

# Involve, Engage a Ideas for Workplace Impr

by Dr Scott J. Simmerman

**M**any people involved in workplace improvement efforts feel that it is the managers who put the “no” in innovation and there should be no question that the first line management team is the leverage point for profitability. The issue is often simply one of perspective. Let me illustrate.

Consider Figure 1 as one representing how most organizations really work. Take a moment with it...

You'll find that if you show this to any two people, you will generate lots of different ideas and some very interesting discussion. One reason is that each of us has our own thoughts and beliefs colored by our history and experiences. We bring those along with us wherever we go, and that these perceptions and what we think is our reality.

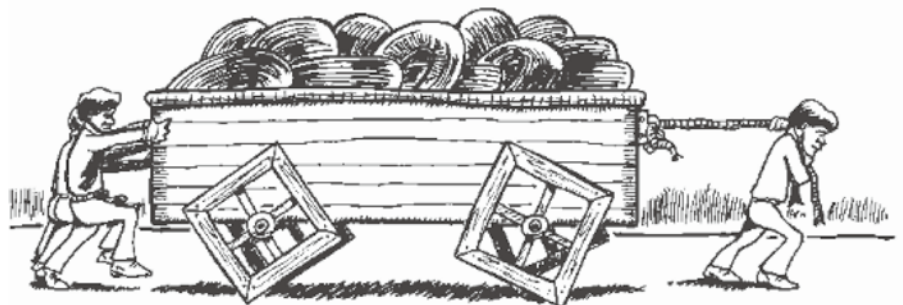
From a human resources position, one key to high performance is alignment to missions and goals.

If one's personal beliefs do not align with those of the boss, however, then we run the risk of disengaging or being disengaged and acting indifferently. And that is dangerous for many reasons.

According to Target Training International, more than 60 per cent of all customers stop dealing with a company because of perceived indifference on the part of an employee.

And the global statistics on how well we are aligning and involving people are not so great. Only 21 per cent of workers worldwide are “engaged” while 38 per cent are either disenchanted or dis-engaged, according to a 2008 worldwide survey by Towers Perrin.

Figure 1



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# nd Enlist – ovement

A mere seven per cent of employees today fully understand their company's business strategies and what's expected of them in order to help achieve company goals (from The Strategy-Focused Organization, Harvard Business School Press, 2001). And the statistics like these go on and on.

But good news is – making improvements is alignment, and motivation is not that difficult while generating an involved workforce has many benefits.

Engaged employees outperform average employees by 20 per cent and highly engaged employees are 87 per cent less likely to leave their organizations than highly disengaged employees (2004 study conducted by the Corporate Executive Board). And motivation is not all about money! Some 44 per cent of

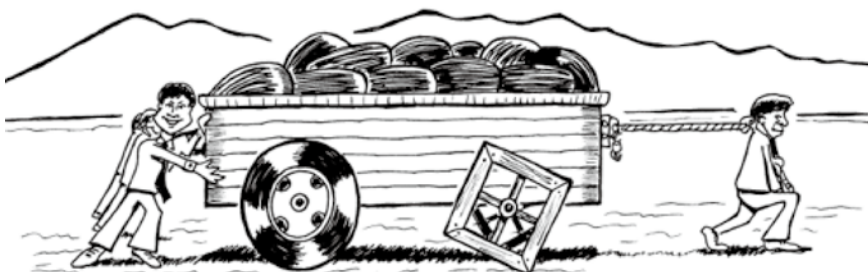
Gen Y respondents to a TMS Asia Pacific survey put money *last* on a list of reasons to stay at a company (or move on to another – which is *very* costly to you).

