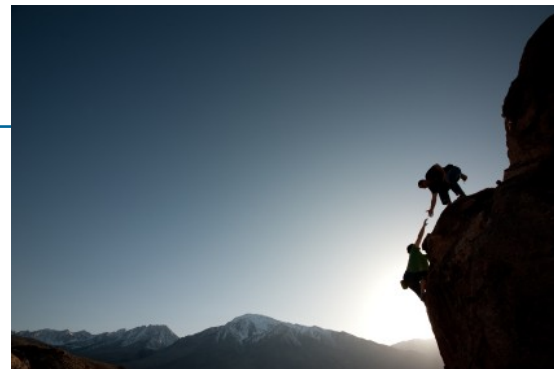


# Leadership and the Engagement Gap

By Bob Pierce



Elsewhere in this edition of The Donington Report we talk about the power of career management in building employee engagement as a means of increasing performance.

## What is leadership’s role in this challenge and how can leaders be effective in leveraging their people’s engagement and consequent performance?

A recent global study into engagement coined a term “The Engagement Gap” which was defined as “the difference between the discretionary effort that employers need for competitive advantage and employers’ ability to elicit this effort from a significant portion of their workforce”\*

The March 2010 edition of Boss Magazine focused on Reinventing Leadership. It included an article featuring an excerpt of the speech Don Argus delivered at a Leadership Victoria dinner in December 2009.

Mr Argus’s speech contained some fascinating and insightful comments that substantially answer the questions raised above.

### Some extracts.....

- “...In my experience, success goes to those enterprises whose leaders mobilize their people and unleash their competence, creativity and commitment.”
- “...Those people who are to expand their enterprises are the ones who understand human nature and how to tap the best in people – they understand that the bottom line is ultimately the result of human endeavour.”
- “...The most successful leaders that I have had the pleasure to work with or observe have a profound understanding of themselves, of the motivations of people around them and of external challenges their enter-

prises face”

- “...The skill to make things happen comes directly from blending two sides of the leader’s personality: the tough, competitive side that demands winning performance and loves to win; and the softer, compassionate side that is caring and understanding of others.”
- “...What is really being underused is what might be called ‘people’s discretionary effort’, that is, performance above and beyond the expected minimum. It is their initiative, creativity, motivation and loyalty. This discretionary effort is the part of a person’s performance that is liberated or shutdown by the way their leaders treat them and the quality of their work environment.”
- “...I have found that businesses and employees know what they need and want. They will tell you if you are willing to listen and listen hard.
- Good leaders do listen well. They understand that people have a need to see, touch, feel their leaders, and that the leaders have a need to see and understand the business.
- Good leaders use their listening skills to have dialogue with others. They engage in conversations for learning and possibility, they seek to deepen understanding, clarify perspectives and find new ways of solving problems.”

### In summary

Exceptional leadership, relevant to the needs of the modern business world, has to focus on the behavioural elements of an organisation. Business leaders need to develop new and more effective ways to:

1. Unleash competence, not manage behaviour
2. Enhance individual performance, at home and work, as a foundation to realising bottom line potential – we must acknowledge the interdependence between employees personal and professional lives; and
3. Simplify the way leaders execute their business plans and manage their organisations.

**“Unleash competence, not manage behaviour”**

Finally, last words go to the previ-

ously quoted Global Engagement Study\*:

“In a 1924 book, Creative Leadership, author Mary Parker Follett summed up the total leadership experience with these simple powerful words: ‘Leadership is not defined by the exercise of power, but by the capacity to increase the sense of power among those who are led. The most essential work of the leader is to create more leaders.’”

\* Towers Perrin Global Workforce Study 2007-8