

Stop Telling People What to Do, Engage their Hearts Instead

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Evan Hackel, CEO, Tortal Training & Engage Consulting

I am a CEO, and I have worked with many other top executives during my career. So I speak from experience when I say that this could be the biggest day-to-day frustration many leaders face . . .

“I tell people what to do, but they don't do it.”

This issue comes up time and time again. It makes being a leader much harder than it should be.

You talk, you communicate, you spell things out, but somehow only a small percentage of your initiatives come to completion. So you bear down, discipline people, or offer incentives, and those solutions don't work either.

And do you know what could be an even bigger problem? People do what you tell them to do but there was in fact a better or simpler way that you didn't know - perhaps one that your people could have told you if you were willing to listen.

I have found a solution to this problem, which I call Engaged Leadership, let me summarize a few of its key points here so you can test it and get it working for you.

What Is Engaged Leadership?

Engagement is founded on the belief that when you align people and create an organization where everyone works together in partnership, that organization becomes vastly more successful. It isn't a single action you take just once. It is an ongoing, dynamic business practice that has the power to transform your organization, your people, you and ultimately, your success.

What Do Engaged Leaders Do Differently?

Engaged leaders believe that it is not enough to tell people to do. They understand that if they want to unlock the full potential of any organization and its people, it is necessary to involve people's minds, creativity and emotions. I called it Engagement with an “I” because it gets people Involved, Invested and Inspired.

Getting Started as an Engaged Leader

That all might sound theoretical. But it isn't. Here are some ways you can start Engaged Leadership today. I invite you to try them and see for yourself how quickly they can improve your effectiveness as a leader.

- **Set aside personal opinions about what works and what doesn't and let people test their own ideas.** Of course, any good CEO will stop employees from doing things that are sure to be disastrous. But the fact is, too many leaders step in, err on the side of caution, and stifle people's inborn drive to strive for great things. I would urge you to get your ego out of the mix and let people try things that are unproven or even risky. More often than not, the results they achieve will greatly surpass your expectations.
- **Don't just listen well, constantly look for nuggets of value in what other people are saying.** Early in my career I thought I was a good listener. In fact, people told me that I was because I sat quietly, didn't interrupt, and paid attention. But a time came when I realized that although I was attentive, I was only listening closely so I could catch faults in other people's statements so I could prove them wrong and

advance my own plans. I turned that around, began to listen for nuggets of high value, and then developed them in concert with the person who had suggested them. The result was a quiet revolution in my leadership effectiveness.

- **Build a top management team that is positively disruptive.** That means resisting the temptation to surround yourself with “yes people,” “people who are just like me” and people who prefer the comfort of “group think” to shaking things up. Also have the courage to recruit people who are genuinely better than you at doing certain things, and let them. Their efforts will free you and your results will soar.
- **Ask for help and offer help.** Both activities are signs of strength, not weakness.

A Case Study of Engaged Leadership

In case you think that all this is theoretical, it is not, as this story proves. Last year I had a call from one of my clients, a franchise brand. I cannot give the company's name in this article, but you know them. They have branded walk-in locations in hundreds of cities and towns across America – probably near where you live.

The caller explained that the company had a very specific problem they wanted me to solve, which my contact summarized as, “Our annual conference is coming up in a few months, attendance has been in the low 20% for the last few years, and we would like you to get more of our store owners to attend. We will be rolling out a new store design and showing it to our people and that's why we want to get most of our store-owners there.”

Our team called a number of franchisees to ask, “How do you feel about going to your annual conference?” Most of them responded by saying something like, “Oh, the conferences are fun and I get to socialize, but I never learn anything that the company isn't going to tell me later on anyway. So why go?” Further we found the franchisees didn't feel like they were involved at the meeting, they felt like they were being talk at and being sold things. Those comments made it clear that the rollout of the new design was going to be a disaster.

I called my contact back in headquarters and suggested that instead of “selling” a completed new design, the company should structure the convention as an opportunity to let franchise owners come out to see the three different concepts, critique them, and give feedback.

All of a sudden, there was real value for people to go. They weren't going to be talked at, they were going to be listened to. In other words, they were being engaged. The event sold out, to the point where no hotel rooms were available in the original hotel or two hotels nearby. In the end, there was more than 85% attendance. The meeting was a huge success. Currently the new design is in testing in the field, but assuming customer reaction is strong and positive, there's an anxious group of franchisees that are ready and willing to convert their locations. Involvement and listening were the keys to this success story. A traditional hierarchical approach would have met with failure.

Putting the Power of Engagement to Work

I could report more times when engagement has achieved great things. But in the end, all the stories I could tell you are not as important as the new chapters you can write in your own leadership journey. I invite you to add engagement to your leader's toolbox as you watch your story unfold.

About the Author

Evan Hackel, the creator of the concept of Engaged Leadership, is a recognized business and franchise expert and consultant. Evan is also a professional speaker and author. Evan is Principal and Founder of [Engage Consulting](#), a consulting firm headquartered in Woburn, Massachusetts. A leader in the field of training as well, Evan serves as CEO of Tortal Training, a Charlotte North Carolina-based firm that specializes in developing and implementing interactive training solutions for companies in all sectors. To learn more about Inage Consulting and Evan's book [Engaging Leadership](#), visit [Engage.net](#).

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