

**(Re)Engage!**

# How Companies Build Cultures of Engagement to Create a Better Workplace



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Dear Organizational Leader,

Welcome to Teaiiano Leadership Solutions! In 2015 as part of a graduate level capstone project, I created a quick survey for CEOs of high-growth Inc5000 companies. The survey was based on a Forbes magazine article the top challenges faced by executive leaders of fast-growing companies. I was overwhelmed by the positive response. Many CEOs and executives willingly stopped what they were doing to participate in the Top Challenges survey and talk to me about business issues that were keeping them up at night.

That experience changed my perspective on what is important to CEOs and decision makers, so I dove head first into business literature with their challenges in mind. I knew if I could make a difference for leaders and managers by addressing what they care most about, I could also make a difference for the employees that work for them.


For the past 3 years, I have surveyed business and academic literature searching for root causes to the top challenge facing CEOs across the United States. Three research questions that drove my search were:

- Why are employees leaving their organizations?
- Where are they going?
- What do they want from an employer that their current or former employer did not provide for them?

These questions led to an examination of employee engagement and how employers could reengage employees during times of change by creating an environment of engagement. It also led to research that talked about a trend toward sustainable employee engagement or what Shane Crabb calls “internalized engaged states”. This concept implies a shared responsibility between employees and managers engagement. In other words, the accountability for engagement does not fall solely on the manager. Employees are accountable as well.

The vision at Teaiiano is to partner with visionary leaders and entrepreneurs to make a positive impact on the world. If you fit that description, I would encourage you to read further to see how what we do at Teaiiano can be of value to you and to your organization.

Hoping to connect,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas E. Anderson, II". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Thomas E. Anderson, II  
CEO and Facilitator  
Teaiiano Leadership Solutions

## The (Not So) Great Employee Exodus

Hiring and retaining top talent has emerged as one of the notoriously complex problems that exist for companies of all sizes. According to Entrepreneur magazine:

- 56% of businesses with 101-499 employees listed hiring as their biggest challenge
- Hiring is just as important as growing revenue in businesses of 50-100 employees
- 29% of small businesses reported that hiring is a top challenge.<sup>1</sup>

Many employees only spend one-third to one-half of their day involved in work-related activities. Why? Here some reasons: getting sick and still reporting to work (presenteeism), getting sick and skipping work (absenteeism), and checking out while at work (employee and manager disengagement).

Factors such as unresolved conflict between coworkers cause employees to display counterproductive work behaviors (stealing, withdrawing, etc.) and workplace incivility (fighting and other types of aggressive behaviors). In extreme cases, people drop out of the workforce altogether (workforce disengagement). It is no secret that employees are exiting companies in greater volumes and frequencies.

Turnover is largely due to dissatisfaction, which turns into disengagement when it goes unchecked. Gallup estimates that “actively disengaged employees” – the least productive – cost the American economy \$350 billion per year in lost productivity (including absences, illness and other problems resulting from active disengagement). When workers encounter motivational challenges, they tend to disengage from their work environments.

Though the hiring challenge reveals a turnover problem, a deeper look into the problem reveals a key indicator: turnover intention. In examining turnover intention, leaders consider questions such as:

- Why are employees leaving my company?
- Where are they going?
- What do they want that my company is not providing for them?

Employee disengagement and turnover intention represent two fundamental causes of the hiring challenge. This paper will offer evidence-based insights to address and provide alternatives to these issues. It will examine the answers to these questions in an effort to convince organizational leaders of the need for a shift – a transformation – in company culture, especially in interactions between organizational leaders and those who work for them.

**By increasing engagement and well-being, managers make gains in employee retention and satisfaction, and reduce turnover intention.**



## Toward a Sustainable Model of Employee Engagement

Recent studies have confirmed that employees with higher levels of wellbeing enjoy greater levels of engagement. I am sure you have seen articles that read like this:

By increasing engagement and well-being, managers make gains in employee retention and satisfaction, and reduce turnover intention.

Unfortunately, if most managers wrote out their storylines, they would read much differently.

It is impossible for a manager to constantly reengage employees, yet the accelerated pace of change creates the fundamental need for reengagement in organizations. To make matters more interesting, relationship-based indicators, such as supervisor communication and having a good friend at work, have proven as a source of motivation to workers. So, what is a manager to do?

The concept of engagement is trending towards a search for solutions that produce internalized engaged states<sup>2</sup> or sustainable engagement<sup>3</sup>, among employees, managers and executive leaders. This perspective of reengagement is crucial in times of change, which has become the new normal. Problems are too complicated for a lone CEO or a handful of directors to tackle. Leaders can safeguard their own well-being by reengaging their workforce to handle the increasing pace of change.

### So how can you do that?

It is worth noting that engagement is bigger than a program or special initiative. It involves more than keeping employees occupied until a supervisor needs them to perform a routine task. Engagement becomes an initial action that is followed by reengagement. So here are three areas where managers can reengage employees from the inside out.

