

# Passion Matters

Learn how to capitalize on its energy.



by Alaina Love

**T**HE ECONOMIC DECLINE has prompted an expected frenzy of belt-tightening and budget-cuts. What's surprising, however, is the debate about the relative importance of maintaining a focus on *employee engagement*.

Contrarians believe that engagement programs are unnecessary since a glut of talent is available in the labor pool and job opportunities are limited. The law of supply and demand, they posit, will enable leaders to retain the talent they have while cherry-picking highly skilled workers from the ranks of the unemployed. So why should companies invest in programs to keep employees engaged, when they aren't likely to leave the organization? In short, because *passion matters*.

When I work in companies, I'm immediately struck by the pulse of an organization—the vibe flowing from leaders, the energy and enthusiasm in employees. It doesn't take long to size up whether employees are engaged. It's almost palpable when passion is present, and vacuous when it's not.

Passion, or the lack of it, is obvious to customers and shareholders as it translates to results. Consider a company where several competitors offer the same service—the airlines for example. What differentiates a good customer experience from a disaster is related to the passion and engagement of company employees. Their passion directly impacts the bottom line.

*So what is this elusive X-factor called passion?* It's the outward manifestation of individual purpose and the connection with organizational purpose. *Individual purpose* shows up as visible and measurable passions that impact results. We've identified 10 *patterns of passion* or *passion archetypes*: Creator, Conceiver, Discoverer, Processor, Teacher, Connector, Altruist, Healer, Transformer, and Builder. These archetypes generate positive results. And when employee passions are aligned with their work roles, they also help to build an engaged and motivated workforce where team trust is high.

## Take Five Steps

You can best capitalize on the *energy* that *passion* brings by taking five steps:

**1. Determine both the skills and passions of your employees.** Most organizations spend much time and money honing and shaping employee skills, believing that those skills will deliver results. While skill for a job is important, an employee's passion for the job greatly impacts the company's success and the individual's sense of fulfillment. Passions are outwardly visible, if you look for them. When does the employee seem most engaged? What ideas are they bringing forward? What is the role they are asking to play in the implementation of those ideas? In what ways have they transformed their job that you can trace back to a passion



they have shown? Passion achieves what skill alone cannot. It moves performance from good to great.

**2. Identify required skills and passions of key jobs.** When most job evaluations are conducted, the objectives include determining the required skills, along with job scope, incumbent responsibilities, and reporting relationships. One factor, often left unaddressed, is the environment in which the job must operate, which suggests a lot about the implied passion characteristics of the job. Will the position require, for example, a *Transformer* passion, because it is an anchor job in a sea of chaos and change? Does the job require a *Healer* passion because the previous incumbent's style de-motivated the team and morale is low? Will results be best delivered through a *Builder* passion, because the charge is to create a business in a region where the company lacks a presence? These are the nuances to examining jobs that will impact can-

didate selection and ultimately the success of incumbents. The best results are derived when job evaluation is seen as a dynamic process. As the environment changes, so will the key jobs within it and the passions needed for success in those positions.

**3. Introduce the passion factor into people management systems.** Passion is a lever for performance that doesn't require a wholesale discard of current processes. A focus on employee passions and job fulfillment can be incorporated into performance management systems, development processes, and recruitment and selection methods. Consider, for example, developing passion-linked interview questions, or passion-based performance objectives that support the strategic goals, while enabling employees to thrive. Instead of just focusing on an employee's role and how that role is expected to contribute to achieving objectives, consider the employee's passions and how those passions will drive their interest to contribute beyond their current role. Determine how you can capitalize on the discretionary efforts born of passion and gain a competitive edge!

**4. Don't make assumptions.** Many leaders assume that because a person is doing well in a job they must also have passion for it. Not so! Think of how often you find yourself in a role for which you possess the skill and responsibility to deliver expected results, but feel no passion for the work. Leaders must resist pigeon-holing employees into roles based solely on their past performance in similar roles.

**5. Improve the quality of your conversations.** Discuss how employees see themselves making a contribution. Become an active listener, rather than holding on to a construct about what employees can or should be doing. Development discussions are not about you; this is the time for the employee's needs and desires to take center stage. Imagine what you might learn by asking, "What are you most passionate about in your work?" or "What have you learned since joining us that we're not capitalizing on in the way that we should?" Opening up this dialogue with employees will provide you with insights into their real passion drivers.

You need your people investments to pay off. So expand your view about what is available to achieve results. In challenging times, leverage passion. **LE**

*Alaina Love is a consultant, speaker and president of Purpose-Linked Consulting and co-author of The Purpose-Linked Organization (McGraw-Hill). Visit [www.thepurposelink.com](http://www.thepurposelink.com).*

**ACTION: Leverage the passion in your people.**