

# Leadership Integrity, Value Congruence, and Employee Engagement

By Bret L. Simmons, July 24, 2010

There is new credible evidence that employee engagement might indeed affect employee performance. This is the best evidence we have so far that employee engagement produces tangible results, which is important because the hype surrounding engagement far exceeds the evidence. This new research also gave us a very specific definition of engagement, a new and better measure of engagement, and an evidence-based suggestion for three things that might enhance employee engagement.

One of the things this new research suggests enhances engagement is value congruence. Value congruence is the extent to which the individual can behave at work consistent with their own self-image. It's very difficult to experience meaningfulness in our work if we are expected to behave in ways that are inconsistent with the highest values we espouse to ourselves and others.

When individuals find that their role expectations pull for behaviors that they feel are inappropriate for their preferred self-images, they feel devalued, taken advantage of, and less willing to give themselves to their work roles. (Rich, et al., 2010, p. 621).

This is where leadership integrity comes in. Leaders with integrity *in the eyes of their employees* speak and act in ways consistent with what employees value. The leader's personal behaviour reflects values

congruent with employee values. As leaders inspire others to enact their best selves and stretch for higher and higher levels of performance, they never expect values to be compromised, and they never accept compromise in their own behaviour or in the behaviour of others they have been given the privilege to lead.

Find a disengaged employee and I'll bet you will also find a leader lacking integrity.

Model the way for your employees by being open and clear about your values. Then behave at work consistent with your values, and help your employees behave consistent with their values. Try not to hire and never promote people that are either void of or unwilling to make a public commitment to meaningful personal values. Partner with your employees to continuously improve the rubbish systems that rob people of their pride of workmanship.

Don't expect the engagement that flows from meaningful work to magically appear in others until you have the wisdom and courage to first do the right thing yourself.

