

“ IN OTHER WORDS, HOW CAN WE EXPECT OUR EMPLOYEES TO DELIVER THEIR BEST TO MEET CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS IF THEY ARE VOID OF FULFILMENT AND A SENSE OF PURPOSE? EVERY ORGANISATION IS LOOKING TO INCREASE THE LEVEL OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT BUT THAT CAN ONLY BE SUSTAINABLE IF IT IS MATCHED WITH EQUAL EFFORTS OF INCREASING THE LEVEL OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AS WELL. ”



# THE SILENT CRY OF DISENGAGED AND NEGLECTED EMPLOYEES

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Last week, I was invited to speak to the senior management team of one of the largest paramedic organisations in the world which serves over eight million citizens. What's interesting to note is that while many of its front line employees are busy serving the needs of others, there are increasing signs of dissatisfaction and disengagement, leading to persistent turnovers. This presents a paradoxical scenario—the organisation is caught up with meeting the increasing demands of the public but has been neglecting the internal needs of its employees.

Here lies the danger—the *silent cry* for affirmation and appreciation often goes unheeded in the midst of the ever-increasing demand for high performance and productivity. The question to consider then is this:

*Is it possible to meet increasing client demands without jeopardising the emotional health of employees?*

## THE DEMAND FOR ACCELERATION

No company intentionally sets out not wanting to appreciate its employees. However, with the increasing demand for high performance each passing year and the loud “voice of the

## WHAT CAN MANAGERS DO TO ADDRESS THIS?

customer,” it is not surprising to find that employees feel the gradual distancing every time management announces a new performance goal.

Hence, this demand for acceleration, if not coupled with a corresponding people affirmation plan, will create an employee base which is stretched, strained and stressed.

### Here is the silent cry from stressed-out employees:

*“Boss, when you announce the higher performance measurement, please realise that we also need to feel the passion of wanting to meet those numbers.”*

The challenge for managers is not just to communicate the numbers clearly but to also “humanise” the message, i.e. the ability to connect the emotions with the expectations.

Any Tom, Dick, Harry and Sally can convey numbers but it requires an engaging manager to be able to connect the dots between an organisation’s mission and goals with an employee’s personal aspiration.

Much of the commitment that we make as individuals are based on the emotions of the moment rather than just pure logical thinking.

In fact, Daniel Kahneman, an Israeli-American psychologist, states that 70% of our decisions are based on emotional factors while the remaining 30% are based on logical elements.

Hence, if most of the decision-making factors are emotionally-driven, shouldn't managers be designing their communication methods to be at least 70% impactful from an emotional perspective?

## THE DEMAND FOR ACCOMMODATION

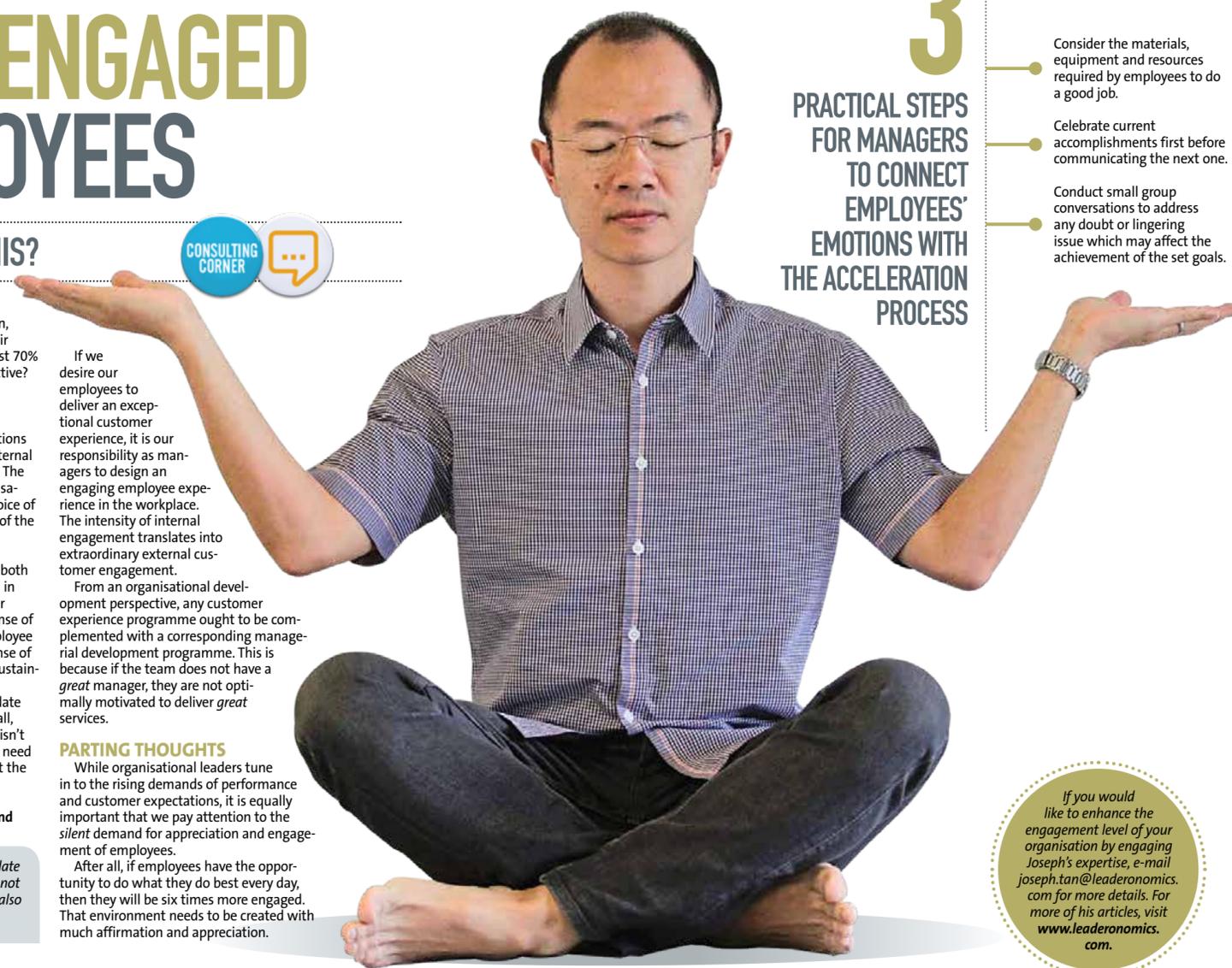
Besides the rising internal expectations of performance, there is the rising external expectations from customers as well. The fact of the matter is that most organisations end up listening more to the “voice of the customer” rather than the “voice of the employee.”

