Engage the Team

Move from average to excellent performance.

Charlie Fewell
Charlie Fewell and Associates

With 32 years in the automotive industry Charlie Fewell has been a service technician, a sales manager, a service school instructor, and a training manager. He has developed courses and consulted with some of the most well-known companies in the industry including GM, Sun Electric Corp., and ACDelco.
He is now president of Charlie Fewell and Associates Inc., a training and consulting company to help those who want to improve their perform-ance in life and in business. He is a speaker, consultant, leader-ship coach, trainer and published author, and offers NARSA members his services at reduced rates. If you are interested in receiving Charlie's consultation and/or training services please call (662) 895-1171 or visit www.charliefewell.com.

Much has been written about how to develop and lead groups of people, commonly referred to as a team. This is not my first article to appear in this publication about developing people. I've used the word engage in the title here because its definition is significant.

The understanding I want to convey within this article is how to engage the team. An engaged team is a group of people working together as a unit. Engaged team members are interested in your success and are involved with their mind and their heart while at work. There are two levels of engagement you can strive to create within your work team: engaged and actively engaged.

Engaged team members are attached but doubt that the benefits you speak of are truly exclusive to your organization. They are intel-lectually willing to be loyal, but aren't emotionally attached to your organization and the brands you represent. They need to be connected. They are a reservoir of potential. They could be called average performers. They do acceptable work and, with work, could be developed into actively engaged team members. Actively engaged team members enjoy being your employee. They feel important, valuable and want you to feel that you can always count on them to deliver. They are responsive, posi-tive, listeners, fair, and sustainable.

It's possible you've never used any terms that illustrate team concepts in your business. If I asked your employees, they may not think they operate as a team in any way. Just because people work at the same physical location at common times during a seven-day period, does not mean they are a team. Further, you may refer to them as a team in their presence and when speaking to others, but that won't make them perform as a team.

Why should you be concerned whether a spirit of teamwork exists in your workplace? What benefits will you accrue if you create a spirit of teamwork? There are many case studies that indicate what can happen when you accu-mulate a group of superstars, assign them a project and ask for excellent performance, but don't create the environment that would cause them to work as a unit. These studies reveal that none of them could perform at their highest level until they were organized to work together. Don't misunderstand: you may be successful without creating an environment that fosters teamwork. If you want to move from average to excellent, however, creating an environment that fosters teamwork could be a solution you choose to implement that would take your busi-ness performance to the level of excellence. So how do you get started? Keep reading.

Create and Communicate Your Goals and Objectives

The first step in creating an environment that would cause your employees to work together as a unit (become engaged) is to create and communicate your most important goals and objectives. While many business owners are hesitant to share sales and revenue information with their employees, I suggest to you it's very important to share your sales, gross profit, expense and net profit goals with the entire team. In our financial management seminar, we provide several formats you may use to provide that information to your team. If you would like a copy, e-mail us or call the office.

If you haven't developed a mission state-ment and a vision for your company, you certainly should begin the process right away. Your mission statement defines your purpose and your reason for being in business. Your vision declares how you will behave in the delivery of your products or services, as well as the future state you seek to create as a result of your business endeavors. Your employees need to know the reason you are in business and how you plan to succeed for a long time. This gives them a feeling of security and improves the possibilities that they will engage. But more importantly, this can be the instrument that creates unity for the entire work team.

Communicate on a Regular Basis

An important commitment that you must make if you want to build a spirit of unity and create engaged team members is that you will create opportunities for the team to communicate on a regular basis. Team members who engage and work with excellence as a unit do so when there is a high level of trust within the team. Trust among team members increases as open, honest dialogue is allowed. When you draft the agendas for your regular meetings, be sure you allow time for team member feedback. Team members should be encouraged to offer sugges-tions for team improvement.

Create Scorecards for Each Position on the Team

Team members who work together well as a

unit are clear about how to be successful in their position on the team. Think about it: when you observe team interaction in a competitive sports setting, the performance of every team member is measured based on observable behaviors or in quantifiable ways. When there are clear accountability measurements for each team member, everyone will know how to win. As a team member, when I know how to win in my position, I am more likely to engage than if I am unsure of how to win in my position.

Stephen Covey reported in his book, *The 8th Habit*, that he commissioned the Harris Polling Group to conduct a landmark study of employees in an attempt to reveal why many of them were not performing up to their potential. One part of the report demonstrated that, of those surveyed, 51 percent reported that they were unclear or did not understand the personal actions required in their job, in order to help the organization achieve its top priorities and goals. What would your team members say if asked? Are they clear about their behaviors?

Review Past Performance and Provide Coaching

How often do you review past performance and coach behaviors that would improve future performance? Are you completely clear about how to be an effective coach? Coaching is "training or directing; to order or instruct with authority." Dallas Cowboys coaching legend Tom Landry said: "Coaching is to get someone to do what they don't want to do in order that they can achieve what they always wanted to achieve."

Coaches never play a position on the team, they observe performance and conduct training sessions by demonstrating the correct behaviors. Coaches don't require perfection: they create continual improvement through their interaction with team members.

Create employee recognition cards and catch employees doing something right. The value of the card can vary based on the employees' interests. Some considerations are a free dinner at a nice restaurant, a half-day off with pay or a one-night stay in a fine hotel in town.

Set up incentive programs that are designed to reward the entire team's performance, not just the performance of one individual. Offer various rewards for different levels of performance. Make everyone a winner.

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