

Series: The (not so) Secret Keys to High Engagement

**Part II of V: The First Key - Emotional Commitment
to the Job**

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To read **Part I** of this series, visit <http://www.progressu.com/ezine-leadership-2008-4.htm>

What does emotional commitment to the job mean? And how can we potentially maximize emotional commitment to the job as it has the strongest impact on engagement?

Let's have a look at Tony and Maria. Both work in the same company – a financial planning organization - as key client managers.

Tony has been in this industry for the past seven years, Maria for five years. Tony's performance is average whereas Maria is clearly the best performer in the team.

When you talk to Tony about his work, he is very matter-of-fact, complains about the current difficulties due to the financial crisis and focuses on reasons why his performance isn't as good as he'd like it to be. The reasons he states are all outside his direct area of influence.

Meet Maria and the difference is more than obvious. Maria brims with energy and enthusiasm about her work. She very clearly loves her job. When asked about the current economical challenges, she responds that she feels sad that some of her clients lost considerable money and that she sees her current responsibility in doing her utmost to help them through this crisis.

Why she loves her job? Because she feels that she is blessed to be in a position to help people make better financial decisions and as a result improve their quality of life. Maria clearly is on a mission!

What if you had a team full of Maria's? People who love their jobs because they find meaning in it? Because their job aligns with their personal mission? Because their job is congruent with their personal values and preferences?

1. Optimal Selection

It all starts with getting the right people onto the right bus into the right seat!
What are you focusing on during your selection process? Past experience of the candidate? Education? Skills? Looks? Personal chemistry?

All important, but unfortunately not sufficient.

Emotional commitment to the job is driven by both the ability to do the job and a good match with personal traits, preferences and values (I'll refer to the term 'suitability' to encompass these). While we tend to get the ability part right in most cases, we tend to be considerably less successful in getting the suitability part right.

Dan Harrison, developer of Harrison Assessments, has spent over 20 years to research suitability of candidates. He developed an assessment which measures over 130 traits & preferences (those which are particularly important to a candidate represent values) and found that a selection of around 20-30 of these traits/preferences determine suitability for a certain position. For example, for a typical financial planner, the following traits would determine the degree of suitability:

Essential	Minimum required	To be avoided
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Persistent▪ Finance/business▪ Optimistic▪ Self-improving▪ Teaching▪ Outgoing▪ Takes Initiative▪ Wants Challenge▪ Influencing▪ Self-Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Analytical▪ Tolerant to Pressure▪ Tolerant to Bluntness▪ Numerical▪ Tolerant to Structure▪ Certain▪ Driving▪ Manages Stress Well▪ Enthusiastic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Rigidly Meticulous▪ Rigidly Organized▪ Dogmatic▪ Harsh▪ Blunt

Running this assessment with Maria, we found an excellent match with this profile (over 90% suitability) whereas Tony's suitability ranked only 67%. Not totally off, but obviously far from an excellent match.

Looking at the technical backgrounds of Tony and Maria, we noticed that they were on a very similar level, with Tony having a slightly higher ability level.

Does this mean that the company should get rid of Tony and look for another Maria? Not necessarily!

2. Optimal Development

The good news is that suitability can be developed to some extent. While in most cases it is easier to develop skills and knowledge, personality is not fixed. From the experience of our coaches who have worked with several hundred managers, we know that it is very possible to develop personality traits.

It might be useful to distinguish between traits that are so important to a person that they represent values and traits that developed based on the person's beliefs system.

For example, we noticed that persistence represents a value for Maria. Being asked about persistence, she gets all excited and says that she simply can't give up until something is completed. She scores 9.5 on a scale from 0-10.

Tony scores 6.2 and when asked he confirms that persistence is somewhat important to him but that he believes that being 'too persistent' may lead to wasting too much time and that one risks missing other opportunities.

You see, Tony's view on persistence is based on a set of beliefs around persistence. While these beliefs have some merit because indeed one could waste too much time in trying to accomplish something that can't be accomplished and as a result miss other better opportunities, these beliefs are equally limiting Tony's probability of success, especially in adverse circumstances.

With coaching, Tony might come to the realization that persistence requires as a precondition due diligence to assure feasibility of any initiative and to understand if the benefits of success clearly outweigh the needed efforts. Once that is clarified and a given, persistence makes sense and Tony's original reservations are out of the way.

After such realization, Tony's persistence score is likely to rise to a higher level which in turn will help him in being more successful as a financial planner.

This is just one example how coaching can help any executive develop a higher suitability for the job which in return will lead to higher emotional commitment.

There are, of course, several other factors such as appreciation of good work, work atmosphere, tools, etc. that have an impact on emotional commitment to the job.

Where is the limitation of development?

We found it particularly difficult to achieve high emotional commitment if the personal values clash with the required suitability for the job. For example, if honesty is an important personal value for an employee and the company requires the employee to twist facts when dealing with customers in a certain

job, then it will be very difficult if not impossible to 'develop' someone towards taking honesty less important. Or if the job requires the person to be very detail-oriented but if the personal value of the employee is to look at the big picture only, difficulties are pre-programmed and hard to overcome.

That's why it is so crucial in the recruitment process to assure that there is no clash between corporate and individual values.

Conclusion on Emotional Commitment to the Job

It becomes obvious that it's much better if we get the selection process right. This means to find candidates with a highest possible fit for the position to be filled. This includes not only the education, knowledge and experience (eligibility) but also the traits, values and preferences (suitability) of the candidate. This will assure a high level of emotional commitment to the job and as a result high engagement leading to top performance.

If you can't find the optimal fit or if you have already employees working for you for some time, you may find that traits rooted in certain beliefs can still be developed with the help of a qualified executive coach. Also, lacking skills and experience can usually be developed through training initiatives. However, if the gap is too big between the current state and the optimal situation or if value clashes are getting in the way, you may need to consider replacing the employee in question. It is ultimately in both the company's and the employee's best interest.

Part III of this series will focus on Emotional Commitment to the Company and the Team.

If you have any comments in the meantime, please write to charlie.lang@progressu.com . We will post any comments to this series in the next part we publish.



Charlie Lang is an Executive Coach and Trainer who founded Progress-U Limited in 2002. His mission is to assist his clients in becoming excellent leaders for the benefit of all stakeholders. He is a passionate and professional Executive Coach, Mentor Coach, Trainer, Public Speaker and Author of over 100 articles related to leadership, change management and innovative sales.

End of 2004, he started authoring the book "The Groupness Factor" (see <http://www.progressu.com.hk/Groupness-book.htm>) which got published in August 2005. Charlie's articles got printed in publications like Human Resources, FZ Magazine, Banking Today, SCMP, Effective Executive and CareerTimes.

Charlie is a founding member and President (2007/08 & 2008/09) of the Hong Kong International Coaching Community, the largest coaching association in Greater China.