This is not to say that one is more important than the other, but rather, both voices need to be kept in balance and in perspective. Listening to the customer more than the employee creates a sense of expectation, and listening to the employee more than the customer creates a sense of entitlement. Both extremes are not sustainable.

While it is important to accommodate to the needs of the customer—after all, they are the ones who pay the bills—isn't it also a consequential factor that we need to meet the needs of those who meet the needs of these customers?

### Here is the silent cry of disengaged and frustrated employees:

*“Boss, when you seek to accommodate and please the customer, please do not forget that we, as your employees, also have feelings.”*



## 3 PRACTICAL STEPS FOR MANAGERS TO CONNECT EMPLOYEES' EMOTIONS WITH THE ACCELERATION PROCESS

Consider the materials, equipment and resources required by employees to do a good job.

Celebrate current accomplishments first before communicating the next one.

Conduct small group conversations to address any doubt or lingering issue which may affect the achievement of the set goals.

*If you would like to enhance the engagement level of your organisation by engaging Joseph's expertise, e-mail joseph.tan@leaderonomics.com for more details. For more of his articles, visit www.leaderonomics.com.*

■ Joseph Tan is CEO of Leaderonomics Good Monday. His passion is to work with performance-focused leaders to capture the hearts and minds of their employees through a strengths-based and accountability-driven approach. Much of what is shared in the article comes from his work as a Gallup-certified strengths coach.

## 4 WAYS A MANAGER CAN HELP FILL IN THE EMOTIONAL BANK OF EMPLOYEES

### 1 IDENTIFY THE UNIQUE TALENTS OF EVERY MEMBER OF THE TEAM

Knowing the talent of an individual is not the same as knowing the job description of that particular person.

Job descriptions are standard across different individuals but talent is distinctive to each person and no two employees are alike (although they may have the same role).

### 2 SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

According to Gallup, 50% of employees in the United States turn up for work not knowing what their priorities are, i.e.

they are unsure of what their boss *really* wants and why they are doing what they have to do.

Yet, all of them would claim that they are busy! This means that we have employees who are busy but not purposeful.

Sure, there are plenty of tasks to complete, but there is a lack of direction and focus. This may sound ironic but setting clear expectations is a way of affirming the employees' talent.

### 3 MOTIVATE AND ENGAGE

Setting measurements is the easy part. Next is the need for employee motivation. Your ability to motivate is influenced by your ability to present a compelling

story of the purpose of what you and the team do.

### 4 DEVELOP

Every talented employee has a need for his or her talent to be appreciated. This appreciation is demonstrated when the manager makes time to be personally involved in designing a personal growth programme for every employee. Nothing energises an employee as much as the act of being cared for in terms of having a personally designed growth and upskilling programme.

We are wired to look for meaning in our work, and having a personal development track is certainly an enriching experience.



## WHAT DO WORKING PROFESSIONALS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THIS?

DO you think the lack of appreciation is one of the underlying factors of people quitting their jobs? Please elaborate.

*Anonymous, HR consultant and trainer from a local organisation:*

Lack of appreciation, in my opinion, is not necessarily the prime factor for people quitting their jobs. It also depends on the generation. Most millennials (or Generation Y) would expect a fair bit of appreciation from their bosses and the organisation. If this is not forthcoming, they would probably explore other job opportunities, especially if they are looking to fast track their career, which is quite common nowadays. In general, and I believe statistics support this as well, that employees leave bosses and not the company. So in that sense, quitting one's job may be tied to a lack of appreciation, especially when you have a “boss from hell.”

*Joyce K. Noser, Practice Leader, Organisational Surveys & Insights, Willis Towers Watson:*

Yes, absolutely. Feeling underappreciated is becoming a key reason for people to leave their jobs. Employees have a strong need for recognition and want to have a sense of accomplishment that their hard work and skills matter to the organisation. So, when supervisors fail to recognise employee contributions, it can affect overall productivity and engagement in the workplace.

*What would you do to appreciate someone, perhaps a colleague/boss?*

*Anonymous, HR consultant and trainer from a local organisation:* For appreciation, I would give a favourable comment during meetings or do a public sharing where all employees are together. Appreciation

should be expressed in public and made known to everyone so that they value it more and others will strive to emulate the achievement. In some cases and where appropriate, this could be followed up with a formal mail or letter expressing the same.

*Joyce K. Noser, Practice Leader, Organisational Surveys & Insights, Willis Towers Watson:*

Offering appreciation at the workplace can be conducted in different ways. Simply expressing a sense of gratitude through verbal recognition such as “great work” or “thank you” can ensure that employees know you appreciate them, especially when the gesture is done in front of other colleagues. For a more formal recognition, supervisors can consider nominating a subordinate, peer, or boss for employee awards.