

The Holy Grail of Full Team Engagement

by Kevin Eikenberry

"If I could just get my team really engaged in this project . . ."

"The problem is that people don't seem to really care. If they were more committed to this work, we'd get better results. . ."

"You can't get people to really work hard any more . . ."

I've heard all of these comments, and many like them, and so have you. You may have even thought or said them yourself.

Every leader wants to have his/her teams fully committed and engaged in their work. Why? Because we know that when people are fully engaged miracles can occur. Projects will be completed ahead of schedule. Customers will be delighted. Budgets will be met. Morale will be high and turnover low. Productivity skyrockets.

Miracles, indeed.

And no matter if you have personally experienced this magic, you likely know that engagement and commitment are the keys. So you continue to look for the idea, the technique, the tool, or the potion that will lead you to full team engagement.

There is no tool, technique or perfect process. In fact, you can't fully engage teams at all. You can only help individuals become fully engaged.

The good news is that when each individual becomes engaged, the team becomes engaged.

Tip #1 – Don't engage teams, engage individuals.

Engaging Individuals

The good news is that you are an individual! So, if you reflect on what engages you, you will have major clues as to what will engage others. Let me help you think about this. There are three major things that we need for complete commitment or engagement in anything. We need to:

- Understand it.
- Own it.
- Believe it.

Let's explore each of those components.

Understand It

How can you be fully committed to something you don't fully understand? How many people on your team fully understand the task, their roles and, most importantly, the purpose of their work? How well have you communicated these things to them?

There is a major lack of communication in organizations today. Without this clarity of role, task and purpose we can never expect to get to the levels of commitment where magic can occur.

Tip#2 – Communicate, communicate, communicate. Help people understand the task, goals and objectives of their work.

Own It

How does it feel when you own something? There is pride. There is desire to maintain this thing, to care for it, right? When you feel a sense of ownership to something, what happens to your level of commitment?

For people to be more fully engaged in their work they have to have a sense of ownership. How do you create that ownership? By letting them own it! People can't become committed until they are truly involved.

Tip #3 – To build ownership, let people own it. Commitment can't be achieved without involvement.

Believe It

Are you committed to things you don't believe in? Will your team members be committed to things they don't believe in?

People may not always agree with the details of the plan, or the exact work process. But people can endure any approach (and they will likely work hard to improve it), if they believe in the reasons why they are doing it in the first place.

You will create engagement when you help people see the big picture for their efforts. How will people be served? How will the world be a better place? How will their work and the end result contribute? Helping people answer these questions will help them believe.

Tip #4 – Help people believe. Help them see the biggest possible picture and how their work contributes to that picture.

How will you know when you are there?

This week, a friend of mine said, "When you are committed, there is no decision, you just do it. If you are questioning and deciding each time, you aren't yet fully committed." He's right.

Fully engaged teams may argue and discuss things at length, but they aren't discussing if they are going to reach the goal or if it is valuable to reach the goal. They are talking about the best ways to reach the goal! Reaching it is a given.

These three steps lead to individual commitment and engagement. Help every team member understand, own and believe in their work and you have reached the holy grail. It sounds simple, and it is. But it is far from easy.

Humans are complex beings, and teams are significantly more complex. Taking these steps will help you navigate these complexities and lead teams to be more committed, and therefore more productive.

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Kevin Eikenberry is a leadership expert and the Chief Potential Officer of **The Kevin Eikenberry Group**, a learning consulting company that helps Clients reach their potential through a variety of training, consulting and speaking services. To receive your free special report on **Unleashing Your Potential** go to <http://www.kevineikenberry.com/uypw/index.asp> or call us at (317) 387-1424 or 888.LEARNER.