The New Era of the Glass Ceiling

Roe and Don Polczynski, Jr.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Business and organization leaders face new realities in the 21st century spurred on by the influx of generations of workers with far different expectations. While most organizations are trying to adjust to Gen Y (Millennials), Gen Z is just starting to enter the workforce. Once again, the rules of Reward, Recruit, Retain are about to change. People within the different generations have their own set of characteristics that define them. Luckily, one thing hasn't changed. They are all people; human beings who need and will demand to be treated as such. The organizations who understand how to engage each and every generation of their workforce at a human level will be at a significant advantage over those who resist acknowledging this change.

At the heart of every organization lies both its mission and its people. How well an organization is able to fulfill its mission is highly correlated with the level of engagement of its workforce. If one is off-track, so is the other. With the addition of new generations in the workforce, the struggle with employee engagement will continue to define an organization's ability to execute its mission in the 21st century.

In this ever-changing organizational landscape, new management concepts will be defined and need new execution strategies. Consider the concept of the "glass ceiling". The "glass ceiling" once referred to the invisible forces that kept women and minorities from achieving the highest levels within many organizations. While this is still unfortunately true for some, the connotation of the 21st century glass ceiling will be far different.

Organization leaders will be expected to become involved in acknowledging the existence of and in helping to shatter the personal glass ceilings of each and every individual team member. Failure to aid in breaking these personal glass ceilings will constitute a new kind of organizational glass ceiling.

When an employee reaches their personal limits, they hit their head on the glass ceiling and plateau. There can be many causes of this plateauing effect that add to the thickness of the glass. The more layers, the harder it is for that person to break through. Individually, the effect may not be too impactful on the organization as a whole. Yet, as more and more employees hit their head, the organizational glass ceiling becomes thicker and increasingly hard to break. Without intervention, the plateauing effect will be in full force.

This white paper is for organization owners, executives, managers and human resource professionals who want to decrease attrition, increase engagement and serve their employees as well as their mission. You need a hammer that will shatter through the layers of glass for your organization and employees alike.

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INTRODUCTION

According to a recent Gallup report, 67% of the American workforce are either not engaged or actively disengaged from their employer.[i] Judging by the attempts to integrate Millennials into the workforce, this number will likely increase. Traditionally, the analogy of a glass ceiling was used to illustrate the boundaries that existed for many women and minorities in the corporate world. While unfortunately for some that definition still holds true, there are also newly added dimensions in the 21st Century.

In this new era, employees' individual glass ceilings are comprised of obstacles that restrict their ability to reach an Ideal Future – the collection of their hopes, dreams and goals. When the individual factors in their life's equation aren't met, their glass ceilings are formed. Whether the obstacles are personal or professional, the result is the same. Unless rectified, layers of their glass ceiling will form to become a barrier to growth leading to an imminent plateau.

Organizations, whether they realize it or not, have influence on the thickness of these glass layers.