## Insight 1

### Engage Employees in Visioning and Strategic Thinking

Millennial workers have indicated a strong desire to be looped-in on strategy development at the companies they work for. An engaging workplace does more than expect workers to implement a vision that leaders create and impose in an ivory-tower meeting. From its core, reengagement factors the vision and desires of the employees into the organizational equation. It involves employees and managers co-creating the corporate dream. Employees are less likely to implement changes they did not help create. The process of collaboration infuses the shared vision with employee buy-in from the inception.

To engage employees and managers in implementing the mission of the company, leaders must include them in the vision development process. They must first buy-in to the future vision for the organization. Only then will workers exceed expectations and help the organization to increase momentum toward the desired, shared future. Employees want to be involved in the vision and strategy development process. An engaging culture brings together employees and other stakeholders in co-creating and implementing a shared vision for the company.



## Insight 2

### Shift the Communication Culture: It's About Relationships

The bureaucratic model of organization has its strengths, limitations and appropriate settings, as does the decentralized model. However, treating workers as “hired hands” within a closed system and occasionally issuing, top-down communication and directives through a memo, has run its course. Organizations are changing to adapt to the post-industrial age and the knowledge economy. Richard Daft (2013) defines organizations as “social entities that are goal-directed and designed as deliberately structured and coordinated activity systems and are linked to the external environment.”

Daft goes on to say:

“An organization is not a building or a set of policies or procedures; organizations are made up of people and their relationships with one another. An organization exists when people interact with one another to perform essential functions that help attain goals. An organization is a means to an end” (Daft, 2013, p.12, emphasis added).

With organizational contexts that value customer journey mapping and employee well-being, people – both customers and employees – are becoming a central focus in organizational goal achievement. Building relationships with stakeholders at every level has become a priority.

Employees also want managers to engage them in meaningful conversations, not just about work and job performance. A study by The Institute of Leadership and Management (2011) found that coaching works best when coaches center goal-oriented conversations on the broad scope of work-life topics.<sup>4</sup> This inspires a shift in organizational communication culture. Why is that? When people interact with each other over time, they begin to form a culture. A way of doing things. A system or process for getting the best result with the least amount of resistance. Since the industrial revolution, the interactions between leaders and followers has influenced the communication culture within organizational life.

**Employees want managers to engage them in meaningful conversations on a broad scope of work-life topics.**

The shift in organizational theory over the last century has drifted away from the mechanistic, bureaucratic organization of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and toward a more organic, networked form of organization. For over 100 years, inflexible company cultures resulted in byproducts among employees such as lack of purpose, feelings of misuse and abuse, substance addiction, low self-esteem, sabotage and a host of counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) and personal/family issues that have negatively impacted lives of employees and their families.<sup>5</sup> Most importantly for managers and executive leaders, these employee problems hinder job focus and employee performance, which affects the overall performance of the company.

Flatter organizational structures have led to two-way communication patterns, which in turn result in company cultures that are characterized by open communication. Organizations that are designed, not for control, but for learning. Let’s revisit Daft’s definition of organization. The definition poses the question “doesn’t goal-orientation and a focus on interaction put the organization at cross-purposes?” That answer is “it doesn’t have to”. There is a two-way communication capability that is changing the patterns of interaction and shaping culture of engagement within organizational life: coaching.



## Insight 3

### Build Coaching Capabilities

For decades, great focus has been placed on the benefits of executive coaching and leadership coaching for managers and leaders. It is no doubt that leadership coaching is crucial for organizational success. The discipline of coaching also benefits entire organizations by creating an atmosphere of engagement when integrated into organizational life. So, what is coaching? And more importantly, how does it benefit organizations?

### What is Coaching?

Coaching is a skillset that many companies are integrating into their company culture. The International Coaching Federation (ICF), officially defines coaching as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.” Coaching functions in various ways within organizational life. One way to think about coaching is through the following seven functions:

1. Coaching is a **service** that supports achievement of business and personal goals.
2. Coaching is a **solution** that keeps clients moving forward toward their agenda and growth goals.
3. Coaching is a **set of techniques and skills** including open questions, the G.R.O.W. model, unpacking, reframing, and S.M.A.R.T.Y. goals.
4. Coaching is a **set of competencies** that focuses largely on co-creating relationships, communicating effectively, facilitating learning, planning and goal achievement.<sup>6</sup>
5. Coaching is a **capability** that organizations integrate into business operations to improve performance and achievement.
6. Coaching is a **discipline** that co-exists alongside counseling, mentoring, consulting and facilitation.
7. Coaching is a **movement** that is transforming communication culture, one conversation at a time.

**Coaching is a movement that transforms  
organizational communication culture,  
one conversation at a time.**



## The Role of Coaching in the Workplace

Coaching is changing the culture of organizational communication. It is decentralizing throughout industries and organizations at an unprecedented rate. Through coaching, organizations not only build the type of cultures they can be proud of, but also create cultures that produce engagement, and most importantly reengagement, without putting undue strain on managers, employees or executive leadership. Communication that satisfies employees begins with authentic conversations. In *Fierce Conversations*, Susan Scott (2002) makes a bold claim that “the conversation *is* the relationship”.<sup>7</sup> If an organization is made up of people and their relationships to one another, conversations serve as the barometer measuring the quality of interactions among organizational members. Coaching has emerged as an alternative to top-down communication and the concept of organization as an end in itself. It accounts for the relational dynamic and produces various outcomes that align with not only humanistic thought, but also factors that lead to higher employee productivity such as highly engaged employees with a thriving sense of wellbeing.

