



FERENCE LEADERSHIP and STRATEGY

Alignment • Balance • Style

Hospitality Gaming Foodservice Retail Leisure Entertainment

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN Hypercompetitive Times

**After bricks and mortar the most precious,
challenging, and competitive resource
is your human capital!**

How engaged are they?

EVERYONE KNOWS we are in a supercharged, challenging economic environment. Now, more than ever, it is important to be proactive in order to stay on top of issues which are top-of-mind with your staff. Surveying the pulse of your employees can reveal some startling insights about their mindset and what they really think. **One arena that fluctuates with a significant change in executive leadership, organizational climate, and the economy is employee engagement.** Under increased stress and downturns in the economy, how well do employees continue to represent the brand promise to each guest? Simply put, if morale is down, leadership insensitive, and personal futures uncertain, employees become disengaged, lose focus, fail to walk-the-talk, and experience attitude shifts ultimately affecting product quality, personalized service, and memorable guest experiences. Only engaged employees work with passion, drive, and enthusiasm to get the job done right.

It is easy for guests today to view the hospitality industry with too many promises, too many claims, and too much confusion. As a result, **guests turn to brands who walk-the-talk and where product excellence prevails, service is engaging, and the experience is beyond expectation.** One estimate of the eventual shake out of brands in the high-end sector of the hospitality industry is an eventual reduction from 130 to 25 global companies. To thrive, peak performing organizations will keep their messages focused on reinforced vision, fundamental core values, and measuring their brand promise.

EVERYONE RECOGNIZES the need to cut costs in tough economic times but top brands also recognize that the right brand investments today will ensure their own future as well as allow them to jump-the-curve-of-competition when economic conditions improve. **In short, cut the right costs, keep the brand image strong, and don't stop investing in your people power.**

Creating Competitive Advantage

Aligning Organizations
Through
Insightful Creativity
and
Operational Leadership



Gene Ference, Ph.D., President
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Gene is a service-industry insider. His degrees in management and organizational development from Cornell University are backed by over 30 years of industry experience. He is an accomplished speaker and group facilitator, conducting management workshops, leadership retreats and strategy meetings. He has developed and implemented research surveys internationally, worked with Fortune 100 companies, contributed to client national quality awards, and designed appropriate strategies for optimizing human capital and growing organizational profits.

Supporting Divisions

Peak Performance Mindset
*Programs in Organizational Dynamics
and Service Practices*

Center For Survey Research
*Customized Metrics and Assessments
Positioning the Business*

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BUT NOT EVERYONE REALIZES fundamental principles of surveying staff and turning raw numbers into strategic information need to be embraced. **Top brands are peak performers not by accident.** They thrive by working continuously – in good times and bad – to remain relevant to their brand promise. Just who drives your brand promise? In day-to-day operations the answer is your staff. How well do they understand your brand? What are their perceptions of how well their team delivers the brand promise? To what extent are employees engaged in selling to each guest the features and benefits of your brand? Surveys can tell you this and more.

The following proactive steps will make your brand thrive and not just survive:

Step #1: Make sure your survey measures the right stuff.

At the Center for Survey Research, it is our custom to measure numerous organizational dimensions such as: Communication, Motivation, Teamwork, Quality of Product, Service, and Experience, Mid-Management Practices, Leadership, and many more. These areas are further refined into sub-dimensions. For example, leadership is segmented into three behavioral sub-dimensions: providing *optimum direction*, providing *meaningful support*, and providing *passionate engagement* with the guest/customer. In today's hypercompetitive times, everyone needs to be continuously monitoring their employee-customer engagement practices. At the Center for Survey Research we correlate the metrics of employee engagement to leadership and report results in property overviews, by department, and by organizational levels. While executive committees are managing the big picture, it is department heads and their staff who are managing the operation's day-to-day standards. We provide each mid-level manager with a report of their individual department complete with benchmarks, comparatives, and norms. This is their tool for monitoring change and continuous improvement, and operationally this is where the rubber meets the road!

