

Engagement

Have you ever had the experience of talking to someone about something important and finding out that they didn't understand a word you said? How did this situation make you feel?

Perhaps you have had the reverse experience – after listening to a colleague speak, you realize that you weren't paying attention and have no idea what they said. What kind of impression do you think you left with your colleague?

Engagement begins with being present and paying attention to whom we are talking or to the task at hand. Our attention can wander, however, when we have a lot of things happening in our lives. We can be thinking about work when we are at home or on the other hand, be thinking about family obligations when we are at work.



We can only be in one place at one time. True engagement begins by being present in the same place mentally as we are physically. When we are truly engaged, it is like passing a baton in a relay race. If the two runners are paying attention, the exchange occurs smoothly. If they are not – they may for instance be thinking about how much time they have to make up to catch up to the front runners – they may end up bungling the exchange.

What we are thinking and what we are doing are synchronized when we are engaged. We are most effective when this happens. Think of Michael Schumacher - when he is racing in Formula 1, you can be sure that he is only thinking about driving.

But attention is only the beginning...

What is our attitude when we engage people and tasks? Do we like what we do? Do we feel like we have the power to make a difference?

The nature of our personal engagement is a reflection of how much we actually like what we are doing. If our attitude is that our work is a chore, uninteresting or not worth doing, we are unlikely to be truly engaged. The famous Greek myth of Sisyphus provides a good example of this non-engaged attitude. As punishment by the gods, Sisyphus was forced to roll a giant rock up a hill. No sooner would he get the rock to the top of the hill than the rock would roll back down. Then he had to start the process all over again. Sisyphus was damned to do this for eternity. When we feel like Sisyphus our work seems meaningless and unsatisfactory and perhaps never ending.

Most activities however have an intrinsic value – what makes your work worthwhile? Is the task in itself interesting? Is the work with other people to accomplish the task your prime

motivator? Does the end result of your work have value for customers? A janitor of a school whose task was to clean the schoolrooms once said: “What makes my job so worthwhile is that I know that I make it possible for the teachers to teach and the children to learn in the most optimal environment. That makes me proud.”

What is it about your job that makes you proud?



Finally engagement has to do with the attitude that we can make a difference. If our attitude is that whatever we do doesn't matter, or even that we cannot make things better, we are unlikely to be truly engaged. For example, if we really don't believe that recycling will make a difference towards saving our environment, we probably won't make the effort to recycle our trash.

In every activity there is always something that we can improve or do better. Engagement has to do with being aware of how we can contribute even more to our task, our environment and the people around us. Even small changes can make a big difference. A shepherd who lived in southern France – Elzeard Bouffier – once decided that the land where he was living was becoming too arid due to the lack of trees. He took matters into his own hands and started to plant trees every day for a period of over 30 years. In the end he personally was responsible for creating an entire forest of oak and beech trees all by himself. As a result, the soil began to attract moisture and became more fertile. Wildlife returned that had long been absent from the landscape. Like Mr. Bouffier, we can also plant seeds everyday in order to make our personal contribution and by doing so, make a difference.

At Bunge, we strive to be engaged in what we do. By living the value of Engagement we can ensure that we will enjoy greater satisfaction in our jobs and be more effective in what we do as a company. The question for each one of us to ask ourselves is:

What more can I do to be even more engaged in my life at work and at home?

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