## How Does Coaching Benefit Organizations?

Coaching is relationship-based and goal-oriented. Organizational coaching and coaching cultures produce healthier relationships between both customers and organizational members. Within an organizational context, coaching sessions are designed to improve job performance and productivity from a holistic approach. Fortune 500 companies, such as Walt Disney, Apple, Continental, and Harley Davidson, have integrated coaching for executives into HR operations. Other companies have successfully integrated coaching at lower levels of the organization to guide employees in making positive change on their jobs, in their lives and in their careers.

Organizational leaders mobilize coaches, along with their accompanying coaching skills and techniques, as a way to address the complexities of change through practices such as collective intelligence, strategic thinking and conflict resolution. Several coaching skills and techniques align with employees' values and often subconscious desires for such things as satisfying communication, and timely, actionable feedback. Coaching skills such as mindful reflection, quality feedback, and building trust lead to outcomes such as shared decision making, encouraging learning, and communication satisfaction.

Coaching encourages and preserves the free flow of knowledge and information between supervisors and employees, between different departments and teams within the organization, and even between colleagues who operate on a peer level. Conversations are also important between multiple generations that currently exist within the workforce. Coaching works to increase understanding, while minimizing communication barriers.

## Coaching for Change Leadership

Coaching is also a change leadership skill that managers can use to increase engagement among employees. As organizations change, personal change must take place. Coaching is designed for personal change. However, it produces organizational outcomes. Coaching provides a way for leaders to respond to the complexities of change and accelerate the pace of change by preserving the level of engagement in highly motivated workers and increase the level of engagement for demotivated workers. A coaching culture provides workers with key communication and relationship outcomes. A coaching culture empowers leaders, managers and co-workers to engage each other in authentic conversations that strengthen working relationships. The democratization of coaching throughout an organization harnesses the cascading effect of employee and manager engagement.



## **Let's Connect**

Organizations use coaching techniques to not only navigate the complexities of change, but to also engage employees on a strategic level. The fundamental concept of engagement requires employees to go above and beyond the call of duty to meet the organization's goals. Executive leadership can utilize coaching competencies to produce strategic organizational outcomes such as effective communication cultures.

If you are interested in creating a culture of engagement or strengthening your current culture with the concepts presented in this paper, I would like to connect with you. To schedule a time to talk about how our solutions can specifically benefit your organization, contact Thomas E. Anderson, II at [t\\_anderson@teaiiano.com](mailto:t_anderson@teaiiano.com) or (240) 499-2828.

## **Our Solutions**

### **Authentic Feedback Workshop**

Giving and receiving feedback is deceptively simple. Timeliness, quality, trust, and organizational hierarchy make for a complex communication exchange without the proper principles to guide your approach. Our approach integrates ongoing feedback into organizational life to support strategy implementation.

Learn the 5 keys to effective feedback, and how to implement them in your team setting. Participants will also learn principles and application for:

- Developing and preserving trust to ensure that feedback is well-received
- Giving feedback that considers differences in communication styles, job focus, and organizational interests
- Delivering effective, actionable feedback that is timely, high-quality and authentic

### **Real Talk Training (RTT)**

RTT teaches professional coaching techniques to unlock sustainable personal change. Team members can revolutionize everyday conversations by learning how to:

- Ask powerful questions that enhance learning
- Listen for what really matters
- Connect meaningfully at home and at work
- Empower others toward transformation
- Make conflict less demanding and more productive

This interactive communication training includes demonstration, practice and constructive feedback.

**Strategic Visioning FaciliTraining**

Managing complex group dynamics presents a significant challenge when taking a shared approach to making strategy. Our FaciliTrainings take the coach approach to build collective wisdom around solutions that will work for your organization. Participants engage in strategic thinking sessions to co-create a shared vision for the future.

**More Information**

You can also visit our website at [www.teaiiano.com](http://www.teaiiano.com) to download more of our insights papers and read about our solutions.



## **About the writer**

Thomas E. Anderson, II (t\_anderson@teaiiano.com) is CEO and Facilitator of Teaiiano Leadership Solutions. He is an alumnus of Columbia University, and holds an M.Div. and Masters of Organizational Leadership in Organizational Development Consulting from Regent University. Thomas is a recurring presenter at the Annual Research Roundtables at Regent University's School of Business and Leadership and is currently pursuing a doctorate degree in strategic leadership. Thomas has published scholarly articles in the Journal of Practical Consulting (JPC) on coaching, organization change, well-being and employee engagement. Thomas holds leadership coach credentials from Lifeforming Leadership Coaching and works with students from grades K through 12 in one of the nation's top performing school districts. Above all, he enjoys being a devoted husband to wife, Jamie, and dedicated father to Arianna and Azalia.

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