

# Workplace Enhancement Notes

A Journal for People Working to Build and Lead Great Organizations

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## The Power of Engagement

**H**ave you every truly “lost” yourself in a job? While performing some task, did you lose all track of time and simply forget to eat—or even take a break?

Most of us have had these experiences every once in awhile—especially with a favorite hobby, a good book, or an engaging conversation with another person. Unfortunately, when it comes to our jobs, for many of us these instances are far too fleeting. We have only a vague sense of what it might feel like to be so fully engaged in a task at work. Reclaiming this sense of connection to one’s work is the focus of our work in the area of job engagement. What does it mean to be fully engaged in a task? What are the factors that lead to someone feeling job engaged? Can we help others grow their job engagement levels? And, perhaps most importantly, why does it matter? Why should we care about strengthening job engagement in the modern organization?



For the past five years, Russell Consulting has been exploring the idea of job engagement. During this time we have talked to our clients, explored the research, and conducted employee surveys that sought to measure this powerful concept. We thought it was time that we shared what we’ve learned.

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## A New Approach to Performance Reviews

**M**ost of us dread them. Whether we’re the reviewer or the reviewed, the annual performance review is one of the most uncomfortable conversations that most of us have during the year. But it doesn’t have to be this way. There is an innovative alternative that can transform your approach and change something that we tend to avoid into something that we actually seek out with anticipation.

### What’s Wrong with Most Performance Reviews?

The problem with most performance reviews is that they start off with the wrong focus. Most reviews are retrospective in nature and are more evaluative than developmental. This backward looking evaluative review is further complicated by the fact that they are usually done by the manager rather than the performer—which leads to the manager passing “judgment” on the employee’s performance contributions, with the manager often missing key performance details that only the performer can bring into the conversation.

The consequence from using this approach is a performance review that often moves the performer and the coach further from the desired outcomes of the

*(Continued on page 3)*



### Read this Issue to . . .

- Understand employee job engagement.
- Learn about a new approach to reviews.
- Diagnose employee performance problems.



## The Power of Engagement, continued from page 1

First, job engagement is profoundly different from job satisfaction. Whereas job satisfaction is a characteristic that describes how satisfied you are with the work you do and the environment within which you work, job engagement is more about being deeply connected and committed to performing the task and creating value-added outcomes. You may be satisfied with your job, for example, but not deeply connected or committed to it. If your employees have job satisfaction without commitment, you may have people who enjoy the work environment but who may not feel a high level of job ownership or responsibility. This tendency is most evident when you look at one very important organizational outcome: customer satisfaction. Research suggests that satisfied employees don't necessarily translate their job satisfaction into quality service that meets customer expectations. But, when people are job engaged, customers tend to be more satisfied. Research conducted by Sears found that job engaged employees directly affected the bottom line: an engaged workforce provided better customer service which, in turn, led to more satisfied customers and higher sales!

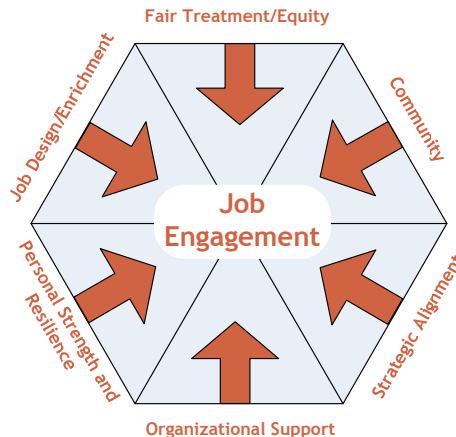
“The road to happiness lies in two simple principles: find what it is that interests you and that you can do well, and when you find it, put your whole soul into it – every bit of energy and ambition and natural ability you have.”

— John D. Rockefeller III  
American philanthropist

**Job Engagement Defined.** Job engagement is a characteristic where an individual approaches his or her work with enthusiasm, energy, focus, and commitment in such a way that the person is entirely present in his/her work and is able to bring his or her full potential to the work effort. Engaged employees are deeply connected with their work, the work environment, and the people with whom they work. People are *engaged* at work when they feel a sense of ownership and commitment to the work itself, their peers, customers, and the company.

**Job Engagement Dimensions.** Our research has determined that there are six factors that influence someone's level of job engagement. Organizations that care about the level of job engagement of their employees should focus some energy in each of these areas:

- **Job design/enrichment.** Jobs are designed with the performer in mind and both broaden and deepen the performer's tasks such that the work is challenging and fully utilizes the performer's talents.
- **Fair treatment and equity.** There must be perceived equity in the distribution of assignments, rewards, and punishments and employees should feel comfortable taking the initiative, challenging the rules, and so forth.
- **Community.** When people feel part of something larger than themselves, they feel connected and are more likely to participate in and contribute to this community. This, in turn, builds job ownership and reinforces positive performance outcomes.
- **Strategic alignment.** When performers understand the strategic impact of their work, they tend to bring a higher level of commitment to the task. This factor in job engagement infuses the organization's vision and overarching strategy into the work such that the performer sees the higher purpose of his or her work and understands the larger context of his or her individual job performance.



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Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.

— Mahatma Gandhi, Indian spiritual and political leader

## The Power of Engagement, continued from page 2

- **Organizational support.** This facet involves the degree to which performers have a sufficient level of support for their work in the form of effective supervision, communication, training, equipment, and other critical resources.
- **Personal strength and resilience.** People tend to be more job engaged if they deal with change and uncertainty well, if they feel responsible for their own success, and if they are resourceful in solving the problems that they face.

