



Leading from Above the Line



Steve Satterwhite

In the wake of the great recession, in businesses and organizations around the world, we have a crisis on our hands. But it's not the crisis we all think it is and talk about.

It's worse. Let me explain.

Here's the crisis we think we have and the one we're all talking about: Employee Engagement

According to the current annual Gallup, Inc. State of the Global Workplace study, only 13% of employees worldwide are Engaged in their jobs. By "Engaged," Gallup means employees who work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.

Sixty-three percent are Not Engaged and 24% are Actively Disengaged. By “Not Engaged,” Gallup means employees who are essentially “checked out.” They’re sleepwalking through their workday, putting time—but not energy or passion—into their work.

By “Actively Disengaged,” we’re talking about people who aren’t just unhappy at work. They’re busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged coworkers are trying to accomplish. These are the people that come to work every day actively looking for ways to bring the organization down.

Startling, but true, Actively Disengaged employees outnumber Engaged employees by 2-1. So you have 2 people trying to bring down the organization for every one person who’s trying to move it forward. It’s a one-step-forward-two-steps-back scenario plaguing organizations.

And the middle? They just don’t care. They are ambivalent at best, and they turn a blind eye to both sides.

This is a crisis that is costing hundreds of billions of dollars. Low employee engagement results in poor quality products and services, higher workplace accidents, greater employee theft, and more. But worst of all, it’s taking a toll on people by eroding away their mental and physical health and well-being.

With these numbers, let's all agree that we have a crisis on our hands. But this is not the real crisis. The real crisis is even deeper.

Here's the real crisis, the one that we're not addressing. It's the Elephant in the Boardroom, so to speak.

We don't have an Employee Engagement crisis. We have a Leadership Engagement crisis.

It should be no surprise that only 13% of employees are engaged when you discover that only 19% of managers and executives are engaged! "Engaged Leaders" are outnumbered 4 to 1 by those who are not.

Bradford D. Smart, author of Topgrading, reports that the top Human Resources executives of the largest 100 companies in the world admit that only 20% of managers they hired turned out to be the high performers they expected. "That's an 80% mis-hire rate!" Smart notes.

“Here's the real crisis, the one that we're not addressing. It's the Elephant in the Boardroom, so to speak. ... We have a Leadership Engagement crisis.

And yet, these are the same leaders that we are expecting to raise levels of Employee Engagement in our organizations.

Maybe the old saying is still true, that people join organizations but they leave managers. A Florida State University study confirms why:

- 39% of workers said their supervisor failed to keep promises.
- 37% indicated their supervisor failed to give credit when due.
- 31% said their supervisor gave them the “silent treatment” during the past year.
- 27% report their supervisor made negative comments about them to other employees or managers.
- 24% indicated their boss invaded their privacy.
- 23% said their supervisor blamed others to cover up personal mistakes or minimize embarrassment.

Then, there’s a great post in the Harvard Business Review blog by Umair Haque. He says, “we’re in the midst of a Great Dereliction—a historic failure of leadership, precisely when we need it.”

Haque says there are two kinds of leaders: Wannabes and True Leaders.

Wannabes are literally just that: Wannabes. They want to be leaders, they want the benefits of leadership, (like the title, money, prestige, the corner office and the parking space upfront), but they don't want to pay the price. They want the respect, dignity, and title of leadership, but they are unwilling or don't know how to lead people to lives that matter. True leadership, he says, is a lost art. "True Leaders lead us not to a place—but to a different kind of destination: to our better, truer selves. It is an act of love in the face of an uncertain world."

I couldn't agree more.

The Old Way Is Dead

The old way—where managers rule over their people with fear and intimidation, or control, or create an environment of competition...

The old way—where employees compete against one another for status, raises and promotions, where one person winning means another one must lose, where one withholds from their co-workers because their managers stack-rank their people against each other...

Yeah, that day is over.

