



“PUT ME IN COACH. I’M READY TO PLAY TODAY. LOOK AT ME, I CAN BE CENTERFIELD.”

— JOHN FOGERTY

ENGAGEMENT, COACHING & SUCCESS

Here’s a scenario: Alice works for a thriving mid-sized company, managing her piece of the corporate pie effectively and efficiently, as she has for years. She comes to work every day, contributes to meetings, does all that’s assigned to her and files away the usual performance-review praise. Go ask Alice, and she’ll tell you she loves her job.

She won’t tell you about the better processes she’s mapped out in her head; she’s not the department head. She won’t tell you how to streamline delivery; that’s above her pay grade. She certainly won’t tell you how staff restructuring would allow her to take on greater responsibilities; no one asked for her opinion.

Alice is disengagement embodied. Surely the untapped knowledge in her fictional head might be over-dramatized, and it’s fair to say she lacks a certain amount of ambition. Alice isn’t real, but she’s accurate. Companies of all sizes have Alices at all levels, people who routinely do their jobs to the minimum standards, but not much more. They show up, but are they really there?

I won’t bother telling you how important employee engagement is ... try to get anything accomplished with workers who checked out for Christmas 1999 and never really returned. But to reference some movie titles, how do you move from “Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore” to “Alice in Wonderland”?

Coaching, perhaps. Whether done informally or as part of a company-wide initiative, the availability of coaching is a clear signal to the workforce. It shows awareness of their contributions and their potential, it allows their voice to be heard, and it sometimes reminds them that they have a voice. From these simple

seeds, giant sunflowers grow.

But there’s more than a bit of blue sky in that last paragraph. The biggest lie in movie history may well be the memorable “Field of Dreams” line, “If you build it, they will come.” Ask any real estate developer: Construction (availability) does not equal occupancy (engagement).

Like anything, coaching is most effective when it’s voluntary, not mandated. Like the John Fogerty song quote that leads off this column, there are people in every organization who are desperate to play, waiting for their turn at bat, itching to get on base. Coaching gives those people a voice, an opportunity, a stake in the success.

But the real question remains: Does coaching work? Coaches would say, “Of course,” but those not yet drinking this particular Kool-Aid have to be sold, especially on coaching programs that throw the whole pot of spaghetti at the wall to see what sticks. If you bring the hungry to a sumptuous feast, it’s successful. But if you bake a rock at 350 degrees for 45 minutes, all you get is a warm rock. Coaching, in other words, is only as good as the raw material allows.

Which brings us back to Alice, and her low ambition. The real answer to the “Does coaching work” question is almost entirely on the shoulders of those being coached. The desire to learn, to grow, to advance is the real key to engagement. That can’t necessarily be taught, but it can be enhanced

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