

# McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond

Certified Public Accountants/Business Consultants

## Big Picture: Helping Employees Connect with the Game Plan

An employee (we'll call him Joe) gets up every morning and goes to work. He mans the help desk or processes invoices or waits on customers. How does Joe feel about his job? Does he consider himself an integral part of your company? Only 29 percent of today's employees are described as "engaged," meaning that they "work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company," according to the Gallup Management Journal. This indicates there's a 71 percent chance that Joe doesn't feel connected.

The conversations in Joe's head might sound something like this: "What I do here isn't really important." "Why should I work so hard?" "So what if I take a longer break than I'm supposed to? What difference does it make?" And, "Forget all this rah-rah company stuff - just give me my paycheck and let me get out of here on time." This kind of thinking costs the company money. From unwarranted sick leave to longer breaks to inefficient work habits, profits seep out through apathetic or disengaged employees. And employers have a responsibility to prevent that from happening.

Do your employees understand how your company makes money? Do they know how their particular work fits into the big picture? Do they make decisions with the good of the company in mind? Helping employees understand where they fit in, and how their work impacts the company, can go a long way toward combating indifference.

It's critical that short-term employee performance goals be consistent with longer term company profitability goals. Otherwise, employees will find themselves in a dilemma over which goal to satisfy.

Take, for example, a furniture manufacturing plant. Employees on the packing line are graded on their ability to keep the line moving and package a certain number of pieces of furniture each shift. When the assembly line is moving too fast for the varnish to dry completely, there's no incentive for employees to slow down to give the furniture time to dry. The more they package, the better their rating for the day. So they keep moving, packing sticky furniture that is sure to be returned later because the packing has stuck to the wood.

Over the long term, this costs the company a lot of money. Yet in the short term, employees have done exactly what they were told to do - keep the line moving and get that furniture packaged. If these line employees understood how their jobs impacted the bigger picture, and they were compensated or given bonuses based on the ultimate success of the job, they would be able to make better decisions.

The company would save significant money, and employees would feel their jobs were important. Many business owners hesitate to broach the topic of how the company makes or loses money for fear that employees will react by just wanting more from the company or that they will be concerned about the stability of their jobs.

This type of communication is a cultural shift for some companies. If this type of information is shared, it's important to initiate performance-based compensation or a bonus system that rewards good decisions. Such a system reinforces the benefits to both the company and employee, increasing the chances that good decisions will continue to be made.

How do the employees in your company feel? Do they make decisions with the good of the company in mind? You might want to consider ways to educate your team on the bigger picture and help them see where they fit. The benefits to both employee engagement and your bottom line could be tremendous.

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McLean, Koehler, Sparks & Hammond helps owners and business leaders become more successful by providing innovative financial, technology and management solutions for every stage of their organizations' life cycle. MKS&H's organizational consulting division, Tandem Partners, specializes in people strategies that drive business results. For more information on this article or MKS&H, please contact Margaret Wilson at 410-296-6200 or via email: [margaret@mksh.com](mailto:margaret@mksh.com).

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