

***Fire Up! Your Employees and Smoke your Competition;
How to Invite, Incite, and Ignite Employee Performance***

By Jay Forte



Introduction

Create the Fire for Passionate Performance

“Every great idea starts out as blasphemy.”

Bertrand Russell

To fire them up, you must know how they spark.

In *extraordinary* organizations, *all* employees are excited and energized, their brains sparking with ideas, inventing solutions, and contributing in all areas. They connect with their jobs; they connect with their managers. These connections fan their performance sparks into an all out fire of passionate performance. Employees actively contribute in ways that use their talents and strengths. Employees voice their opinions, solve problems, and invent opportunities. Employees think and act like owners because they are engaged, passionate, and fired up about what they do.

In *average* organizations, we occasionally see the sparks of employee performance – a little extra effort here, a little more creativity there. We see only random sparks, not hot enough to start any fire of performance; these employees are unable to significantly impact results. How an organization activates their employees’ passion for performance determines whether the organization will be extraordinary or average. What does the extraordinary organization do that the average one does not? Why is it that some organizations consistently engage and ignite employees’ passionate performance while others can barely generate a spark of enthusiasm? The answer is more about you, the manager, than the employee. Let’s see why.

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When you slept last night, the world changed. It moved from manufacturing to service, from industrial to intellectual, from brawn to brain. As author Seth Godin states, “We used to make food (agrarian society), then we made things (industrial age), now we make ideas (service economy).” Our days are no longer involved doing the same repetitive process that was a significant part of manufacturing or the industrial age. Much of manufacturing moved offshore and left us with a service economy. Service is an intellectual and thinking environment – all brains need to be fully engaged, thinking, inventing, and responding to be successful. We used to provide manpower (physical work) in the agrarian age, horsepower in the industrial age, but today we provide brainpower (thinking and innovation). Employees own this brainpower and it is their choice to offer it, or not. This very fact has significantly affected how employees must be managed. To be effective, our management style must always reflect the needs of those we manage – our employees. Managers must now learn to connect intellectually and emotionally with employees in order to ignite their (passion for) performance. This means you, the manager, must become a better communicator, listener, collaborator, nurturer, and relationship builder. These attributes, previously discouraged in the workplace, are now the drivers of performance.

Performance remains our goal; you now see that you can no longer demand or dictate performance. As Dr. Lois Frankel states in her book *See Jane Lead*, “People don’t want to be told what to do, when to do it, and how it should be done. Not only do they not want it, they won’t allow it.” The focus on strong, centralized, military-based command-and-control management actually works against performance in today’s intellectual workplace. Today, you must inspire and engage employees to activate their performance. Today you must INVITE, INCITE and IGNITE employee performance; you do this through the new and more powerful form of management that focuses on the power of *connection* – *intellectual connection* of the employee to his/her role and the *emotional connection* of the employee to his/her work, manager, team, and organization.

Today, each employee must be fired up and thinking about ways to add value, to contribute, build customer rapport, find opportunities, innovate, and in short, make a big difference in both the job and in the organization. Your people are your profits, or, your

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people's thinking, innovation, and passionate responses drive your profits. It is up to you, the manager, to be the spark that ignites each employee's passion for performance. It is up to you to fire up each employee.

Though you want and need great performance from all employees, the Gallup Organization presents research showing approximately 65 percent of employees do just enough at work not to be fired. Seventeen percent don't care if they get fired because they believe they will easily find another job. That leaves approximately only 18 percent of employees committed, engaged, connected, and fired up – trying their best to make a difference in the workplace and with customers. And though the percentages change depending on the study and on the economic conditions, they indicate that not much more than 20 percent of employees are fully engaged (fired up and excited about doing a great job); all others do less than is required for the organization to be successful.

There is very little likelihood of exceptional performance, achieving significant targets, and growing the business unless:

- You identify that employees (what they know and how they perform) are your organization's greatest assets and, therefore, must be continually, wisely, and aggressively invested in.
- Employees feel they work for an organization that is employee-focused in its culture, policies, and workplace brand.
- Employees connect *intellectually* to their work. Employees are more inspired to perform when their duties and responsibilities match their talents, strengths, and interests.
- Employees connect *emotionally* to their work by having a voice in determining how to contribute and how to achieve their performance expectations.
- Employees connect *emotionally* to you, their manager. Having a successful and professional relationship with you will influence the length of time an employee will stay, how productive he/she is, and how fired up he/she will be.

You, as a manager, have the most influential role in creating a dynamic workforce, and it starts with a new and non-conventional way of looking at your employees. Employees are

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(intellectual-age) assets to invest in; they are no longer (industrial-age) expenses to manage. As such, you need to regularly investigate ways to secure more significant returns from these assets. You do this by understanding how to grow your investment; in this case, by understanding what employees need to be their best and to continually provide it.

The changes in your world now require you to learn how to partner with each employee – much in the same way you must partner with customers to be successful. The Fire Up! ProcessSM is transformation management thinking. It offers a new approach to developing your employees' talents and human capital. In each section of this book, I support a hands-on and practical method connecting employee intellectually to their work and connecting them emotionally to their work and to you. Connections focus on the humanity of your employees as thinking, feeling, and emotional beings. The more you allow this back into the workplace, the more you will connect to your employees and inspire them to perform.

So, it is you, the manager who can fan, or douse, the flames of performance. How has the role of manager changed in the intellectual age so you have this impact on employees? A reintroduction to the role of a manager and leader is critical at this point in our discussion.

Things to Consider

- From your perspective, what is the role of the manager?
- What is the manager's responsibility to each employee?
- What is the manager's responsibility to the bottom line?