Step #2: Ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

Top-of-mind for each respondent is the question, How confidential and anonymous is this survey? Unlike marketing surveys which characteristically use random samples of large consumer populations, employee feedback surveys ask questions sensitive to the performance levels of individuals and teams. The population is finite and these surveys can influence individual's professional futures.

Additional articles can be found at FerenceLeadershipAndStrategy.com

Topics include:

- Developing Baselines, Comparatives and Trends
- Maintaining a Competitive Edge
- Obtaining Complete & Honest Employee Feedback
- Setting Standards to Reach Peak Performance
- Upgrading Product & Service to Ensure Customer Loyalty & Dedicated Employees
- Ensuring Communication Flow is a Two-Way Street
- Gaining the Right Information for Your Competitive Advantage
- Team Building to Reach Strategic Goals.

... and more

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Employee feedback surveys focus on internal populations all of whom normally participate in the survey process. For complete and honest data, all participants need to feel comfortable that no one from within their organization will see the respondent's data in its original form. Whether surveys are conducted on paper or over the internet, employees need to be reassured that the process is highly confidential and that it will protect the anonymity of each person regardless of their position in the organization. I recall receiving a phone call from a vice president of finance with a large international hotel company. He asked, "Gene, just how confidential is this survey?" Only after personally explaining to him that no one except us would ever see his responses did he feel reassured with the process. So, confidentiality is a key concern at all levels. With it, you get good data. Without it, you run the risk of putting your ladder up against the wrong wall.

Step #3: Be prepared to share survey results.

Employees who have taken the time to complete a survey expect the results to be communicated to them. With no feedback, the next survey will receive no interest and no enthusiasm whatsoever. Managers who do not share results should not expect commitment to change.

Initial feedback can be accomplished by providing an overview of the top five items employees see as strengths and the five lowest scoring items employees see as their greatest dissatisfactions, frustrations, and challenges. This feedback needs to be reported on at least two levels: the overall property level as well as each department level. We have found that while employees find overall results interesting, they really became attentive, eager, and fully engaged when their own departmental scores are revealed to them. And if you really want them to focus 110%, show them the comparative results from other departments.

Step #4: Develop action plans that have staying power.

Actions plans developed in a vacuum have no commitment. Employees need to be involved in the action planning process with their input seen as contributing to the improvement process. We advocate a double-loop process whereby each department creates their action plans which are copied to top management. In this way, department heads track their goals on a scheduled basis and top management follows-up on progress, accountabilities, and recognition. For further insights the article *Peak Performance at The Dorchester* can be found at:

<http://www.hotelmanagement-network.com/features/feature43817>.

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Step #5: Keep results top-of-mind daily, weekly, and monthly.

It is a waste of time and money to look at survey results only as the topic-of-the-day and put reports on the shelf until the next survey. Properly formatted reports should be referred to on a continuous and systematic basis throughout the year. We report survey results in such a manner that all employees feel comfortable in referring to them in daily line-ups, management-by-wandering-around (with purpose) tours, staff meetings, orientation programs, training seminars, and strategic planning meetings. Too often results are reported in complicated spreadsheet formats to be interpreted only by executives whose interest is primarily in seeing the positive, top-side numbers to be reported to head office and owners. The real power for continuous improvement lies with front-line employees and their need to be engaged in peak performance: product quality, personalized service, and memorable guest experiences.

At the Center for Survey Research, our data bank has over 1,000,000 employee feedback surveys conducted worldwide, cross culturally, and dedicated to the hospitality industry. Based on the views of these service employees in 72 countries, our analysis reveals common operational challenges: perceived favoritism, out-of-touch leadership, lack of recognition, absence of performance feedback, and general insensitivity to working conditions. These areas can and do directly affect the interpersonal and highly complex arena of employee-guest contact. Without motivated employees, brand clarity, and passionate guest engagement, the lifeline for continued success will not float in today's ocean of uncertainties. In these economic times, just how engaged are your employees?

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