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Leadership can be tricky. Sometimes you need to be direct and involved, and other times you can be more hands off. Different scenarios, situations, and people require different approaches.

If you're someone who wants to transition from a “command-and-control” style of leadership to one that “partners for performance,” then your workforce must transition from “waiting to be told” to “taking the initiative.” This requires people to be self leaders.

Many organizations put emphasis on managers to delegate and “let go.” Sometimes there is a valid need for this, but more and more there is emphasis for the most capable individuals to pick up the ball and run with it. Organizations where people are competently taking the initiative and getting things done without waiting to be told are organizations with an abundance of self leaders. And an organization filled with self leaders is one that truly has an engaged workforce.

Why is it important to have an engaged workforce? Because a disengaged one is costly, especially if those disengaged are “actively disengaged” (workers who openly express negative attitudes). According to a survey conducted by Gallup, 17% of the American workforce are actively disengaged, costing the U.S. economy approximately \$500 billion per year. These actively disengaged workers are also notorious for being absent from work 3.5 more days a year than other workers, totaling 86.5 million days of lost productivity in all. When it comes down to it, actively disengaged workers, compared with their colleagues, are significantly less productive, less loyal to their companies, less satisfied with their personal lives, and more stressed and insecure about their work.

So how engaged is your workforce? Maybe the answer is obvious. Maybe

it's harder to tell, especially if there is a perception of inconsistency. A good place to start is with a survey to get input from your workforce. I recommend administering one that consists of the following 12 core questions. Responses to these questions will allow you to see and understand links between levels of employee engagement, productivity, growth, and profitability. Included with each question is an example of how an engaged person would respond.

1) *Do I know what is expected of me at work?* “I have clarified what my manager and organization expect of me in my role. I have made it my business to obtain agreed-upon key responsibility areas and corresponding goals.

2) *Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?* “I take the initiative to ask for and obtain the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.”

3) *At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?* “I find the opportunity to do what I do best every day.”

4) *In the last 7 days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?* “In the past 7 days, I have solicited and received specific feedback regarding my work. I have internally recognized my good efforts, and, where needed, elicited acknowledgment for doing good work from those who matter to me.”

5) *Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?* “I initiate one-on-one meetings with my supervisor to discuss the ongoing direction and support I need to pursue and achieve my goals.”

6) *Does someone at work encourage my development?* “I have fostered a mentoring relationship that encourages my development.”

7) *At work, do my opinions seem to count?* “I have presented ideas, offered my opinions, and proactively solved

problems in a way that communicates my due diligence and allows others to buy into my solutions without worrying about the solution's viability or feeling threatened by my assertiveness.”

8) *Does the mission or purpose of my company make me feel my job is important?* “I have aligned my personal life vision and work-related purpose with the mission and purpose of my organization, making me feel that my job is important and supports my own values and point of view.”

9) *Are my coworkers committed to doing quality work?* “I have mentored and peer-coached my coworkers and have taken personal responsibility to help create a team environment where we are committed to doing quality work for the greater good.”

10) *Do I have a best friend at work?* “I have fostered meaningful relationships and made connections with people at work.”

11) *In the last 6 months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?* “On a regular basis, I have taken the initiative to confer with my manager regarding my progress and his or her impressions of how I'm meeting expectations.”

12) *This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?* “In the past year, I have created opportunities at work and in my personal life to learn and grow.”

If your people respond to the preceding questions with a majority of positive answers similar to the ones I provided, then chances are good that your organization has an empowering culture that supports the development of self leaders. You most likely have an engaged workforce. If your people respond with more negative answers, then they are probably disengaged, and you will have work to do.

~ The End ~