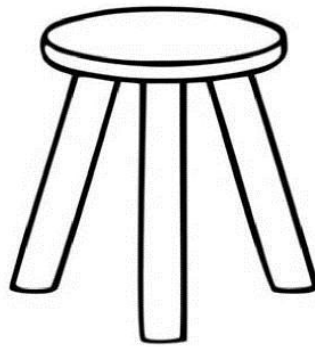


# Maximizing Employee Engagement - Three Legs of the Stool

[My first post](#) discussed how engaged employees benefit their employers. [My second post](#) defined employee engagement. Here, we explore what creates a foundation for fully engaged workplace relationships.

In my view, employee engagement rests on a three-legged stool.

## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT



***Making a***

***Difference***

***Shared***

***Purpose***

***Connecting***

***Personally***

*Shared purpose:* Gallup's 2013 Report on the State of the American Workplace disclosed that [only 30% of American workers are engaged](#). As to why engagement levels are so low, one finding seems significant. Only 41% of employees surveyed agreed with the following statement: "I know what my company stands for."

As a former manager and employment law litigator, and currently as an executive coach, trainer and consultant, I've observed that management's "whats" vastly outnumber its "whys." We tell employees what to do. Yet we rarely explain why — the purpose, objective or need behind the what.

I encourage managers to strive to make the What:Why Ratio 1:1. Connecting daily communications to mission, vision, goals and values builds engagement.

*Making a difference:* Have you ever felt frustrated by needless obstacles preventing you from fully contributing your skills, talents and abilities? Leaders want their workforces engaged, yet few ask whether they are unwittingly preventing their employees from contributing their fullest to better the organization.

Based on my work with employers, including 25 years of litigating broken workplace relationships, I believe the vast majority of employees (including the problem ones) want to contribute and not simply put in their time and collect a paycheck.

I use the following tool to improve employee contributions and give them a greater sense of accomplishment. The “Triple Two” consists of a manager asking his or her employees, “What two things should I start doing, stop doing and continue doing that will help you be successful?” It’s not what **they** need to start/stop/continue, it’s what **you** need to start/stop/continue. The Triple Two creates a permission-to-speak-freely exchange about things that really matter. It identifies hidden obstacles as well as opportunities for growth and improvement.

*Connecting personally:* Confession: For years as a management attorney, I preached the doctrine that manager-employee relations should be kept impersonal and focused on work only. The idea was to keep things from getting complicated, especially when the boss might have a tough message to impart.

I now believe the contrary. Truly engaged employees feel a connection that goes beyond just the work. Connecting personally doesn’t necessarily mean attending weddings, christenings, bar mitzvahs and so forth. In many cases, knowing something about their lives, where they grew up, names of their family members and special interests or hobbies will suffice. Connecting on a personal level humanizes you to them and them to you.

Each leg of the stool supports the others. Together they create a foundation for workplace relationships based on trust, collaboration, effort, initiative and accountability.