If the organization relies on its employees to fulfill its mission, then in return the organization needs to work to fulfill their employees' missions. The only way to remove these invisible barriers is for employers to become more engaged with the human side of their teams. It is now a critical function for organizations because it directly addresses the issue of employee engagement seen in the American workforce today.
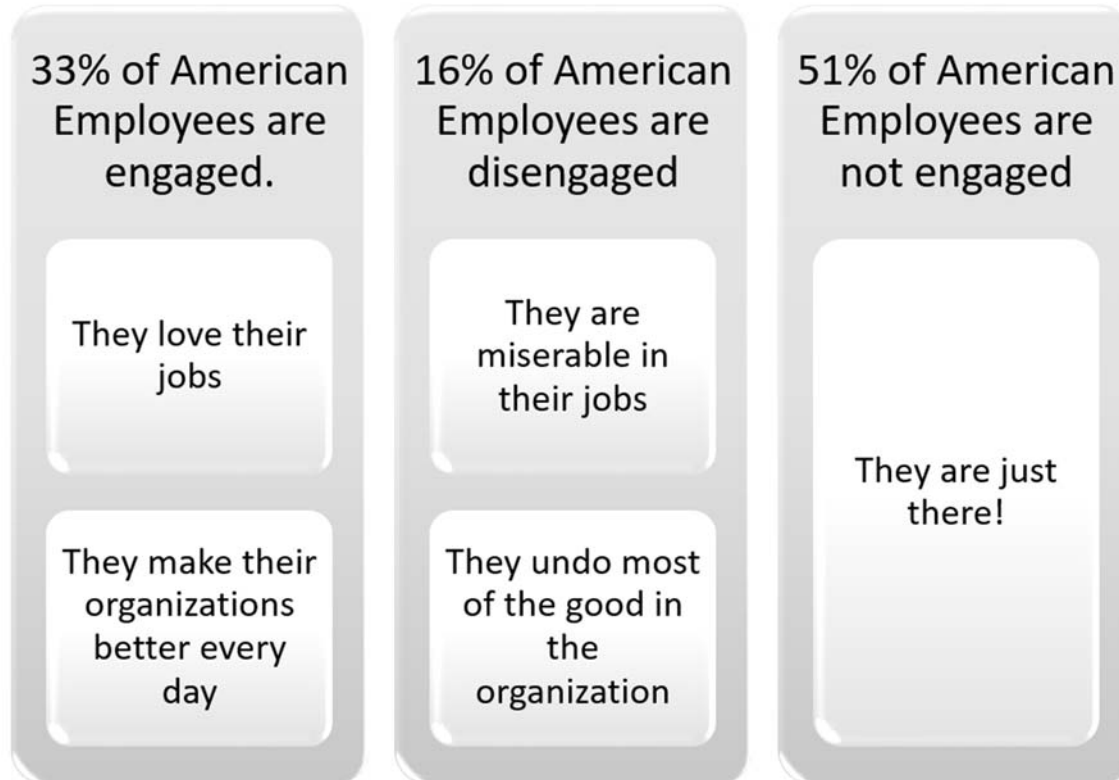
The connection between individual and organization occurs when you add all the unique layers of employees' glass ceilings; the summation constitutes the thickness of the organizational glass ceiling as a whole. There is no way around it. The personal missions of the employees and the mission of their organization are tied together.

$$\text{Organizational Glass Ceiling} = \sum \text{Individual Glass Ceilings}$$

Shattering the glass ceilings for all individuals will ultimately lead to an organization with the power to reach its highest potentials. This white paper will delve into the topic as it relates to employee engagement and retention, career growth and the solutions that can shatter the glass ceilings of organizations and the individuals who comprise their employee teams.

BACKGROUND/PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to the Gallup 2017 State of the American Workplace Executive Summary:[ii]

33% of American Employees are engaged.	16% of American Employees are disengaged	51% of American Employees are not engaged
They love their jobs	They are miserable in their jobs	They are just there!
They make their organizations better every day	They undo most of the good in the organization	

Interpreting these results, 67% of American employees don't care about fulfilling their organization's mission. This lack of connection leads to a slew of problems for organizations, including, but not limited to:

- High attrition
- Low morale
- Lack of internal advancement potential
- Customer complaints
- Decreased profit margins

Think about it – 67%. Look around your organization and only 1 employee out of 3 is passionate about giving their best to the mission.

"Employee Engagement" is a buzzword that has been used time and again yet the resulting problems still exist. According to the Gallup survey, though it is a universal issue, little headway has been made. It remains, as always, a critical concern for many organizations as they struggle to recruit, reward, and retain employees effectively.

While organizations generally tout employees as their greatest asset, their actions indicate otherwise. Far too often, the push for results negates those very words and is all too often de-humanizing. Sure, some organizations may increase pay, offer flexible schedules, and even conduct employee satisfaction surveys to offset the greater demands, however the problem is still treated with a top-down approach.