So, how do you motivate people? Here is my model of how to motivate most people in most workplaces (Figure 2):

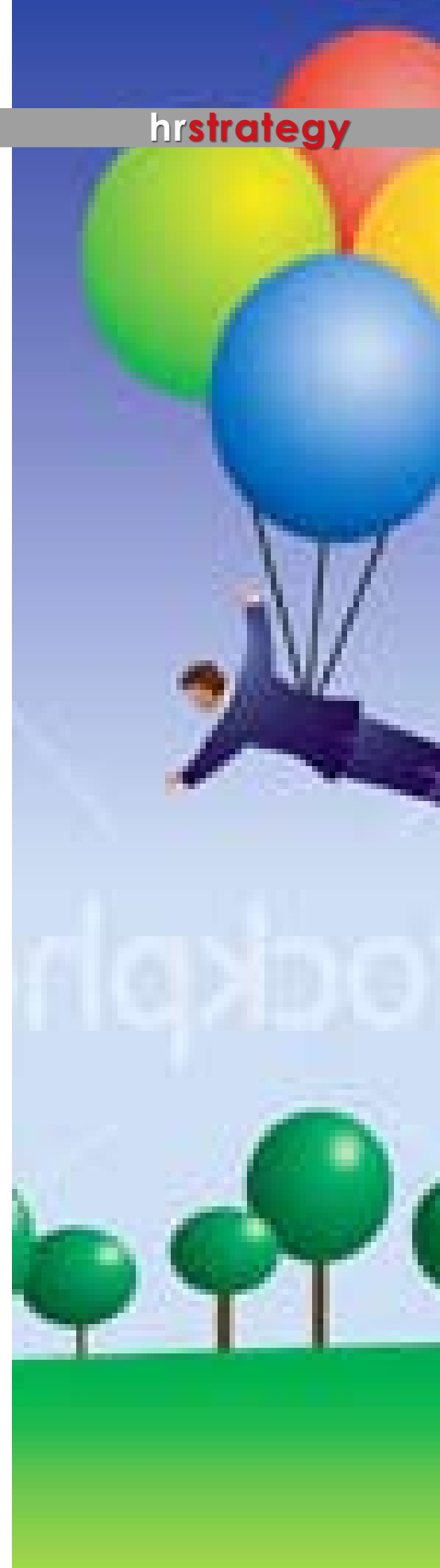
Start the process by engaging them and asking for their ideas on how to make improvements. Most people pushing the wagon feel the thumps and bumps every day and they know what can be improved.

Then, let them try things, especially in teams. Most people in most workplaces are un-empowered and a common method of motivating is generally called, “Yell and Tell” in many workplaces. If we can remove those roadblocks and improve the environment, we generate *dis-un-empowered* performers.

Figure 2



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Allowing people to safely try things is motivating. *More than half of executive respondents in a global survey occasionally or frequently bent organization rules to be more productive and 32 per cent said they did so to make a quick decision, close a sale or retain a customer.* (You wonder about the results of those who chose not to be responsive to customers or make decisions quickly!) Why not push this down to drive motivation up?

