

Uncovering an Overlooked Source of Employee Disengagement

BY ADRIENNE HEDGER

Is employee engagement internally driven based on how a person feels about his or her job? Not necessarily, says Ryan Ross, Vice President of Global Alliances for Hogan Assessments. The root cause of a disengaged employee is something that people often overlook: the boss. Here's what HR can do to identify and address this difficult situation.

Ryan Ross, Vice President of Global Alliances for Hogan Assessments, gets this question a lot: “Why is one of our business sites doing so much better than another site?”

“Executives tell me that they have two locations that are doing the same basic work, in the same market, with the same conditions,” says Ross. “And, yet, one site delivers exceptional performance while the other is struggling.”

What’s the cause? More often than not, it’s leadership. “When we assess the management teams,” says Ross, “we usually find startling differences.”

Indeed, a company can have an exciting vision, a popular product, and a pleasant work environment. But a difficult leader can derail all of this. If employees can’t stand the boss, they likely won’t be engaged. They may even be actively looking for other work.

“If the boss is the problem, it’s impacting everyone,” says Ross. “By addressing this root cause, you take a significant step toward improving engagement across an entire team.”

The first step: Figuring out where the trouble lies.

How a Leader Can Derail Engagement

Hogan’s research has zeroed in on eleven “derailing” personality characteristics that can have a negative impact.

They can be described as:

- **Excitable:** moody, unpredictable
- **Skeptical:** cynical, fault-finding
- **Cautious:** reluctant to change, averse to strategic risk
- **Reserved:** distant, unapproachable
- **Leisurely:** indifferent to requests, passively aggressive
- **Bold:** overly self-confident, entitled
- **Mischievous:** risk taking, indifferent to consequences
- **Colorful:** attention-seeking, dramatic
- **Imaginative:** eccentric, impractical
- **Diligent:** perfectionistic, micro-managing
- **Dutiful:** overly eager to please

“In many cases, people think, ‘Oh, that’s just how Jim is. That’s his personality,’” says Ross. “But the reality is that action needs to be taken, because these characteristics are causing problems for the company.”

By assessing leaders, companies can identify potential issues, and gain a deeper understanding of what’s really happening in a department or team. This doesn’t require a large consulting budget; Hogan’s assessments can be conducted in house, by employees who complete an accreditation workshop (which counts toward Continuing Professional Education).

It’s important to note that the goal with any assessment is not to point fingers. Instead, the goal is to build strategic self-awareness.

Helping Leaders Improve

Leaders want to compete and win, and this is where strategic self-awareness comes in.

“It’s common for organizations to say, ‘Congratulations! You’re a manager!’ But not equip an employee for this new role,”

says Ross. “With the right assessment tools, you can help leaders understand their own strengths, and whether or not they have personality characteristics that could derail their success.”

Any issues that are identified in assessment can be improved through coaching, he adds. And coaching can help a manager cultivate the five characteristics of great leaders:

- Integrity
- Respect for employees
- Effective communication
- Good decision-making and accountability
- Vision

Letting Science Guide the Way

There’s no doubt that talking to a manager about derailing characteristics can be a difficult conversation. The key is to stay focused on the data. An assessment is not a personal judgment, it is an objective report meant to deliver insight that can help someone throughout his or her career.

“It comes down to science,” says Ross. “These are validated assessment tools that help companies understand their workforce.”

This quantifiable data is especially valuable when trying to understand something as complex as employee engagement.

“When you have disengaged employees,” says Ross, “you don’t necessarily want to assume it is an internal, personal issue. Instead, it’s helpful to look up one level and ask, ‘What role is leadership playing?’”

To learn more about the eleven derailing characteristics, watch the short videos at Hogan Assessments’ site, www.HowDoYouDerail.com.

COMPANY PROFILE

Hogan Assessments has more than 30 years of experience helping businesses reduce turnover and increase productivity by hiring the right people, developing key talent, and evaluating leadership potential. The Hogan assessments predict job performance by assessing normal personality, derailment characteristics, and core values. The assessments are grounded in decades of research and evaluate every major job family. The portfolio of employee selection, development, and leadership tools allow companies to better manage their human resource capital and retain top talent.

For more information, visit www.hoganassessment.com.