When employees aren't engaged at their core human level, they are treated as just another unit of production. Their needs, wants, goals, hopes and dreams are not even considered in the scope of organizational goals. Yet it is those same employees who will bring those goals to fruition. The expectations and demands are for the employees to fulfill the organizational mission, yet the organization doesn't even acknowledge the existence of the employees' individual missions in return.

The 21st Century glass ceiling is thickening.

The main issue in all of this is a lack of emotional connection. According to a Harvard Business Review article by Emma Seppala and Kim Cameron, "Engagement in work — which is associated with feeling valued, secure, supported, and respected — is generally negatively associated with a high-stress, cut-throat culture."[iii]

The root of the problem is management's failure to address the human needs of their employees. After all, employees are people with needs, wants, goals, hopes and dreams. In our book, Changing Your Equation, we wrote that everyone is entitled to an Ideal Future. Your employees are included in that statement!

As humans, employees have personal glass ceilings – those items that are limiting their personal and professional growth. Perhaps they don't have the education needed to for that next promotion. Maybe they were placed in a job with tasks that don't align with their strengths and skill-sets. Even having a manager who bosses instead of leads could be the source of disengagement. Whatever the work-related issues may be, they need to be addressed on an individual level.

However, addressing organizational limitations alone won't shatter the personal glass ceilings.

> *"Every one of your team members is important and worthy of care. Every one of them is instrumental in the future of your business, and your business should be instrumental in their lives."*
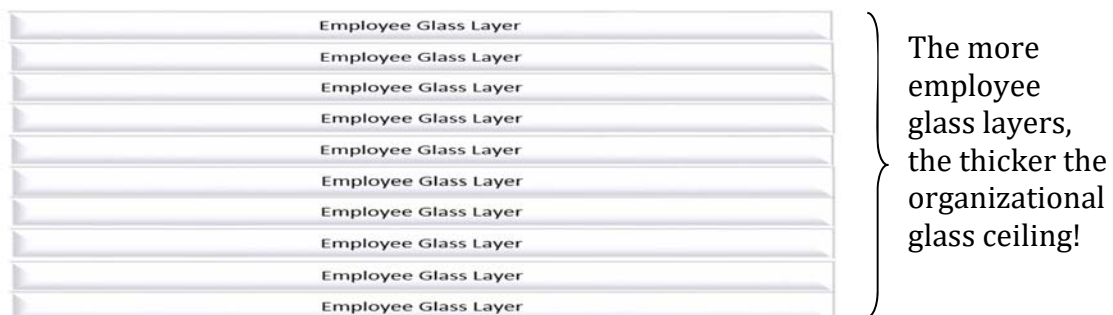>
> **Bob Chapman and Raj Sisodia**

When they walk through your front door, employees don't flip the switch to shut off their personal life. They can't – it's humanly impossible. Their personal stresses, whether physical, mental, emotional, or financial, don't disappear. In fact, the resulting damage can be very visible to others.

Consider just one of those stresses – financial. Personal finances are often quoted as Americans largest source of stress. Your employees might spend their time at work worrying about paying their bills or checking bank balances or calling financial institutions or telling their co-workers about their problems or anything else that may just offer the solution they are seeking. When they are so focused on the pressing need in their personal life, how engaged could they be in fulfilling the pressing needs of the organizational mission?

Employees can't completely separate their life outside of work. The organizational glass ceiling is getting thicker.

Wait, this is the connection! It is the missing piece in employee engagement. The human side of employees, their personal glass ceilings, are directly linked to the organizational glass ceiling. Yes, the organization will be limited by the human limits of their employees.

More than linked, the organizational glass ceiling is comprised of the individual glass ceilings of all its employees.

Employee Glass Layer
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The more employee glass layers, the thicker the organizational glass ceiling!

In all the attempts at employee engagement, this core element is often overlooked. Because there is no awareness on the part of the leaders, the personal glass ceilings are invisible. Management doesn't understand it at its core and certainly don't know what tools will actually break through it. Beyond knowing what those tools may be, managers often don't have the inclination, experience or time to be involved with their employees' personal Ideal Future.

