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CULTIVATING INGAGED LEADERSHIP

Engagement starts with a belief that when you align people and create an organization where everyone works together in partnership, that organization becomes vastly more successful.

Article Author: by Evan Hackel, Principal and Founder, Ingage Consulting, and CEO, Tortal Training

How did I hit upon the concept of Ingaged Leadership? To be truthful, I didn't discover it on a single day or in a particular location. It was something that emerged organically from many real-world experiences like these...

INGAGEMENT CASE STUDY 1

If You Ask People, They Become Ingaged

Back in 2013, executives from a major consumer brand were planning to unveil a new store redesign at an upcoming conference. They asked me to help increase attendance at the convention. In previous years, only about 20 percent of franchisees had attended the convention. It was a big priority to get as many of them as possible to attend and to get their buy-in on the new design. Company leaders were hoping I could get 40 or 50 percent of all storeowners to attend.

I was able to get more than 85 percent of them to be there.

How did I help this company achieve that result? I asked the company leaders if instead of simply pulling the curtains off a new design at the convention, they would consider bringing three or four designs-in-progress and allowing franchisees to make suggestions about them. When franchisees learned they would get to help design and finalize the way their stores were going to look, they wanted to attend. In that way, we shifted the dynamic from "They're going to talk to me" to "They're going to talk with me." The result was not only a good design, but also one that reflected the front-line, real-world intelligence only storeowners could provide. That is an example of Ingagement at work.

INGAGEMENT CASE STUDY 2

Knitting Together a Fractured Organization

In 2000, the company I worked for, CCA Global Partners, acquired our No. 1 competitor, Flooring America. Prior to our acquisition, Flooring America had 700 locations. Approximately 400 of them were company owned, and the rest were owned by franchisees. But then the Flooring America parent company/franchisor went out of business. The circumstances were troubling, to say the least. Four hundred stores that bore the Flooring America name had going-out-of-business sales. The brand was seriously tarnished.

The owners of those franchises were rightly angry, frustrated, and fearful. They also had to deal with the fact that the company that had just acquired them (my company, CCA) had been their main competitor up to that point. Many of those franchisees were in no mood to even speak with people like me who worked at CCA. They thought we only wanted to shutter their businesses, which was never our plan.

To build trust, we went around the country and held town hall meetings with the Flooring America owners. We addressed their most basic questions. Did they want to retain the Flooring America name, for example, or did they think the brand had suffered too much damage after the bankruptcy? The owners ultimately decided to keep the name. We created advisory councils and did our best to encourage the owners and their staff to participate. We also created an umbrella advisory council. By building Ingagement in those settings, we identified and created leaders within the organization.

Through this process, a disgruntled, upset group of individuals bonded, came together, and became very passionate. When we took over Flooring America, there were 300 Flooring America locations doing \$700 million worth of business. Four years later, there were nearly 500 locations doing \$2 billion in business a year. That again is Ingagement at work.

SO WHAT IS INGAGEMENT EXACTLY?

As these case studies show, Ingagement is something that is waiting to happen in many business situations. It leads to better results, improved processes, and healthier organizations. Ingagement starts with a belief

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that...

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HOW DO YOU START USING IT?

Engagement is not something you do just once. It is an evolving, ongoing process you should engage in every day. Here are some of the key activities of Ingaged organizations:

Accept the reality that the best ideas in most organizations often come from employees at all levels...not only from executives at the top.

Create steering committees and advisory councils within your organization...and give them the leeway to suggest and make real change.

Invite and encourage people at all ranks to define and refine your company's mission...and make sure their vision gets put into practice.

Be tireless in recruiting and retaining people with positive attitudes...and intolerant of people who breed negativity.

Create individual career plans for all employees who could be with your company for the long term...and have them discuss those plans in regular, ongoing, touch-base meetings with their managers.

Listen in a higher way to people...by actively striving to hear what they are saying that is right, not looking for things that are wrong.

Relish the fact that you are sometimes wrong...and invite people from all ranks to improve on your ideas, suggest better alternatives, and come up with new ideas.

Build and empower a leadership team of independent thinkers...not "yes people" who rubber-stamp everything you say and do.

Ask for help and input...because doing so empowers people and leads to superior results.

Encourage people to take risks...and support them and learn from what happens.

Let people identify the tasks they are wildly enthusiastic about...and give them the autonomy and resources to tackle them.

Encourage an atmosphere where learning is valued...and become a tireless learner yourself.

AND INVEST IN TRAINING

Training is of critical importance. Furthermore, there is a vital, critical link between good training and Ingagement.

On the most basic level, training creates a company where people have superior skills. Yet training can have even larger benefits. One of the biggest is that if you invest in training your employees, they will realize they have a future with your company. You will create an environment where your best people are much more dedicated, productive, and Ingaged.

Here is a joke many of us in the industry have heard before, but it is so true:

A manager asks, "What if I invest a lot of money in training my people and then they leave me?"

Another manager retorts, "What if you don't train them and they stay?"

LOVING THEIR JOBS

Organizations that move toward Ingagement enjoy better employee retention, improved processes, and dramatically larger profits. It all starts with a simple willingness to entertain the possibility that everyone in your organization can actually love their jobs...not just do their jobs. People in your organization are itching and eager to become fully involved and enthusiastic about partnering with you to build your success. Are you letting them do just that? I encourage you to let it happen by tapping Ingagement.

The creator of the Ingaged Leadership concept, Evan Hackel is the principal and founder of Ingage Consulting. He also serves as CEO of Tortal Training, which specializes in developing and implementing interactive training solutions. For more information, visit Ingage.net and follow [@ehackel](https://twitter.com/ehackel).

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