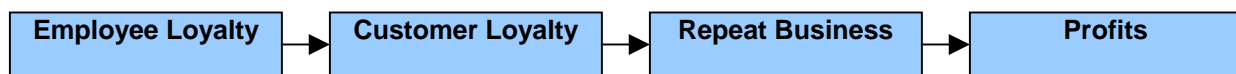


## What's Missing In the Workplace? Engagement As An Untapped Resource

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Landmark research by James L Heskett et al, at the Harvard Business School<sup>1</sup> has shown that the most significant contributing factor to an organization's success is employee loyalty. The research indicates that employee loyalty drives customer loyalty, which in turn is proven to generate the biggest portion of an organization's income in the form of return or annuity business. Employee loyalty yields customer loyalty yields repeat business that yields bottom line profits.



What can organizations do to impact each employee's loyalty? The easy answer is: satisfy the employee's needs better than the competing organization. So, let's get out that old Maslow's list of human needs and take a look at what might be missing in the regular list of compensation, office furniture, benefits, parties, and recognition systems.

Maslow talked and wrote about the ultimate need being a need for self-actualization. At INSPIRATIONWORKS we translate this self-actualization as the need to matter in the world. Carl Jung in his study of human psychology wrote about the universal need to answer questions about meaning in life. He actually called this basic human drive a "religious instinct". He was saying that we humans are "wired" to find meaning in life like Stephen Pinker in his best selling *Language Instinct* says we are "wired" for language.

Like Carl Jung, at INSPIRATIONWORKS we believe that the human animal is "wired" with a need for engagement. But we are missing two fundamental elements in today's workplace: an emotional competence perspective and a way to develop and exercise it daily.

We believe that humans have an emotional nature and need that must be fed during every workday. This emotional need is a condition of work that an employer helps employees satisfy (or not) and that is as essential as proper lighting. In fact, this emotional engagement focus is a "lighting"---an enlightenment, an inspiration--- that enables the employee to work to their best capability. Those employers who acknowledge, understand, and provide for this basic human need, this proper lighting of the workplace, will be the organizations that earn the loyalty of their employees because humans stay where their needs are satisfied. Even more, humans are eager to stay where they thrive. They are more enthused about their work more of their day.

That word *enthusiasm* is interesting in this context of missing workplace elements. Employers often ask for more enthusiasm from employees. The original meaning of the word *enthusiasm* was "to be divinely inspired." Perhaps the time is right to talk about that missing element to thrive, the element that has been missing in all the total quality management and organizational development programs: emotional engagement in the daily work organization.

It's not new to say that to be a whole person you have to tend to your physical, intellectual, and emotional needs. The new recognition is that we don't practice what we preach. We don't tend to all those needs at work. It's the rational, logical elements of human nature that we are familiar with and encourage. We're taught to compartmentalize work and emotions, to prohibit any language that is too emotional. Even talking about taking an emotional perspective in the workplace is often suppressed. Do say, "Let's have some team spirit here!" Don't say, "Listen to your emotions." Do say, "Let's have some enthusiasm!" Don't say, "Listen for inspiration." We're inhibited when it comes to taking an emotional perspective in organizations.

The act of inhibiting emotional perspectives causes emotional and even physical illness. James Pennebaker, the psychologist, researcher and professor at University of Texas at Austin, in hundreds of studies on the power of expressing emotions, measured the significant increase in immune system effectiveness as humans disclose feelings around life experiences. But we are taught to inhibit any emotional nature that we might have

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while we are at work. Jose Arguelles, the Spanish philosopher, said: “When a man is deprived of the power of expression, he will express himself in a drive for power.” We are taught to inhibit our emotional nature in the workplace culture. Relationships suffer from power competition. Health care costs to organizations rise. The whole person---integrated physically, mentally, and emotionally---is not supported.

## **What does it mean to support emotional engagement?**

It’s interesting to notice that since the beginning of the written word, in every age and generation, and many times in each generation, the same question is asked by individual human beings. That common question is: “Why am I here?” It seems that this common question articulates a universal human need: the need to matter, the need to have a legacy, to leave a mark that says, “I was here and I mattered.” We believe that if the organization can honestly support that need to matter, then that organization will matter more to its customers. The organization’s need to have a legacy is addressed. As each Self in the organization is supported to survive and thrive and have a legacy, the organization will survive and thrive and have a legacy.

The mission, therefore, is to equip employers and employees with the process and the tools to satisfy the need we are wired for, that we inherently have, as humans: the need to recognize meaning in my life and my place in that big picture. We are wired to strive to satisfy this need even while we are at work. This wiring is not turned off just because we are in the organization where we “make a living.”

We’re taught in sales training, leadership training, interpersonal training, communication training, and diversity training how to “read” others. We are not taught practical ways to read our Selves. We are not taught to watch for changes in our own body language like we are taught to look for those changes in others. We are not taught this emotional competence skill of seeing in---“in-sight”---as an energy resource. We are not taught these skills. But they are teachable. They are learnable.

There is a timely example (considering a current health problem focus) of missing the Self perspective. We are not taught in school to notice the feeling of hunger. We are taught to eat at lunchtime or dinnertime or have a cookie after school. The size of the diet industry attests to our inability to read ourselves as effort is spent on helping people know the difference between hunger and emotional eating. Our sight is directed toward the outside, rather than toward our core nature, as we find ourselves obese compared to other cultures.

What if we set as one of our objectives to support our human engagement need, developing emotional competence to manage our emotional energy as an untapped resource? Think of it like energy management to operate the emotional as well as the rational energy in organizations more effectively.

Can we be concerned with learning how to “read” our Selves, our emotional nature? Can we be concerned with learning “in sight,” making emotional connections within us and to the world without? Can we tap this energy resource? How can we create a structure in our organizations to practice these skills to thrive?

## **Conclusion**

Efforts in organizational development have missed a basic human need: emotional engagement. The inspired and thriving organization is the container where the Self--the physically, mentally, and emotionally integrated individual--can really emerge and develop. The inspired and thriving organization develops one Self at a time by equipping employees with pragmatic tools to inspire themSelves. Employees equipped with pragmatic tools to inspire themSelves develop inspired and thriving organizations. When the organization equips each Self with tools to satisfy the human emotional engagement need, that’s when the employee really “makes a living.” Emotional energy is put to work. The result...employee loyalty...customer loyalty...and a lot more. There is a benefit for the complete Self, which is taken home, brought back to the organization, and taken home again each day. Enthusiasm is realized and palpable more of each day.

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<sup>i</sup> *Harvard Business Review*, March-April 1994