The focus is too narrow. People can work very hard at their jobs without seeing how those jobs relate to other areas, help them (or not), or create value (or not).
- People’s interest in a specific job can dissipate over time. What happens to their engagement when the inevitable boredom and fatigue set in?

Engagement gets the edge over satisfaction, but they are fighting for a distant second place. You can go for first, for the gold medal that some organizations have already won.

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#2 THE PRINCIPLE:

In a joint survey done by Luman Consultants International and the American Management Association, people in 755 organizations were asked to evaluate a list of potential drivers of high performance.

The highest-rated factor? Well, it wasn't strategic planning – that came in second, with 65.0 percent of respondents rating it “very high” (a 6 or 7 on a 1-7 scale). Goals with measurement scored a respectable 58.9 percent, while reward & recognition programs garnered 59.2 percent and compensation & benefits netted 50.6 percent. But the winner by far was a committed workforce – 76.8 percent rated it very high.

I've heard leaders say, “people first, strategy second,” many times over the years. Well, now you have the proof that this proverb is on solid ground. But “people first” isn't coddling people or worrying about hygiene factors or trying to motivate them one play at a time. It's having a committed team, people who have the passion and focus to drive to victory, and a determination to never surrender.

So what is this “passion,” the passion that leads to commitment?

*We define **passion** as a choice to be wholeheartedly committed to achieving results and adding value. It is working with enthusiasm and energy and vigor to build something excellent. Although passion can include emotion, it is more of a choice than a feeling – people can be quiet and still quite passionate. Passion is characterized more fundamentally by focus and intensity and persistence and care than it is by externally observable behavior such as constant activity, high animation, or simply putting in long hours. Passion is the great differentiator in the people side of any organization.*

As the only firm working in the “passion and commitment” space – and we've been working in it for a decade – I can say categorically that these are the difference-makers. We've had public-company clients go from fourth to first quartile in 18 months, from trailing behind their peers to being best in their peer group. We've had (very) former double-digit growth companies return – no, find a new way – to sustainable growth. We've seen these principles and practices work with not-for-profits and with state and national government. They work because they tap into the best of what it means to be a human being.

I recently had a senior executive put his division's current “satisfaction” scores in front of me and ask, “If our scores are so good, why is our performance so bad?” He knew instinctively that good scores on bad metrics yield...nothing.

So how do you become a Passionate Organization? How do you trump engagement and satisfaction with a winning hand?

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#3 THE PRACTICE:

Become a *Passionate Organization* by transforming these seven areas of infrastructure:

1. **Design.** A *Passionate Organization* isn't achieved by motivational schemes or rah-rah speeches. It's a matter of designing a passionate culture using the *10 Key Elements of a Passionate Organization*. If you've got them, you will see the fire. If you're missing even one of them, a passionate organization will be out of your reach.
2. **Human Investment.** Traditional HR/OD approaches to people as “resources” or “assets” are well-intentioned. However, using investment thinking dramatically changes the nature of the conversation about people and gives us a whole new way to attract and retain “winners and believers.”
3. **Commitment.** The passion needs to be converted to sustainable commitment. This can be done using a variety of *PMATs* (Practices, Mechanisms, and Tools). Undirected passion won't get the job done. All true commitment is the result of directed passion.
4. **Motivation.** What gets talked about more than “motivation”? And yet, 95 percent of the material out there on the subject is either superficial (cheerleading, feel-good retreats, etc.) or schematic (reward and recognition, short-term incentives, etc.). Even talking about “self-motivation” won't get us where we want to go, unless we surround that powerful concept with principles and *PMATs* to make it real.
5. **TeamsBuilding.** Peter Drucker often said that most teams were failures. If we define “failure” as “not achieving your potential,” then very few teams would be called a success. Converting passionate people into passionate teams is anything but automatic. Getting the right people onto the right kind of team, and launching it with passion, requires a little bit of work and a lot of smarts.
6. **Emotional Management.** Emotion is far and away the most powerful driver of human action, and yet most organizations do little or nothing to harness it. Just knowing about “personality types” and “emotional intelligence” is inadequate for building a *Passionate Organization*. It's possible to encourage strong, positive conflict, to discourage weak, negative consensus, and to use human emotion to drive results.
7. **Emotional Firepower.** Passionate organizations have a high level of *Passion Capital*, as measured by the *Passion Intelligence Quotient*. A high level of *Passion Capital* gives us something to draw on to develop new products and services, exploit new opportunities, solve big problems, and overcome even gigantic challenges.

With regard to people, passion does indeed trump engagement. And it annihilates satisfaction.
And really, everything else.

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