

# The Engagement Paradox

The More You Manage Engagement—  
The More Disengagement You Produce

## WHITE PAPER

7 Employee Engagement Principles  
Based on Brain Science  
By Brady Wilson

*Juice*



## Executive Summary

This white paper asserts something surprising—that although employee engagement is the primary strategy leaders rely on to get employees to produce a great customer experience, it rarely delivers it. In fact, many leaders and employees today are caught in the grip of the paradox that employee engagement policies can actually lead to employee disengagement.

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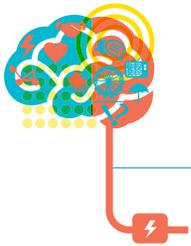
There are two key reasons why:

1. We've focused on engagement and ignored energy—the fuel that drives passion, innovation, intuition, and “extra mile” helpfulness, the vital differentiators of the customer experience.
2. We've failed to understand the organ that generates our experiences—the brain.

And there's a major and very serious result:

**We're missing the opportunity to align the customer experience we want with the employee experience that will produce it.**

The 7 leadership principles from brain science in this white paper explain why achieving employee engagement is not enough. They provide links to cases that show how some organizations have shifted their approach to managing employee energy and matching employee experience and customer experience—and are achieving superior outcomes as a result.



## The employee engagement principles from brain science are:

- 1. *Manage Energy*, Not Engagement**  
The focus on engagement has left good people engaged but exhausted, dedicated but depleted. When leaders learn to manage energy, they safeguard the engagement they wanted all along but unlock something extra: energy. It's energy, not engagement, that fuels the passion, innovation, and enthusiasm that generate great employee experiences and therefore customer experiences.
- 2. *Trust Conversations*, Not Surveys**  
Managing energy in human-to-human relations is neither ethereal nor mysterious. In fact, it can be mapped inside the brain. Energy is generated electrochemically, as high-performance hormones are released through quality conversations. When leaders learn how to step into simple energy check conversations (one-on-one or within a team), they generate the energy that drives sustainable results.
- 3. *Target Emotion*, Not Logic**  
When it comes to managing energy, not all experiences have equal impact. Emotional experiences unlock more energy than rational ones. When leaders learn to close the gap between what they intend and what employees actually feel, they release higher levels of discretionary effort.
- 4. *Seek Tension*, Not Harmony**  
Emotional experiences are not difficult to locate. They reside within tension—the gap between what an employee believes is possible and the experience of their current reality. Leaders can learn to unlock the power of these poignant experiences by stepping into the tension and building on competing needs.
- 5. *Practice Partnering*, Not Parenting**  
Stepping into tension in an unskillful way releases destructive energy. Many leaders try to resolve tension with a parenting approach, overpowering the employee's concerns or accommodating them. When leaders learn to shift from parenting to partnering, they co-author powerful solutions that employees are willing to adopt and implement.





- 6. Pull out the Backstory, Not the Action Plan**  
Leaders don't have to look long and hard to find partnering opportunities. They are staring up at them from their last employee engagement report. When leaders learn to draw out the backstory behind the engagement scores, they can identify what matters most to employees and partner to create the solutions that will generate meaningful energy.
- 7. Meet Needs, Not Scores**  
When leaders understand what matters most to their employees, they can make energy sustainable by skillfully helping them get their needs met.

The concluding *How to Make It Work* box summarizes the actions you can take the moment you finish reading this white paper.

## How to Get the Most Out of This White Paper

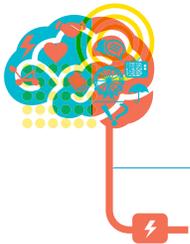
Each principle is made up of a what, where, why, and how:

- What's the brain science?
- Where does this show up at work?
- Why does this matter?
- How to make this work

If you're intrigued by brain science, you may choose to concentrate on the what and how sections. If you're a bottom-line thinker, you may choose to go to the why sections. If you have a strong bias for action, you can skip the entire paper and jump to the *How to Make It Work* summary at the end.

Naturally, you can read the paper from start to finish to see the logical step-by-step build. But even though all 7 principles are connected, each can be explored and used on its own. If your curiosity is piqued by a particular principle, skip right to that page.

And at the very end, I share a personal story that imprinted a life lesson on me—the one that inspired me to write this white paper and my soon-to-be-released book on this topic.



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## About Brady Wilson

As co-founder of Juice Inc., Brady Wilson’s vision is to create a world where businesses pulsate with creative energy. For 20 years, he has inspired companies including American Express, Loblaw, The Co-operators, and some of the world’s largest Fortune 500 companies to consider the possibilities beyond traditional HR strategies; unlock latent organizational energy (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual); and harness employees’ potential to go above and beyond the call of duty.

Wilson is the author of three books dedicated to improving employee performance and business results: *Juice: The Power of Conversation*, *Love at Work: Why Passion Drives Performance in the Feelings Economy*, and *Finding the Sticking Point: Increase Sales by Transforming Customer Resistance into Customer Engagement*.

An animated and pragmatic speaker, Wilson shares practical tools and the know-how to excite and inspire audiences to create a sustained approach to positive change—and better business results.