The old management adage of "It's not my problem," will no longer suffice. Every employee issue that results in disengagement from their work and / or reduced productivity is your problem. Progressive managers need to view these situations as growth opportunities, both for their team members and the organization as a whole.

The employees need personal guidance and coaching to shatter their glass ceilings, and the organizations need help finding the right balance between offering the guidance and staying focused on its mission. It's no wonder employee engagement is an issue that has yet to be resolved…until now.

SOLUTION

> *"Every single employee is someone's son or someone's daughter. Like a parent, a leader of a company is responsible for their precious lives."*
>
> **Simon Sinek**

According to a December 2016 article in Communication World magazine one way organizations should approach the issue of employee engagement is to: "Conduct fulfillment training for your top leaders and managers, enabling them to become more skilled in understanding the role of fulfillment and how they can provide better balance, guidance, and support in creating more fulfilling workplaces." [iv]

Training programs will certainly bring awareness which is the first step in shattering the glass ceilings. During RD Advisory Group's "Breaking Through" workshops, one of the key moments is when the attendees are asked to think about the best leader they ever had and what made them so good. Many times the answers include, "they really cared about me as a person" and "I felt valued." Attendees often exhibit a sense of joy when talking about the past leader.

Then the questions turn to the worst "bosses" they ever had and of course the answers include, "they didn't listen to me" or "I was just a body in a chair." The conversation takes a darker tone. Not surprisingly, attendees become visibly agitated and stressed. Very often, they have left positions they truly excelled in due to the atmosphere that indicated a lack of care and concern for the humans in the organization.

Finally, the ultimate question comes: "What type of leader do you aspire to be – the best, or the worst?" Often, it's a moment of awareness and acknowledgement. In those candid moments, there will be attendees who own the fact they could show more empathy with their employees.

The key is to keep this momentum going. All too often, when the training ends, old habits return. Unless there is a breakthrough which causes a cultural shift, the organization will be back where it started. Transitioning this awareness and acknowledgement into action needs a catalyst. In the case of RD Advisory Group's mentor and coaching programs, they are that catalyst for sustainable cultural change as well as a resource for ongoing support.

Culture is determined by the top of the organization. There lies the responsibility for setting the atmosphere and the level of employee engagement the organization targets. Think about where your organization falls by asking yourself these questions:

- o Do their direct reports call them the "best leader" they ever had?
- o How many would say they're the "worst boss" they ever had?
- o Where do you really want your managers and supervisors to rank?
- o Are you enabling or restraining them?

An atmosphere of disinterest lowers the ceilings for everyone and leads to disengagement of the team.

Bringing in an outside perspective is crucial because organizations often suffer from a myopic view of their own culture. Perspective is lost as they live it every day and read their own press. Companies, such as RD Advisory Group, have the ability to clearly see all of the glass ceilings and can provide the tools to break through them.

Just as an accountant or attorney provides expertise which can be invaluable to your operations, having an outside leadership and culture mentor is equally invaluable to your reward, recruit, and retain strategies. The personal missions of your employees must be accounted for in order to execute and fulfill the mission of the organization as a whole. When this occurs, you will finally have the hammer needed to shatter the glass ceiling of employee engagement.

Authors and Leadership Experts, Roe and Don Polczynski, Jr. have developed a life's formula to help people break through their glass ceilings and reach their Ideal Future. By separating the equation into three factors, Life Elements, The Realities and Change Agents, they show readers how to remove their barriers, their glass ceilings, that are blocking the way. Taken from the pages of the book, "There is no monopoly on an Ideal Future." You too can bring this to life for your employees.

IN REAL LIFE

Managers observe the limiting behaviors and telltale signs of glass ceilings on a continual basis. Let's take a look at a real-life example.

