

# ENHANCING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF THE IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR

Dale Carnegie Training  
White Paper



DALE CARNEGIE®  
TRAINING

## **ENHANCING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF THE IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR**

Engagement, the employee's commitment to his or her organisation and the willingness to provide extra effort when needed and perform beyond expectations, has become a focus area for management. Engagement is not about job satisfaction. Fully engaged employees are motivated and dedicated to making the organisation a success. At the most simplistic level, engaged employees lead to happy, loyal customers and repeat business. Engagement also leads to improvement in retention levels. In short, it impacts the bottom line.

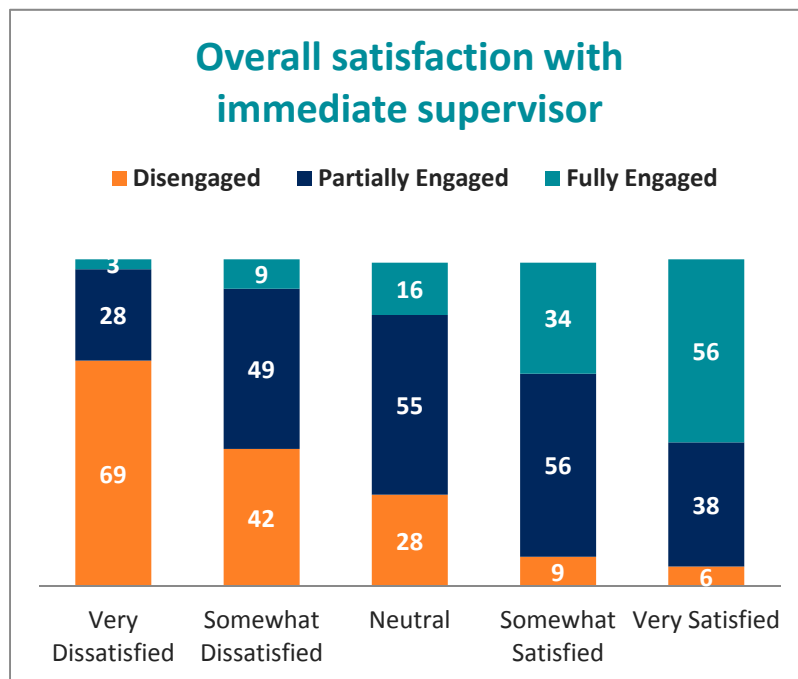
Dale Carnegie recently commissioned a European study that looked at employee engagement throughout the region. A review of the responses from over 1600 people in Europe showed that although there are multiple factors affecting engagement, the personal relationships between a manager and his or her direct reports is the most influential.

## THE VALUE OF THE IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR

The immediate supervisor performs a pivotal role. He or she connects an employee to senior management and vice versa, becoming the primary conduit for the flow of information within an organisation. Top down, management imparts its goals and values through the supervisor who can best explain to individuals what these mean and how they may affect employees. The immediate supervisor ensures that employees' voices are heard, listens to their concerns and responds to them, and passes that feedback to senior management.

It is said that employees don't leave companies; they leave their bosses. What managers do, how they behave, what they say and just as importantly how they say it, affects employees' attitudes and perceptions about their jobs and the organisation as a whole. Employees who are unhappy and dissatisfied with their immediate supervisors are less likely to identify with the organisation's vision and more likely to be absent or to resign. Employees who are engaged take pride in their work, support organisational goals and are less willing to change jobs for a minor increase in salary.

Employees were asked to rate satisfaction with their immediate supervisor. Fifty-six per cent of those employees who were very satisfied with their direct manager were engaged, and an astonishing 69% of those who were very dissatisfied with their immediate supervisor were disengaged.



## THE EMOTIONAL EFFECT

While the role of emotions in the workplace has been explored in detail in another Dale Carnegie Training white paper, “Emotional Drivers of Employee Engagement,” it is important to note that fully engaged employees express feelings of enthusiasm, empowerment, confidence and value based on their interactions with their direct managers. While a good supervisor makes all employees feel valued and confident, a poor supervisor irritates them and makes them feel uncomfortable.