**Would you like to know how engaged your workforce is?** If you are interested in strengthening the level of job engagement in your organization, your first step is to gather hard data on your employees' level of job engagement. With this data in hand, you can then begin building a strategy for enhancing job engagement in every department and at every level of your organization. Russell Consulting has developed and validated a comprehensive **Job Engagement Assessment Survey** that gives you feedback on your organization's overall level of job engagement and on each of the six job engagement dimensions.

Contact **Russell Consulting, Inc.** today to find out how we can help you better understand and enhance the level of job engagement in your organization!

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By itself, job satisfaction isn't sufficient to drive peak performance. People need to be fully job engaged to serve customers well and drive performance quality and productivity.

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## A New Approach to Performance Reviews, continued from page 1

process. Instead of learning and growth, there is defensiveness and denial. Instead of two-way communication, the communication tends to be one-way. Instead of a focus on future growth and development, the review spends too much time looking backward. Instead of an holistic view of the employee's performance the review tends to over-rely upon some performance measures while ignoring others. Instead of each party bringing insights and perspective into the conversation, the review tends to over-emphasize and value the manager's perspective.

### An Innovative Employee-Centered Alternative to Traditional Reviews

RCI has been researching and experimenting with different approaches to the traditional review for the past twenty years. Our alternative—which we think is both innovative and powerful—is described in our latest book, **Ultimate Performance Management** (ASTD Press, 2009). Our approach is an employee-centered process that has, at its center, a driving commitment to employee ownership of performance, with the manager acting as a true performance coach, guiding the employee toward *great* performance outcomes. The foundation of our approach is called the **Performance Coaching Conversation**. Rather than a “review”—which tends to focus on evaluation—the focus of the **Performance Coaching Conversation** focuses on building employee ownership of performance by strengthening the partnership for performance between the performer and the coach.

The core of the **Performance Coaching Conversation** are six simple questions that the coach uses to guide an employee-centered process: (1) What's going well in your job? (2) What's *not* going well in your job? (3) What's behind your performance successes or failures? (4) What actions can you take to build on your successes and overcome your setbacks? (5) How can I, as your manager, best help you to be successful? and, finally, (6) What do you see as future performance directions or challenges in your job?

While there is much more to the “conversation” than these six questions, these simple questions give you an idea of our approach. By putting the performer at the center of the process, the employee takes full responsibility for performance—with the active support of his or her coach.

**Want to know more?** Contact RCI to learn about our innovative approach to performance management and let us help you transform your reviews into powerful conversations that drive employee performance and improvement.

*For information on our innovative employee-centered Performance Coaching Conversation process, call us today.*

*We can help you transform your traditional performance reviews into value-added conversations that drive performance and productivity.*

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**Call RCI Today!**

**(608) 274-4482**





*Performance diagnosis is at the heart of every improvement process.*

*Call RCI today to learn how to apply our 9+1 performance diagnostic tool within the larger great performance management cycle framework.*

(608) 274-4482

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***This above all:  
focus on **cause**,  
not blame!***

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## Diagnosing Employee Performance Problems

**Y**ou are trying your best to guide an employee toward improved performance but continue to be frustrated at a less-than-optimal result. The first step you need to take is actually a step back—stepping back from the details of the performance problem to understand the larger context of the performer’s work. Part of exploring this larger context involves asking a series of big-picture diagnostic questions to guide you to better understanding the factors causing the performer to achieve less than the desired outcomes.

RCI recommends that managers use our **9+1 Common Causes of Performance Problems Checklist** as a great place to start:

1. Are performance **expectations** clear? Does she know *what* she is expected to accomplish?
2. Does the employee know that his **performance** isn’t what it should be? Do you let him know when he isn’t meeting job expectations?
3. Are **performance goals** challenging but realistic? Is the workload reasonable? Are you punishing your best performers by giving them most of the challenging work?
4. Does she have the **skill, knowledge, and ability** to do the job? Has the job changed such that new skills and knowledge are required? Has the job out-grown her?
5. Have you provided him with **access to the tools, equipment, other resources** he needs to get the job done? Does he know where or how to access these resources?
6. Are the **working relationships** between the employee and her co-workers positive? Or, instead, are there ongoing conflicts between her and other workers?
7. Are you **available** to clarify job duties, ask for direction and support, problem solve, or identify ways to improve job performance? Or, instead, are you just too busy to “touch base,” share issues, and discuss concerns?
8. Have you consistently provided **clear and positive rewards** to him and other workers when performance standards are met or exceeded? Do you make it clear that his performance *does* matter to you?
9. Does she have a **physical, mental, or emotional disability** that might limit her ability to do the job? Do you see patterns in her work behaviors that suggest limited physical or mental capacities?

**Plus One:** Does the employee exhibit behaviors that suggest that he is experiencing a personal problem, lacks desire or motivation, demonstrates inflexibility in working with others, exhibits resistance to change, or has a difficult time accepting orders from others?

**Want more ideas on diagnosing performance problems?** Contact RCI to discuss how we can guide you and your team toward *great* performance!



ENHANCING ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE THROUGH  
QUALITY WORKPLACE CONSULTING  
AND TRAINING SERVICES



Jeff and Linda Russell, Co-Directors

*Workplace Enhancement Notes* is a journal published periodically by Russell Consulting, Inc. (RCI) for its clients. *Notes* shares insights and issues that emerge from RCI’s consulting practice around leadership, strategy, change, performance management, motivation, communication, quality improvement, team development, and customer service. Visit us online for information on the full range of our consulting and training services.

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