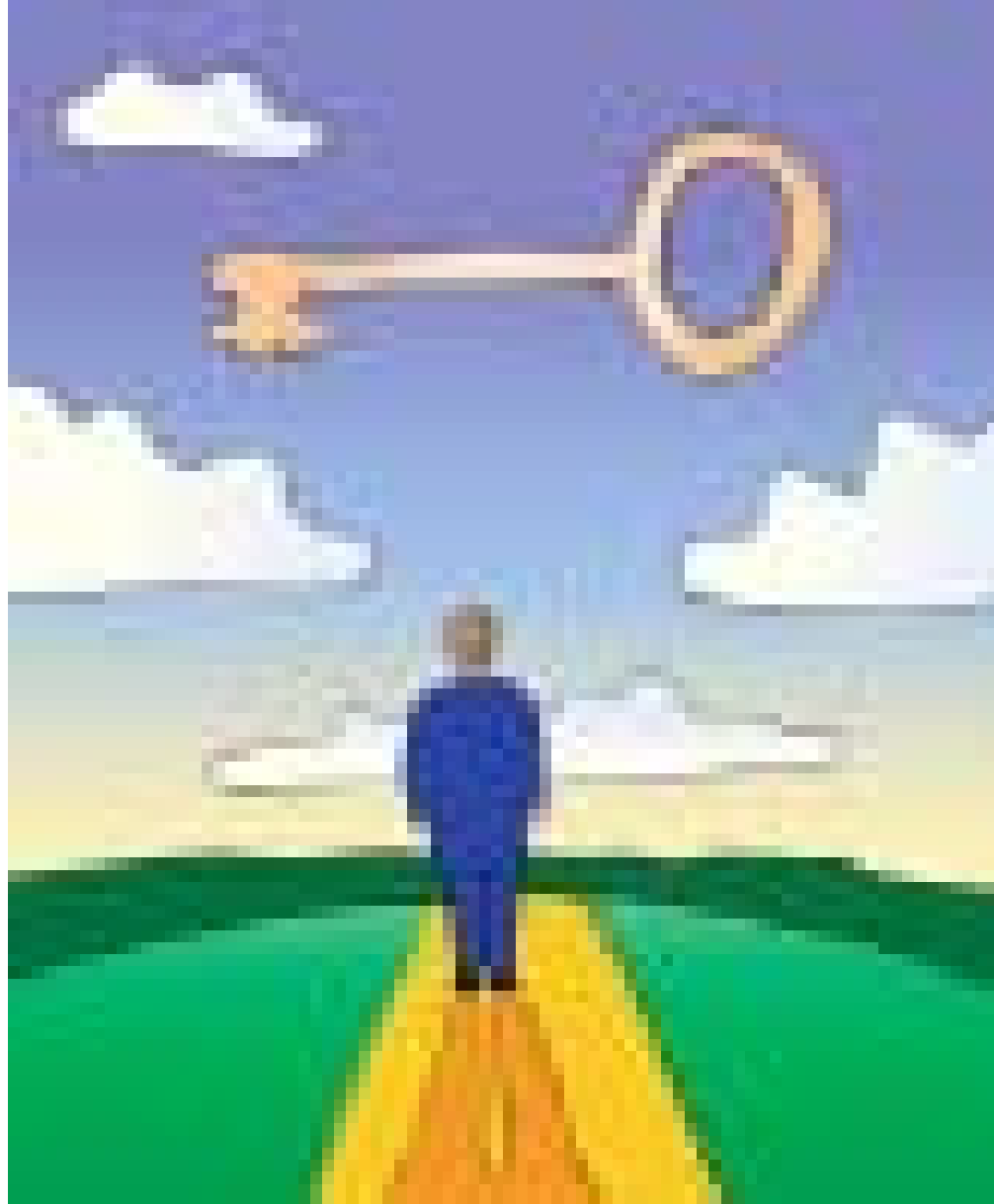
**What to do**

Recognize that the three key managerial behaviors that drive engagement and improvements are: **Ask, Listen and Try.** Get managers to ask for opinions and ideas, demonstrate that they have heard and understand those thoughts, and then allow the people, generally working in small teams, to try to implement some of those ideas with a minimum of potential negative downside to them, personally. It is not that hard to accomplish!

Work with managers to improve their communication skills when it comes to leadership, workplace innovation, performance feedback and conflict management.

Managers think their conflict-management skills are better than their employees think they are. Nearly 1/3 of all managers surveyed feel they're skilled at dealing with conflict, but only a fifth of employees believe their manager deals with conflict well. 43 per cent of non-managerial employees believe their managers don't handle conflict as well as they should, costing US companies upward of \$359 billion per year in manpower hours and contributes to putting that "NO" in innovation (from the 2008 CPP, Inc., Global Human Capital Report).

Acknowledgement of a problem's existence is the first step toward solving



it, so get your managers to step back from the wagon.

Teach managers some basic group facilitation skills and encourage them to use these as tools for improving communications and performance.

Re-align interdepartmental objectives to promote collaboration and teamwork. Build incentive programs to generate cross-functional teamwork and collaboration, which is where a great deal of leverage can be found. Most conflict occurs in operational teams, magnifying its impact on how a business functions. Aligning individual expectations and objectives to organizational goals is something that HR professionals can do to help their companies perform.

Lastly, have fun out there! **HR**



*Dr Scott J. Simmerman of Performance Management Company, Taylors SC USA, will speak at the Guru Plenary of*

*the HKIHRM 2009 Annual Conference on the topic "Envolve, Engage and Enlist – Ideas for Workplace Improvement" that will be held on November 24-25 at HKCEC. For more information, please visit [www.hkihrm.org](http://www.hkihrm.org) or call (852) 2881 5113.*



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