The importance of this cannot be overstated. The relationship to the immediate supervisor impacts the investment an organisation makes in its people. When supervisors demonstrate constructive and beneficial leader behaviours, the employee experiences positive emotions and feels good about the organisation as a whole. Alternatively, negative leader reactions and behaviours cause negative emotions leading to disengagement, lower morale and decreased productivity. Moving disengaged employees to full engagement leads to an improvement in employee retention rates, fewer sick days and less absenteeism.

## PRACTICAL ENGAGEMENT

Too often supervisors get caught up in the day-to-day business of managing. It's easy to imagine if there is no immediate crisis that everything is running smoothly. But to achieve full engagement from workers, the line manager needs to be proactive, exhibiting strong leadership and fostering a positive working environment.

Good supervisors know employees need to develop the right skills to work efficiently. For example, new employees need more guidance than those who have been with the organisation for a few years. In fact, only 27 per cent of European employees who had been with their companies for between 6 months and one year said they were fully engaged. While they are optimistic and excited to advance within the company, they are unsure of their roles and responsibilities. To succeed, they need feedback to understand what they are doing right and encouragement to help them improve their performance. Immediate supervisors can turn that initial level of enthusiasm into full engagement by setting clear goals and developing their staff. There is also a need for the supervisors to continue training to maintain high levels of engagement.

*The leaders' behaviours are the primary driver of engagement levels within the organisation.*

Employees who feel their immediate supervisor displays strong leadership, positive standards and interest in them on a personal level are more engaged.

Successful managers lead by example, which generates enthusiasm and inspires employees to work harder. Supervisors who delegate and trust employees to carry out tasks empower their staff to make decisions.

Open and honest communication between employee and supervisor allows for greater understanding of both expectations and job performance. Employees who trust and feel respected by their supervisor will be confident that they can speak freely without fear of repercussions. Conversely, a supervisor who fails to communicate openly may lose the confidence of his direct reports and cause them to doubt their own ability or the ideals of the organisation. Supervisors who communicate well, and trust and respect their staff, generate the highest levels of engagement.

These consistent, positive interactions with employees promote a spirit of teamwork and cooperation. However, effective immediate supervisors realise a one-size-fits-all approach does not lead to full engagement. For example, disengagement is higher amongst post graduates than university graduates. Immediate supervisors can ensure these employees feel valued by recognising their talents. Similarly, lower income and lower level employees are amongst the most disengaged. The role of the immediate supervisor is vital in ensuring these employees, feel their job is valuable and understand the contribution they make.

Employees perceive their value as an individual through the prism of the immediate supervisor. Recognition of their contribution, along with feedback and encouragement on their performance from their manager, leads to increased confidence, commitment and achievement. Failure to recognise and reward good work can negatively impact employee morale and productivity. Many respondents say that their supervisor respects them, but fewer mentioned that their supervisor provides feedback or encouragement to improve. This last aspect is what most effectively generates engagement.



## THE CARING MANAGER

It pays dividends for line managers to get to know their staff as this translates into higher levels of engagement and all the consequent positive effects to the organisation. An employee wants to feel that the immediate supervisor is interested in him or her as a person. An employee wants a boss who cares about his or her life outside work and its effects on job performance. Supervisors who get to know their employees on a personal level and care about their private lives can counteract the disengagement that disproportionately affects middle-aged workers.

These caring actions are some of the most important enhancers of engagement. Training the immediate supervisor to care about employees has a major impact on business performance, reducing staff turnover and heightening productivity. This leads to more satisfied customers and increased sales.

Employees have a positive relationship with supervisors who care. There is a dramatic opportunity to boost engagement by managers demonstrating a caring attitude and behaviour to staff.

Dale Carnegie Training has programmes proven to help management develop the necessary interpersonal skills for supervisors to become strong leaders and caring managers. Building a team of effective supervisors will ensure an engaged workforce leading to increased productivity, quality of service and higher profitability.