



## The Hedonic Treadmill of Employee Engagement

When people think about how to increase Employee Engagement in organizations, they often focus on more tangible things like perks and environment. The thought is that, if you provide your team with good benefits and a beautiful place to work that includes fun things to do in between projects, they will then become more engaged in the work. How wonderful if that were so. All any company would need do is invest in a few ping-pong tables or a weekly massage therapist and voila! Employee Engagement!

I strongly encourage any or all of it. Benefits like good health insurance and 401(k)s help you to attract and keep talent. Recreational outlets are a means to address the tension and stress that can be part of a productive work environment. However, the problem with solely providing benefits and environmental “perks” as a means of engagement is that people get used to them very quickly. It’s known as the “hedonic treadmill.”



### Hedonic Treadmill - noun

The theory that humans continually adapt to bad and good circumstances and return to relative neutrality

Example: *Lottery winners are the perfect example of the hedonic treadmill: within a year they generally return to their former level of happiness.*

The Hedonic Treadmill recognizes that workers will quickly become used to the perks your organization so generously provides. Whether it’s great benefits or Freaky Fridays,” after awhile it becomes part of the “given” and the “expected” and they demand more. This is why you so often hear senior level executives lament, “It’s never enough for them.” (But these executives have their own version of The Hedonic Treadmill that often includes huge bonuses or better company cars.)

The Hedonic Treadmill inspires a strong argument for the three pillars of Employee Engagement that we advocate:

- (1) Socratic Delegation
- (2) Socratic Feedback, and
- (3) Laughter in the Workplace.

No matter the benefits, toys or fun events provided, what has the strongest impact on Employee Engagement is the relationship between them and their direct supervisor. And those relationships play out most often when delegation and feedback are happening. When a supervisor delegates in a way that implies the team member doesn’t know what s/he is doing, de-motivation occurs. Likewise, when feedback is given in a way that leaves scars. Employees mentally and emotionally check out. They do the bare minimum or start looking for other jobs.

We include laughter in the Employee Engagement equation because, as Victor Borge once famously said, “*Laughter is the shortest distance between people.*” When you have a supervisor you can laugh with, your engagement in the work increases. After all, you cannot laugh with someone unless you like him, even just a little. That makes it difficult to defy that person when s/he assigns you work.

If you are actively trying to increase Employee Engagement, which is at record lows across our nation, I invite you to pivot from the “give them more perks” conversation and toward the Leadership conversation.

No one ever performed their job *better* because of health insurance or foosball but there is a history of solid research that employees are more productive for a direct supervisor who is an effective and likeable leader.

To discuss how to get your team off the Hedonic Treadmill and onto the more productive path of engagement, call 480-560-9452 or email [Silver@SilverSpeaks.com](mailto:Silver@SilverSpeaks.com) to schedule a conversation.

**Silver Rose is an Employee Engagement Thought Leader** who works with organizations to implement practical, proven and timesaving strategies for: (1) improving employee engagement, (2) increasing profitability, and (3) freeing leadership from the need to micro-manage.

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