

I know what is expected of me at work.

Clarity of expectation — perhaps the most basic of employee needs in the workplace — is critical to performance. Yet approximately half of American workers are unclear about what they are supposed to do at work.

The following summary is a brief excerpt on this Q¹² element from Rodd Wagner and James K. Harter's *12: The Elements of Great Managing* (Gallup Press, December 2006).

Because so much of an enterprise's efficiency depends on the seamless combination of personal responsibilities, the First Element of Great Managing is job clarity. When Gallup researchers went in search of questions most predictive of performance, one of the most straightforward turned out to be one of the most powerful: "I know what is expected of me at work." Groups that have high scores on this item are more productive, more profitable, even more creative. Substantial gains on the First Element alone often correlate with productivity gains of five to ten percent, thousands more happy customers and 10 to 20 percent fewer on-the-job accidents.

One electric utility solicits cost-reduction ideas from its employees, much like the suggestion boxes at many businesses. Of those recommendations implemented, the average idea adopted from its less engaged workers saves the company \$4,000. The average idea from the most committed employees saves \$11,000. Clearly the more engaged people put more brainpower into helping their business. Of the 12 Elements, knowing what's expected plays the largest role in generating money-saving strategies at the utility.

For a manager trying to achieve positive answers from her team, the First Element is the easiest of the 12 — but it's still not that easy. On average, only about half of the employees in the international database "strongly agree" with the statement. The numbers are not impressively high even in stereotypically well-defined roles such as security personnel,

sales, truck drivers, registered nurses, or production staff, where the figure ranges from just over half to almost two-thirds. The number drops to a third for those in scientific, technical, and computer-related jobs. And it's amazingly common to find individuals making large salaries who will confide, "I really don't know what I'm supposed to be doing here."

The greatest pitfall of this element is that managers assume the simplicity of the statement means the issue requires only a basic solution: "If people don't know what's expected, I'll just tell them." This is analogous to American tourists who, not knowing the local language, speak English more slowly and loudly. And it's just as ineffective.

"Knowing what's expected" is more than a job description. It's a detailed understanding of how what one person is supposed to do fits in with what everyone else is supposed to do, and how those expectations change when circumstances change. A good team, some say, is a lot like a great jazz band in which each player listens to the other instruments as he plays his own. The better they pay attention to the rest of the band and work their way into the music, the better the result. •

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