The old way creates fear, uncertainty, and doubt in the minds of employees. It creates a level of anxiety that threatens their jobs, their pay, or their basic need for safety. And it creates organizations where people are no longer focused on creating great products or services. Instead, they become focused on basic survival. It's no wonder people are disengaged.

Today, we need leaders who are willing to be real, authentic, and vulnerable. We need leaders to put aside their own fears and insecurities. We need leaders to be brilliant, to inspire, and to touch the heart and soul of the people they lead.

That other thing we do—the masks that we all wear at work, the ones that stroke our leadership egos, to get the better jobs, the better offices, the raises and the promotions, the false roles that we play...

“Today, we need leaders who are willing to be real, authentic, and vulnerable. We need leaders to put aside their own fears and insecurities. We need leaders to be brilliant, to inspire, and to touch the heart and soul of the people they lead.”

That's hard to do. It's not sustainable. It's not real. It's not profitable. And it creates companies where people are not engaged nor inspired. They have checked out long ago, but they're still sitting in a seat and drawing a paycheck. That doesn't serve anyone. It doesn't have to be this way. As leaders, we can change that. We must change that. We must change the way we lead.

As leaders, we must create a space for people to march to the beat of their own drums. We must create space for people who do things differently, people who think differently, people who are willing to look within and find the talents and skills that dwell deep inside.

As leaders, we need people who get who they really are, and get why they're here. And we need to help them get out of their own way to be the person the universe made them to be. We need people to find this connection to their true selves, their authentic selves, in their work, and under our watch.

That's our job. That's the real work of leadership. That's the work of an Engaged Leader.

Here's how we do it.

Leading from Above the Line

If we want to build healthier, more profitable and more sustainable organizations, then we must change the way we hire and inspire our leaders. We must empower them and expect them to carry the noble responsibility to light up our people, our teams, our companies and our organizations.

We must start leading from Above the Line.

Above the Line is a really simple concept. It's a philosophy, a way of being, a way of leading, a sort of leadership mantra that lifts people up, that lights them up, and inspires them to do their best work. This is the starting point for real, authentic leadership, and it goes like this:

Above the Line | *As a leader, everything I think, say or do is either above the line or below it—my thoughts, words and actions are either moving our people closer to the vision or farther away. So therefore, I take responsibility to only think, say, and do the things that move the people I lead closer toward their purpose, goals, and dreams.*

This is not some sort of idealistic self-help or utopian sound bite. You might be thinking right now that this sounds good, but it doesn't take into consideration that as a leader you're responsible for executing, hitting the numbers, making your plan—right now, this week, this month, this quarter. Sound familiar?

But let me ask you something. Do you think it might be easier to hit your goals, your numbers, and your plans with employees that are engaged or ones that are disengaged? Do you think it might be easier for your folks to be inspired, creative, and productive, or to leave them uninspired, unimaginative and ambivalent?

Put yourself in the shoes of those you lead. Do you think they want to work for a leader who lights them up for who they are, someone who sees them, hears them, and gets them, a leader who wants them to bring WHO they are to WHAT they do and HOW they do it? Or do you think they want to work for someone who ignores them, treats them poorly, and just doesn't get them or the value and talents and beauty they bring to the world?

Look, this isn't that complex. But it does take commitment, and it has to start from the top—from the CEO down. Yes, we can do this. We can create organizations with highly Engaged Employees by hiring and inspiring Engaged Leaders.

And here are three simple steps we can take right now to start to make this happen.

1. Hire for Why | HR managers claim that their organizations hire the right managers only 20% of the time. But what if we could flip that around? What if we could implement leadership hiring and onboarding systems that get the right managers in the right roles with the right pay 90% of the time? We can. But the problem is that most organizations don't have a systematic and consistent way to identify, hire and onboard top leadership talent. We have to move beyond the flawed and inconsistent hiring methods we have today. Instead, we need a hiring system that allows us to confidently:

a. Screen for Competence: people with the right leadership skills and a proven track record.

b. Select for Culture: people that align with our organization's value and vibe.

c. Hire for Why: true leaders whose authentic purpose in life is to lift up and light up those they lead.

