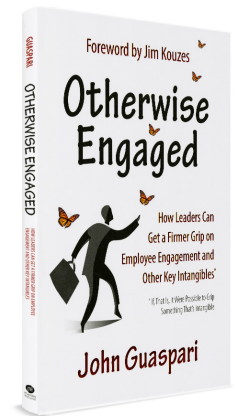


Otherwise Engaged

How Leaders Can Get a Firmer Grip on Employee Engagement and Other Key Intangibles

by **John Guaspari**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Leaders know that they need to get a grip on the Intangibles to raise employee engagement. What are The Intangibles? They are the “soft stuff,” such as employee engagement, empowerment, trust, respect, and company values. *Otherwise Engaged* is about leadership and The Intangibles.

Leaders know that getting a grip on The Intangibles will lead to better business outcomes. Businesses work hard to find the best practices for helping to increase empowerment and engagement, and work to build trust and respect among their employees. But time and again, many leaders find that their employee engagement activities fail. Why?

Author John Guaspari teaches about why businesses’ employee engagement activities and other attempts at fixing “the people stuff” aren’t working. He outlines a paradigm shift to help business leaders focus on what will really lead to change. Leaders will learn why creating an ethos of respect and a focus on the other will maximize employee engagement and lead to greater business success and ROI on human capital.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- What the Intangibles are.
- Why it’s hard, yet necessary, to get a grip on The Intangibles.
- Why you need to infuse respect into everything.
- How to increase employee engagement leading to maximum efficiency.

Getting a Grip on The Intangibles

This is a book about leadership and engagement. It is indisputable that there is a correlation between high levels of employee engagement and improved business results. Therefore, leaders must attend to engagement along with the other “soft stuff” – the people stuff – such as empowerment, trust, respect, and company values.

Leaders know this, and try hard to take action on this, following what they believe to be the best practices. Leaders have a strong bias toward logical, rational, data-driven solutions to problems. But you can't apply utilitarian prescriptions to what is essentially a problem of the spirit. That's why so many employee engagement activities fail.

You need to recognize that The Intangibles are...intangible. They are not rational, and so cannot be handled with a rational approach. It's not that they are irrational; it is that they are “other than” rational – they exist on another plane.

When we discuss The Intangibles, it is very important that we choose our words carefully. Most of us are more comfortable with rational, left-brained thinking, so we tend to use words that bias us toward that type of thinking. Many of us feel uncomfortable dealing with “softer” topics, yet we realize that we need to do so. We need to consciously make an effort to use our right-brains when handling these topics.

Let's take a look at each Intangible up close.

Engagement

Strong engagement among employees has been shown by research to correlate with dramatically better business results. “Engagement” is generally used to connote some form of *interaction* or *connection*.

But we need to be careful how we define “engagement.” While it can signify things coming together, such as an engagement to be married, or two gears interlocking and being “engaged,” this is not necessarily the meaning of the word that leads to better business results. Many managers think that it is and try to increase employee engagement by doing things like holding off-sites and having break-out groups during meetings.

Often, these types of activities don't work. In fact, they often lead to cynicism and disengagement. That's because the type of engagement that leads to better business results has this definition: *The extent to which a person invests incremental energy and effort into the task at hand.*

There are various models used to illustrate engagement. They share the common characteristic of the need to account for both the rational and emotional dimensions of humans. Both sides need to be addressed.

The currency of the rational side is *information*. So if the problem you are trying to address within your company is not getting the right information to the right people, then you need more engagement defined as interaction and connection.

But what if that is not the problem – what if the problem has more to do with your employees asking: “Why should I care?” or “What does this mean to me?” In that case, you need to be addressing the emotional side of your employees. The currency of emotional commitment is *meaning*. People want meaning from their work. They crave meaning.

Your propelling question should not be: How can we ensure more interaction/connection? Rather, it should be: How can we ensure that we do the things necessary to bring meaning to the other person?

Engagement is not a matter of leaders engaging employees. It's about leaders creating the conditions necessary for employees to be more fully engaged in their work.

Empowerment

Employees who are empowered accomplish more for the company than employees who are always seeking approval or permission before taking any action.

People don't get a feeling of empowerment by being told they are empowered. Rather, it's a sense of assuredness that people have as they do their jobs. They feel safe to exercise their own judgment. Empowerment is a feeling that the other person has, not an assertion made by the leader. Leaders need to take a step back and consider the world from the point of view of the other person.

Trust and Respect

While engagement and empowerment are relatively new goals in the business world, everyone has heard of trust and respect throughout their lives and knows that they are important. However, many employers are unsure what to do to increase trust and respect among employees, so they make up some reasonable action steps and call it a day. Clearly, this is not helping them to meet their business objectives.

In order to accomplish anything, you need to define the

words first. Trust is a feeling, like engagement and empowerment. Trust is a feeling of confident expectation. In order to create an environment of trust, expectations must be very clear. Make them clear, and then do your due diligence to ensure that you have an acceptable degree of confidence that your expectations will be met.

