

# Engagement and Performance: Where Well-Being Fits

...by Paul Terry

Sometimes I get so engaged in my work that I come across as not engaged. Sounds puzzling but if you subscribe (as I do) to the definition of engagement offered by Schaufeli and colleagues, it makes perfect sense. If you want to see where you land on their engagement index, take their Work & Well-being Survey (UWES)<sup>®</sup> available online at <http://bit.ly/WWBSurvey>.

I'm encouraged that engagement has become a watchword for well-being practitioners but, to organizational leaders, it means far more than participating in wellness offerings. Most leaders formally trained in management theory understand that engagement is the key driver of performance. Studies show how more engaged workers get rated highest by customers and positively affect

## Leadership in health promotion



**Paul Terry, PhD**

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I score high in 2 of their 3 engagement dimensions of vigor and dedication. But my score on their third dimension, “absorption,” confirms something I’ve long known about my style of engagement: I’m off the charts when it comes to being “fully concentrated.” That is, I get “happily engrossed,” time passes quickly, and I experience difficulty “detaching from work.” I can get so immersed that I run late for meetings or forget about them altogether! So, paradoxically, being deeply engaged makes it appear as if I’m not engaged — at least as it relates to my “dedication” to helping with others’ work.

colleagues’ performance. Despite the worksite health field’s ample research on how poor health reduces productivity, empirical data connecting improved well-being to improved performance is harder to find.

Appreciating this distinction begins with an understanding that business leaders think about the terms productivity and performance differently. A recent Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) study was designed to assess how leaders view employee health and well-being compared to other factors that affect performance. According to HERO’s Dr. Jessica Grossmeier, it turns out employee health is not top of mind

when leaders are asked what drives performance: “While employee health/well-being was listed as a top driver of performance by 1 in 5 business leaders, the majority of them selected employee engagement with their work, having the right people in the right jobs, and having a clear understanding of one’s job responsibilities or performance objectives. This has implications for the



**Jessica Grossmeier, PhD, MPH**

VP of Research at HERO and CEO of Verity Analytics

decisions business leaders make about where to invest corporate resources to meet business needs.”

Well-being practitioners trained in motivational theory have a great vantage point for considering how wellness programs can enhance employee engagement as a top driver of performance. Health and wellness can support “vigor” dimension scores, for example, regardless of whether the job is physically, mentally, or socially demanding. Our motivation for bringing energy to jobs we love may be the same source of motivation workers could apply to self-care.

Moreover, a growing number of business leaders are starting to see the connection between employee health/well-being and engagement at work. Grossmeier notes, “41% of business leaders responding to the HERO survey said health had an influence on employee engagement.”

Well-being practitioners are positioned well to help organizations broaden their definition of engagement and establish goals related to improving it. From my vantage point, finding or developing measurement tools that best capture an organization’s values and culture in support of employee engagement will be a vital starting point. Grossmeier agrees: “Business leaders understand the important role that engagement has on performance and they are beginning to believe that a healthy workforce contributes to both outcomes.” She adds, “While there is an emerging evidence base linking employee well-being to employee engagement with their work, this represents one of the greatest research opportunities in the worksite health field today.”

For more information on the HERO survey findings, visit <http://bit.ly/HERObizLDR>.

# Beware of Thought Leaders and Other Wellness Experts

...by Dean Witherspoon

We’re in the middle of vetting financial education providers for our employees; a top criterion is having a certified financial planner (CFP) paid by the hour, not by commission. The reason is simple: We don’t want an incentive to guide employees toward specific investments sold by the CFP.

In wellness, buyers of services have the same challenge. How do you get unbiased expert advice

That’s a lot of self-proclaimed expertise. You’d think with all of that brainpower we’d be doing a little better lowering health risks across the nation. Just because someone has listed thought leader in their profile doesn’t mean they are or aren’t. In the words of President Reagan while dealing with the Soviets, *trust but verify*.

So how do you go about hiring a consultant or vendor that truly has

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from consultants/vendors if they have a vested interest in what you purchase? It’s theoretically possible, but unlikely in real life. While they go to great lengths to give the impression of objectivity, in the end many recommendations are based on relationships and are inherently biased.

Search “thought leader wellness” and “wellness expert” on LinkedIn — 6500 and 2200 hits appear respectively.

your best interests ahead of their own? It’s not easy, and it requires work. But if you’re in this for more than 1-3 years, and you want ongoing advice/services you can rely on for the next decade, there really are no shortcuts — you need to confirm their claims on your own. Google “Avoiding Wellness Vendor Blunders” for an article outlining the steps to get it right. (NOTE: We sell wellness campaigns, so be sure to verify us as well.)