## Introduction: From Willpower to Energy

Employee engagement is not working. Even the best organizations are seeing their scores plateau and then decline. This is a serious problem. Both employees and leaders are facing a crisis of belief.

- Up to 50% of the employee population in these organizations do not believe any meaningful action will occur as a result of the engagement survey.
- And leaders can't dump the engagement machinery—that would send all the wrong messages—but they can see that lack of forward movement is producing deep cynicism at every level of the organization.

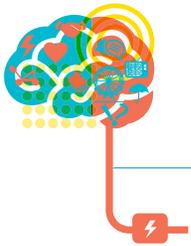
One manager put it aptly, saying, "We talk about engagement all the time. It's like being in a relationship and constantly being asked to talk about the relationship—rather than taking the time to hold hands and walk down the beach."

Why is employee engagement not working? Because it's possible for employees and managers to be engaged but not energized, and when they're not energized, it's only a matter of time before they become disengaged.

However well intentioned it may be, managing engagement relies on grim determination, guilt, shame, fear, control. It triggers a quick surge among employees that gets stuff done but creates a dangerous cynicism.

But managing energy sparks connection, meaning, progress, and autonomy, creating employee engagement and setting up the all-important alignment between...

employee experience  
+  
customer experience



# 7 Employee Engagement Principles Based on Brain Science

## ① *Manage Energy*, Not Engagement

### What's the Brain Science?

When your brain is low on energy, the first thing you lose is your executive function—your ability to predict outcomes, focus your attention, regulate emotions, and initiate action.

The executive function of the brain is **metabolically** expensive<sup>1</sup> and places a large draw on a person's energy stores. What suffers most is value-creation and innovation<sup>2</sup>—the primary drivers of a great employee experience and a great customer experience.

Entropy is a given in nature, as the second law of thermodynamics demonstrates. This means the dissipation of energy is guaranteed. In common-speak, everything winds down unless it's wound up again. The normal challenges of organizational life will deplete people. Great leaders do not leave the generation of energy to chance. They build energy conversations into the lived experience of their managers and employees.

[\(Read the Case: From Engagement to Energy\)](#)

### Where Does This Show Up at Work?

In today's knowledge-worker environment, results are no longer determined by *physical* energy (how much coal a worker can shovel in a day) but by *innovative* energy (how much innovative value an employee can create in a day).

Typical employee engagement initiatives don't focus on generating energy. They focus on unlocking discretionary effort—that is, on getting people to go above and beyond the call of duty. So good-hearted employees heed the call, come in earlier, stay later, and try harder in-between. But they're exhausted.



These loyal, committed people make heroic dives to make sure things don't slip through the cracks—but lacking the executive function, they're not thinking innovatively about how to get to root causes and fix systemic issues. This results in an organizational culture that rewards firefighting, duct-tape fixes, quick work-arounds, and reactivity: the perfect ecosystem for energy depletion.

In short: ***effort without innovation just won't cut it.***

## Why Does This Matter?

As debilitating as the cycle of depletion is for employees, there's something more at stake: the customer experience.

External branding experts create a compelling brand promise for organizations. Often it is peppered with words like “human,” “intuitive,” “personal,” “refreshing,” “helpful,” and “easy to work with.”

When the customer *experiences* these elements at an emotional level, the organization delivers on its brand promise and Net Promoter Scores go up.

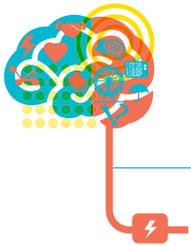
*But the customer experience is entirely at the mercy of the other side of the equation: the employee experience.* Employee engagement supplies loyalty, commitment, and even discretionary effort, but it can leave people overwhelmed and under-supported, exhausted, and depleted. In this state, the best they can inject into the customer experience is something impersonal and mechanical. Transactional. Devoid of magic.

Delivery of a customer experience that is “human,” “intuitive” and “personal” happens in one way and one way only—*through an energized employee.* It's energy and passion that unlocks enthusiasm, zest, creativity, ingenuity, innovation, authentic human warmth, vigour, verve, and vitality—the ingredients of a remarkable customer experience.

Engagement has gotten people to try harder and give more, but supplying dedication when you're not energized produces resentment and cynicism. It corrodes an organization's energy. The ethos of energy yields all the effort and dedication of engagement but goes beyond that and generates passion, vitality and innovation.

## How to Make This Work

*Switch Markers.* Instead of making engagement your marker, step into coaching conversations, team meetings, and client interactions with the marker of “How much innovative energy can we generate here?”



## ② *Trust Conversations*, Not Surveys

### What's the Brain Science?

High-performance hormones flood your brain when you have meaningful, face-to-face conversations.

The emotional centers of our brains are electrochemical conduits through which we transmit emotions to each other. So if strong emotional currents of value, respect, and care are truly present within one person, those currents are **emotionally telegraphed** to another—priming positive emotions that release a flow of three high-performance hormones: dopamine, oxytocin, and serotonin.<sup>3</sup>

These hormones boost the brain's processing power because they form an energy cocktail of connection, calm, concentration, creativity, and curiosity—basically Miracle-Gro for the brain.

