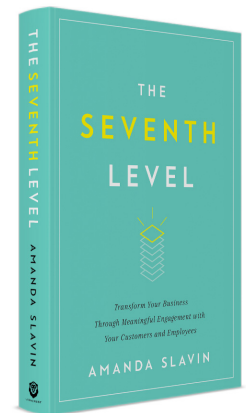


The Seventh Level

Transform Your Business Through Meaningful Engagement with Your Customers and Employees

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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

There are countless ways to connect with your customers, who can use the tools at their fingertips to widely publish their criticisms and positive feelings about your company. Companies that have been around for hundreds of years can disappear in an instant if an upstart competitor co-opts their market share by earning more brand loyalty through deeper customer connections.

The Seventh Level: Transform Your Business Through Meaningful Engagement with Your Customers and Employees teaches business leaders a structure for garnering the attention of their customers and employees and engaging with them on deeper and deeper levels.

Author Amanda Slavin explains each level of engagement and how to get there. The culmination of this journey is the Seventh Level of Engagement: when your personal values and beliefs align with another's message, and you derive meaning and even identity from connecting with this brand, person, or concept.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- What the Seventh Level Framework is and how it can help you.
- The characteristics of each level of customer engagement.
- What you should do to move your customers to the next level.
- How to apply the framework to your internal relationships.

Introduction To The Seventh Level Framework

The Seventh Level Engagement Framework is a structure for creating engagement—for garnering the attention of your employees and customers. It can help you create a meaningful connection with other humans—be they employees, customers, peers, or stakeholders—and make changes within your company to increase engagement.

There are seven distinct levels of engagement. At the Seventh Level, customers are active participants in building and supporting the brands, companies, people, employers, or ideas they love.

Start with Your Seventh Level Statement. Before you can walk through this framework and reach the Seventh Level with someone else, you have to determine your own Seventh Level Statement.

Ask yourself: Who are you? What do you stand for? What do you believe in? What do you do what you do?

When you don't know your own Seventh Level, you end up trying to be something you're not, and your attempts to connect fail. Once you determine your Seventh Level Statement, you can use it to create meaningful, engaged relationships with the people in your life.

Level One: Disengagement

Someone at Level One is disinterested. Bored. Idle with their work. They're avoiding tasks, interactions, or attempts at communication.

At Level One, your audience doesn't respond to your efforts. You have to ask yourself if you're reaching out in the way your audience best receives information. Do they use snail mail or email? Have you announced your product in the channels they frequent? Do they use the same social media platforms you do? Don't try to be something you are not. Instead, identify how customers connect with who you are.

The beauty of online communication is having access to real-time data and metrics. Conduct market research to find out as much information about your customer as possible. Then target, optimize, test, pivot, and make sure you're converting at a very low-cost point. If it's not working, continue to pivot.

Level Two: Unsystematic Engagement

At Level Two, you need to clarify your communication. This can be a particularly huge issue in marketing. Companies often use jargon that no one understands, and they are surprised when customers don't want to buy anything from them. Or they want to communicate that they are a fresh, clean brand but choose colors that remind someone of McDonald's. The message you put out in the world needs to be aligned with your Seventh Level lens and your brand identity needs to communicate what you're trying to convey.

Think about what you are saying to your customers. You should be surveying your customers to understand the language they understand. A good rule of thumb: If you can't explain to an eight-year-old what you do, then your target customer probably won't get it either.

When you're communicating with employees, don't ask, "Does that make sense?" No one wants to admit not understanding. Instead, ask, "Did I explain that correctly?" This takes the pressure off them and puts it on you, the leader. And make your employees feel comfortable with the idea that they can come to you anytime if they don't get something.

Level Three: Frustrated Engagement

Level Three is characterized by a person demonstrating interest, only to have that interest wane due to distraction. Limit the distractions for your internal and external customers, because the world is distracting enough.

Make sure your website doesn't take too long to load. When a customer is asked to go to a landing page, make sure the pop-up you add to that page is relevant to what you're asking them to do and why they're there. Avoid vague messages: have clear calls to action.

Social media is inherently distracting. It's important to use the tools instead of letting the tools use you. If social media isn't employed in a way that pushes your customer base to a higher level of engagement by encouraging a specific targeted action, you're only hurting your messaging efforts.

The same thinking applies to a brick-and-mortar store. Work on creating engagement and meaning with your storefront instead of chaos and distraction. And to presentations. Tons of words and very few visuals don't speak to anyone.

This applies to your internal customers too. As a leader, how often do we ask something of an employee, then

Slack them with something else, then email them about yet another thing? We are constantly keeping our employees at Level Three: Frustrated Engagement, when we should set boundaries for each other.

Level Four: Structure-Dependent Engagement

Level Four is characterized by a person's active response to instruction when the suggested action isn't too demanding. In marketing, this may look like a social media engagement, such as when you post an image that says, "Comment below with your favorite ice cream flavor," and people comment.

Social media engagement in the form of likes, comments, retweets, click-throughs, and accumulated followers is, for many people, synonymous with meaningful engagement, and this is especially true at Level Four. The problem is that so many people are settling for Level Four engagement. This is more about tools using us than us using the tools. It says nothing about the quality of the response.