2. Put the Heart before the Cart | Everyone is put here on earth with a higher calling. We all come with a unique set of talents, skills, and purpose—something we do better than anyone else on the planet. Whether we realize it or not, we each bring these talents, skills, and purpose with us to our workplace. And when we are in alignment to this purpose, we do our best and brightest work. We work from a place of inspiration, creativity and flow. Not only is our productivity expo-

nentially higher, but we authentically connect to the work we're doing. People inherently want and need to make a difference. As leaders, it is our responsibility to find that higher calling in our people and create the space for them to use their unique talents and purpose in their work. If we put our peoples' hearts first, they will light up our customers. And then our customers will find it easier to fill their carts with our products and services.

3. Turn on the Lights | So what is one small step we can take right now as a leader? Sometimes, the simplest answers to the toughest challenges in life are right under our noses. Here's one simple step. As a father, I'm always asking myself what my young kids need from me to become the amazing human beings that I know they're destined to be. It occurred to me one day that maybe all they need is just one simple minute of my time. Just one minute at a time. What they really want is for me to see them, hear them, watch them, listen to them, acknowledge them, appreciate them, thank them, praise them. They want me to simply look into their eyes, smile, and say and feel the words, "I Believe in You".

The thing is, children grow up. They become adults. Adults are just children with jobs, mortgages, car payments, and other responsibilities. And these adults find their way into our teams, our organizations. And guess what they want to hear from their leaders? I see you. I hear you. I get you. You're amazing. I appreciate you. Thank you. Wow!

When people are seen, heard, respected and appreciated by their leaders, it lights them up. And that's our job as leaders. It is our responsibility. It is transformational when we provide this space for the people we lead. It's simple. It's easy. And you can start today. Right now. With one person. With one simple sentence. Do it. And watch them light up.

So, How Will You Lead?

It probably comes as no surprise that companies that get Employee Engagement right are 147% more profitable than those who don't. That in high performing teams, positive feedback and praise outweighs the negative by almost 6:1.

And, when employees feel truly loved and appreciated by their leaders, engagement jumps by 70%. As a result, shareholder value is 5X greater for those companies with an engaged workforce than those without.

But those are just numbers. They tell a story about an organization. But it's not the organization's real truth. As Simon Sinek might say, we have to Start with Why. As leaders, this could be our Why. This could be our must do.

This could be the most important work of our lives.

We must build the organizations and teams worthy of the people we lead. Imagine what's possible if we do.

Imagine a world where people are engaged. People discovering who they are and why they're here—through their work. Imagine a world where we create an environment where trust, respect, honor and truth rule the day. Where simple and universal truths dominate the workplace.

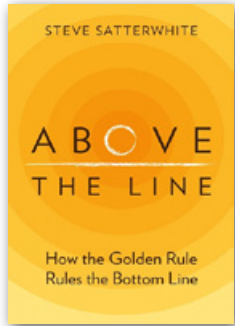
Imagine that, as a leader, you get the honor of inspiring folks to light up the world through the work they do. Imagine an organization where people are engaged authentically. Productivity is exponentially higher. Real work gets done. Good things get created by good people. And profits soar.

It's a place where the Golden Rule rules the bottom line.

This is the world of work I dream about. As leaders, we can bring this dream into reality.

The world is waiting for us to make a move. And there's no better time than right now. 📌

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Steve Satterwhite is CEO of Entelligence IT, one of the fastest growing technology services in the US. With 16 years as a founder and entrepreneur, his people-centric ideas about business have been featured in Forbes, Investors Business Daily, CNBC and his manifesto was featured on the front page of Huffington Post. He is the author of *Above the Line: How the Golden Rule Rules the Bottom Line*—a true story about how putting people first not only makes a difference in peoples' lives, but boosts revenue and profits. Steve is a speaker, consultant and a man on a mission to bring real, authentic leadership into businesses and organizations around the world. Visit his website at www.stevesatterwhite.me.

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