This is a story about "Nadia". Overall, Nadia is an engaged member of the team whose performance is very good, but falls short of great. Nadia is a quick learner who applies new knowledge quickly and is a solid cultural fit in the organization. She is fairly inexperienced and is still learning her position.

One day we told Nadia, "We have a great book for you to read. It's packed full of great content from a renowned expert in your field. It's a must read."

Although Nadia is an engaged team member, her response was lukewarm at best, "Yeah, maybe I'll take a look at it sometime."

A couple weeks go by and we asked, "How is the book coming?" Nadia replies, "I haven't started it yet. It's just not the type of stuff I enjoy reading."

And so, the book sat unopened.

Another two weeks went by and when asked again about the book, "I've read the first couple chapters. My attitude towards reading it just isn't very good. But, I'll admit you're right, the first couple chapters were full of great ideas."

The moment to coach was upon us. Below is how we actually coached through the situation.

We said to Nadia, "Look up and tell us what you see." Nadia replied, "I see a light fixture." We questioned, "Do you see anything else between you and the light fixture?" Nadia looked a little perplexed and responded, "No."

We posed the question, "Nadia, do you think we see the same thing above your head?" She responded with a look of confusion. Then came the pivotal moment when we told her, "Nadia, we see a glass ceiling above your head. Your attitude towards reading the book and applying its learning is a glass ceiling. It is preventing you from growing in your career and holding back the organization from growing more quickly. You and the organization are at risk of plateauing." You could see the proverbial light bulb illuminating in Nadia's head.

Nadia had just connected the dots between reading the book, growing herself, growing the organization, and ultimately being rewarded for making an impact

that she could apply to advancing her own personal priorities, or in other words, move towards her Ideal Future.

It was never about reading a book. It was always about an attitude that constituted a glass ceiling for her personally as well as for the organization.

Upon this realization, Nadia's attitude toward the book changed instantly, so much so that she quickly found time in her busy life to make completing the book a priority. More importantly, she embraced the concept that she was looking straight through that glass ceiling. After all it was completely transparent, until someone looking from a different angle, a different perspective, made it visible. Her mind opened up to the idea that she may have other glass ceilings that are putting her and her career at risk of plateau.

What started out as a simple assignment became a transformational coaching moment that shattered a glass ceiling and opened her eyes to the possibilities of future coaching.

CONCLUSION

> *"Moving from performance management to performance development requires managers to think of themselves in a new way: As a coach, not a boss."*
>
> **Gallup, Inc.**

More, more, more…the demands on organizational leaders can stack higher and higher. Now, we want you to be more "in touch" with the human side of your team members. It's an endless circle. Higher level interactions with your individual team members will yield better results but where will you find the time, the energy, the passion and experience to engage in personal growth initiatives.

You will find it with RD Advisory Group. Using our book, Changing Your Equation, as a guide for personal growth and our Breaking Through workshops and coaching programs as catalysts for organizational growth, we can weaken and shatter glass ceilings. Employee engagement will no longer be an invisible glass ceiling holding everyone down. Your Reward, Recruit and Retain strategies will be effective. The 21st Century will not move on without you.

RESOURCES

i. *State of the American Workplace*. Report. Gallup Inc., 2017. 83.

ii. *State of the American Workplace*. Report. Gallup Inc., 2017. 2.

iii. Cameron, Emma SeppalaKim. "Proof That Positive Work Cultures Are More Productive." Harvard Business Review. May 08, 2017. Accessed September 04, 2017. https://hbr.org/2015/12/proof-that-positive-work-cultures-are-more-productive.

iv. Schiemann, William. "What role should company leaders play in employee fulfillment?" Communication World. December 20, 2016. Accessed September 04, 2017. http://cw.iabc.com/2016/12/20/what-role-should-company-leaders-play-in-employee-fulfillment/.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Roe and Don Polczynski, Jr.

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https://www.amazon.com/Changing-Your-Equation

It's time to reach your Ideal Future!

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