The metrics of how people interact with you on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are crucial for measuring the effectiveness of your social media campaign and accomplishing goals such as generating leads and sales. But they aren't nearly enough to build legitimate brand loyalty. Use your Seventh Level Statement as your guiding force so you aren't obsessed with vanity metrics for no reason. Set a higher reason for the work you are doing and how it fits into a larger narrative.

Depending on the size of your audience, to maintain trust with subgroups who have shifted to lower than desired levels, you might need to segment your efforts—to customize how you communicate to each group.

In the workplace, Level Four engagement is common among low- and midlevel employees who clock in, complete the tasks they're given, and clock out. They lack initiative. But today, many people are looking for flexibility, a commitment to health and well-being, and purpose. This requires moving past Level Four.

Level Five: Self-Regulated Interest

Level Five is characterized by excitement, but the engagement is driven by self-interest rather than an interest in another person or organization.

Level Five in marketing often entails a sweepstakes, discount, referral code, or other incentive that entices customers to do something because they get something. The incentive isn't sticky, and when done carelessly can cause distraction. You must have a strategy to build a more meaningful relationship based on the incentive.

In the workplace, Level Five can look like giving employees comp days for working overtime—anything that incentivizes going above and beyond the bare minimum.

At Level Five, you still need to use your Seventh Level Statement in determining incentives to use and influencers and partners to work with. If you partner with a celebrity, for example, it's not just about how many followers or how many likes or comments they get but who is following them and what they are saying. Analyze the sentiment behind the comments, not just the number of comments.

Sweepstakes are also a key strategy for Level Five, but they have to mean something. Create a story behind the sweepstakes that communicates your brand.

In the workplace, for higher levels of engagement, you have to understand the needs of your employees, and they have to understand the company's needs. Higher levels of engagement require piquing an employee's interest and paying them the value they deserve. Often, it's not about the money. The key is finding out what drives or motivates your employees to do their job well and engage with the company.

Level Six: Critical Engagement

Level Six is characterized by a person feeling motivated and inspired enough to set goals to make a positive change in their life.

Level Six is a time to publicly share your core values that set your culture and distinguish you from competitors. It's about doubling down and ensuring you are living by the values you communicate. Make sure you are authentically aligned with your Seventh Level Statement when identifying your core values and communicate these core values so they are easily understood. Create a campaign around those core values to change the way people think about their lives.

Your internal goals must match your marketing message. Make sure you're walking the walk internally. Companies can inspire someone to become an activist or just to live differently, change their routine, or feel a little bit more strongly about a topic.

Testimonials are a huge part of Level Six: How did someone's life change by using your product? You don't have to be a philanthropic brand to inspire others.

In the workplace, companies that are structured as a bureaucracy are not set up to engage with employees at Levels Six and Seven. You want employees to feel a connection to the company's core values and start to adapt them to their personal lives. Moving toward a more self-organized workplace structure, away from a traditional rigid hierarchy to one that encourages employees to take ownership over their careers, is a great way to strive for the Sixth Level of engagement in the workplace.

Level Seven: Literate Thinking

When loyalty doesn't stop at a purchase and part of a customer's identity comes from the brands they use, the customer moves to the Seventh Level.

We're bombarded by content, writing, words, images, and videos all the time. How can brands that strive for Seventh Level Engagement connect meaningfully, deeply, and emotionally with their customers? At this level, stories are crucial. Books are a significant part of the Seventh Level. Sharing in long form in books and on LinkedIn leads to higher-level engagement.

At this level, it is about including your customers in your story and making them the hero. Make them feel special, seen, and heard, and they'll carry what you're doing forward. Companies announce exclusive offers, launch experiences, and new products to Seventh Level customers the day before the general public as a "thank you" for being

loyal. This also activates Seventh Level customers to bring other customers up from lower levels.

Even these customers may be distracted by a million other things. It's important that you create a pathway for people to stay committed, which means that you have to also be committed to them. Loyalty and retention programs come to mind. You need to emotionally incentivize your customers by making them feel special.

This is a lot of work, but this relationship—and your job—will get easier, not harder, over time, the more energy and effort you put into it. That's because at Level Seven you are cultivating brand advocates who can spread your message just as effectively as you can! Maintaining Level Seven relationships is what separates the world's most beloved brands from those people forget about.

In the workplace, at the Seventh Level, employees are personally connected to the purpose of the company, not only to the benefits or their pay. They work there because of what the company stands for and does on a daily basis. A company should prioritize making its top-performing and most bought-in employees feel appreciated for their hard work and dedication to the organization's goals and values.

When you reach the Seventh Level, you'll see massive returns. Use the Seventh Level Engagement Framework across your entire organization. It's a flashlight shining light on how to build connections that can be used in every part of your life.



Amanda Slavin is the founder and CEO of the award-winning brand consulting firm CatalystCreativ. Amanda guides brands like Coca-Cola, Google, and WeWork to do good for the world without having to sacrifice their bottom line. She's spoken at events like SXSW and TED about how this framework is the future of meaningful connection, and had her work featured in Inc. magazine, Forbes, Fast Company, Wall Street Journal, and Time magazine.

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