As you move forward in this new thinking, let's review a perspective offered by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman from the Gallup Organization in their book, *First, Break all the Rules*. Basically, they feel *leaders* are responsible for the vision and the direction of the organization; this includes a continual focus *outward*, which looks at opportunities, competition, planning, developing new directions to take advantage of, and invents opportunities to increase our value.

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Managers, on the other hand, focus *inward*; they look into each person. Managers look to understand each employee and help him/her achieve his/her best. Successful managers act as a catalyst to create performance by matching employee talents with company goals and creating performance by matching employee talents with customer needs. And they do this by knowing their employees well and understanding some critical information about management. Again, notice that management approach should be based on the needs of the employees (those you manage) rather than on a one-size-fits-all approach based on the way things have always been done.

Leaders use the powerful team inspired by a millennial manager to fully implement the vision. This collaborative approach ensures a vibrant and high-performing employee base, clearly directed and led through a clearly articulated and well understood vision. Though this still remains the minority perspective, I support this interpretation and will use it to show a more effective and performance-based management approach in connecting to employees.

The best way to exhibit this definition of *manager* is with a reference to the famous Italian sculptor Michelangelo, the creator of exceptional masterpieces, including the *David* and the *Pieta*. Though these are extraordinary, his finest works are actually those that represent more of what he thought to be the role of the sculptor. As the sculptor, he believed he was charged not with creating a sculpture, but rather releasing from the stone what was already in it. Some of his finest works are the statues known as *The Slaves*; these sculpted emotive male forms are aggressively struggling to be released from the stone. This was the sculptor's purpose – to know what is in the stone and release it. This perspective offers similar wisdom for today's managers. Your role as a manager is to help release the talents of your employees, existing inside them. You need to understand them well enough to know what these talents are and to help employees identify them and develop them for their personal and professional success. You do this by connecting them intellectually to their work and emotionally to you, their management, and the organization.

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Before you can move on to the process of implementing a new millennial management approach, you need to review one more area presented by Buckingham, Coffman, and the Gallup Organization. For years, the Gallup Organization interviewed managers and their performance to determine what made managers effective or ineffective.

Their results showed that even though all great managers look different and were involved in a variety of businesses, they all shared one common insight. They realize “People don’t change that much. Don’t try to put in what was left out; try to draw out what was left in...that is hard enough.” (In short, work with the talents (strengths) that are in place and don’t try to fix or focus on employee weaknesses.)

People are who they are. They are like the stone – they must be true to their natures. Buckingham and Coffman’s guidance reminds managers not to spend time trying to make an employee something he/she isn’t or to do things that are not in line with the way he/she thinks. Instead, spend time encouraging the employee to be better at what he/she is already good at. Each job is a thinking (innovating, creating) job in an intellectual economy. It is now more important than ever that you place employees in roles that match the way they think because this creates the greatest opportunity for an employee to feel competent, confident and to perform at exceptional levels.

Let’s see the Marcus Buckingham’s phrase “People don’t change that much...” from another angle. His perspective also means a job that requires a particular type of thinking cannot be done by an employee who does not naturally possess that thinking. A core strength or talent (based in thinking) can’t be changed; we have what we have. You must, therefore, learn to define the thinking needed in your roles (jobs) and locate employees who naturally share that thinking. You set an employee up for failure when you put him/her in a role that does not match his/her natural thinking. And since specific thinking is the key to your connection to customers and performance, the better matched an employee is to his/her role, the more likely strong performance will result. This will be one of the most fundamental changes in management mindset that has resulted from the economy’s movement from the industrial age to the intellectual age. Your focus remains performance; the methods to achieve it have changed.

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This new perspective is actually very fundamental. It seems obvious that in a thinking economy, the right thing to do is to match an employee's thinking to his/her role and he/she will think better, be more content, and more engaged. Employees are happiest when they feel most competent and capable. Matching their thinking with the thinking in their roles encourages their performance and confidence. Though this makes great sense, today's managements are not connecting to their employees; they continue to use the outdated industrial-age command-and-control management style of dictate, demand, and define instead of the more effective, dynamic, and passionate inspire-and-engage style. Management's focus on performance mandates, hiring any employee for any role, and spending little time developing or encouraging employees, are creating a performance crisis. *Employees are not the problem – management is.* As was mentioned, management style must always be based on the needs of those being managed. Today's management style must focus on connecting to employees, building strong relationships, empowering them, and holding them accountable for performance and results.

To change to a more successful form of management that actively encourages performance and engagement, I introduce the Fire Up! ProcessSM, a step-by-step process to help all managers learn the fundamentals of managing an intellectual-age workforce, by creating a stronger intellectual and emotional connection with their employees. For those managers who developed their style in the industrial age, this focus on emotional connection may appear challenging. But research supports that this emotional connection is the key to loyalty. In the book *Human Sigma*, written by Dr. John H. Fleming and Jim Asplund, the authors show that customers become loyal (not just satisfied) only when an emotional connection is created with a company, product, or brand. From my experience, their results can also be applied to employees. Employees become loyal (engaged, committed, and high-performing) not only when they connect intellectually to their work (it matches their thinking), but when they also have a personal and emotional connection to their manager and workplace. Emotions, feelings, thinking – in short, humanity – matter in today's intellectual workplace. The happier employees are at work, the more engaged they become; this drives performance. This must, therefore, influence how you manage. This must, therefore, influence how you invest in your employees. This,

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therefore, influences what drives performance. The Fire Up! ProcessSM offers an approach to consistently engage and inspire employee resulting in extraordinary performance.

The pressure is on you. As I said, today's poor performance is more a statement about management than employees. Today, management success is in strong emotional intelligence – strong human relationships and interaction skills. The days of telling employees what to do are over. Today, you must communicate, nurture, listen, collaborate, and connect – you must inspire and engage – if you want to fire up your employees and help them perform. And when they are fired up, they'll smoke your competition.