Respect is defined in the dictionary as “a sense of the worth or excellence of a person.” But like the other Intangibles, we need to be precise in our definition. The definition that we should use is: “Giving due consideration to the other.” It’s important that we say it in the singular like this, rather than saying “respect others.” We need to give consideration to each person.

Values

Businesses want to project a clear and shared sense of values. The best way to promulgate your company values is to live them. Be guided by them, use them when making decisions and making hires. Set an example and guide your employees to follow your lead.

People are very good at noticing any gaps between purported values and actual behaviors. So don’t talk about the values too much. The words and concepts become devalued if you talk about them too much, and people will be on the lookout for hypocritical behavior.

Also be careful to make it clear that company values aren’t meant to be exactly the same as personal values. That can lead to trouble. Make it clear that you are stressing company values not so people will change their personal values to match them, but in order for them to decide if your company is the right place for them.

“The People Stuff”

- All of what happens in the running of a business flows from what’s done or not done by people. Therefore, the business is the sum total of the actions taken by those people.
- The effectiveness of those actions depends on the degree to which those people are engaged – the extent to which they bring the full measure of their skills, wisdom, and experience.
- Engagement is fundamentally affected by a leader’s skill at attending to “the people stuff,” a.k.a. The Intangibles.
- Therefore, separating “the people stuff” from “running the business” is a false distinction.

- Accepting this is step one on getting a grip on the Intangibles because it forces you to do something effective.

There are several historical precedents that demonstrate how changing one’s focus can dramatically improve business results:

- **Total Quality Management (TQM)** was a shift in business practices that occurred in the 1980s. It changed quality management from inspecting products for defects after production to preventing those defects in the first place by looking at the process that produced defects and fixing the process. Businesses learned that all of the careful inspection systems set up for after production had the effect of blocking their line of sight to a much better and more profitable way of doing things.
- **Just-In-Time Inventory (JIT)** was a revolution in business in which people learned that excess inventory doesn’t insulate you from the effects of quality problems. Rather, it insulates those problems from their solutions. Its main principle is that businesses should carry no inventory other than just the amount needed, where it’s needed, when it’s needed.
- **Lean** extended these ideas of removing the excess to other parts of business besides manufacturing. Businesses learned the value of “running lean” in administration, customer service, and all areas by removing extra steps that didn’t add value.

If you think about it in this context, you begin to see a pattern. Could we look at The Intangibles in the same way? Might we be implementing programs and processes to improve our results regarding The Intangibles that are actually blocking our line of sight to the real issues? Could it be that putting up posters about values and respect and having break-out sessions to discuss empowerment are actually drowning out the actual problems and solutions?

Respect Revisited

Remember, the proper definition of respect is “giving due consideration to the other.” Respect is different from the other Intangibles in that it is the only one over which all of us have full control. It’s entirely up to each person as to whether or not he or she will infuse respect into whatever circumstances are at hand. Respect is also the only Intangible that is an input rather than an output. Respect is the fuel that will get you to the other Intangibles.

Be guided by the need to infuse maximum respect into everything. As a leader, you should be thinking things like: “Who

are the people attending this meeting? What's important to them? What's most likely to resonate with them?" You are giving due consideration to the other. Thinking this way will lead to making things more productive.

Lack of respect (and other Intangibles) is a complex situation to be managed rather than a problem to be solved. A lot of logically-minded people are much more drawn to problem solving. If you don't look at it as a "problem" you change how people approach it.

The power of a more single-minded focus on respect has to do with fostering an atmosphere of what we have come to label as trust, which in turn will help people have a deeper feeling of what we have come to label as empowerment, which in turn will result in people who are more deeply and fully characterized by what we have come to label as engagement.

All of this will result in higher levels of efficiency and ROI to the business.

Solipsism

We have a tendency to not give sufficient consideration to the other. This tendency can be called *solipsism*, which is a theory in philosophy that your own existence is the only thing that is real or can be known.

Solipsism, both institutional and individual, is the root cause of our inability to attend more effectively to The Intangibles.

If solipsism is the disease, then respect is the antidote. Respect begets trust begets empowerment begets engagement begets a greater return on your investment in human capital begets a better financial ROI for your shareholders.

What Should You Do Right Now?

- Stop talking about trust, empowerment, engagement, and values. If you must mention them, use them as adjectives rather than nouns. You want "empowered employees," for example, not "empowerment." Focus on the people.
- Create an ethos of respect. Make sure everyone understands that it means giving due consideration to the other.
- Introduce the concept of solipsism and make sure others understand that it's corrosive to the culture you want to create.
- Embrace the fact that The Intangibles are intangible. They're not like the rational/logical issues with which business people are comfortable dealing.
- Become otherwise engaged: Adopt an approach to engagement that is other than the one traditionally used, and focus on how everything we do affects the other.



For the past thirty years, John Guaspari has helped leaders take on the challenge of being more effective at attending to the so-called "soft stuff." He has worked with and made presentations for hundreds of corporate clients in scores of industries, and he has delivered some 1500 intangibles-related presentations, seminars, and workshops. As a result, John has gained an enviable reputation for his ability to unravel complex subject matter and communicate it in the kind of accessible and engaging way that leads to real learning.

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