As mentioned earlier the executive function of the brain drives innovation, and it runs at full capacity only when it has an ample supply of energy. The generation of human-to-human energy is neither ethereal nor mysterious. In fact, it can be mapped inside the brain. Energy is generated electrochemically, as **hormones are released through quality conversations**.

Your circulatory system is a closed-loop system. If it wasn't, things would be very messy. Meanwhile, your limbic system (the emotional center of your brain) is not as tidy: it is an open-loop system. This means your emotions can be affected and even regulated by others. Someone's tears, smile, or expression of disgust can trigger an involuntary sympathetic reaction in you.

Daniel Goleman cites studies in which scientists measure the heart rates of two people as they have a good conversation. At the beginning of the conversation, their bodies are functioning at different rhythms, but fifteen minutes later "their physiological profiles look remarkably similar—a phenomenon called *mirroring*."<sup>4</sup>

Put people together in face-to-face conversations, and they regulate each other's emotions. This happens because our brains are equipped with mirror neurons that detect and reflect the actions, emotions, and even the intentions of the people with whom we are interacting.

Our mirror neurons facilitate the open-loop system through which we imprint each other with emotions.<sup>5</sup> They provide a portal of rich connection, a wide-open conduit of unconscious human interaction. And this emotional superhighway enables us to trigger a flow of high-performance



hormones in each other that can draw out optimal thinking.

## Where Does This Show Up at Work?

Many of today's leaders don't recognize that it's *conversation*, not employee engagement surveys, that create chemistry and energy. So they rely on the employee engagement machinery (the survey, the strategies, the town halls, the newsletter, and the departmental action plan) to boost engagement levels and fuel the customer experience.

*But engagement is seldom boosted by strategies. It's an inside job—the natural byproduct of energizing conversations.*

## Why Does This Matter?

Engagement concerns that are reported and talked about at survey time—but left unaddressed throughout the remainder of the year—fester and simmer until they turn into “crucial,” “fierce” or “difficult” conversations. By the time these issues become calamity-based, there's so much residue associated with them that they consume multiples of energy, time, and mind-space from everyone in the organization.

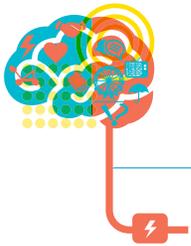
There's a much better way. Our data reveal that leaders who **have short, simple, systematic, energy conversations** (one-on-one and with their teams) increase engagement scores and, because they catch issues before they become calamity-based, save time in the process.

Shifting your reliance from surveys to energy conversations creates natural opportunities to unlock insight and possibility in employees' minds. This generates energy, which fuels a great customer experience and great results.

## How to Make This Work

*Do Energy Checks.* It's a simple thing to ask employees, “What's energizing you in your work right now?” After you're clear on that, ask them, “What's depleting your energy in your work now?”

For more on how to do an energy check, see [www.juiceinc.com](http://www.juiceinc.com).



### 3 Target Emotion, Not Logic

#### What's the Brain Science?

Your emotional brain, not your rational one, tells you what is true.

Brain research shows that your limbic system—the emotional center of your brain—**defines what you experience as reality**.<sup>6</sup> This inner sensor works in the following way.

All data entering your prefrontal cortex (the logical, decision-making center of the brain) are first filtered through the limbic system. The limbic system assigns meaning to the incoming stimulus (by cross-referencing millions of data points from your emotional history) and registers it as an emotion. It's this emotion that instructs you concerning what is real—what is true. In short, you *feel* before you *think*.<sup>7</sup>

Mirror neurons in our brains make all of this possible. They detect and reflect others' actions, emotions and even intentions.<sup>8</sup> Mirror neurons enable us to recognize an emotion in other people neurally. They provide us with an uncanny knack for recognizing care, support, and respect. They also enable us to recognize when care, support, and respect are not present but simply being declared by the other person.

In other words, if you don't *feel* you're valued, all the assertions, declarations, and assurances in the world can't make it true for you.

Meanwhile, our limbic system is "on" 24/7—which means that our feelings are the first and last things we remember about any experience.<sup>9</sup>

#### Where Does This Show Up at Work?

We live and work in a "Feelings Economy," where feelings, not intellect, drive the behaviour of employees. Research shows us that emotional engagement trumps rational engagement by a **multiple of four**.<sup>10</sup> *Engagement strategies have traditionally focused on rational measures when it's the emotional ones that help people offer their best stuff.*

Leaders offer recognition, and their rational brain tells them that the recognition is effective because they're clear that their intentions are good. Employees hear the recognition speech and their emotional brain tells them that the recognition is not valid because *they do not feel it*. That's because people only experience recognition, support, and inspiration as authentic when these things are *felt*.



At Juice, we call this the *felt* gap: the distance between what is intended by the leader and what is experienced by the employee.

### Why Does This Matter?

When there is a gap between what is intended and what is felt, employees end up feeling unfulfilled and leaders end up feeling unappreciated. This changes dramatically when leaders learn how to shift from rational to emotional “pay-checks.”

(Read the Case: 1.5 Employees in One Body)

### How to Make This Work

*Build the Bridge Before You Need It.* When the waters of calamity are raging in an employee’s life, it’s not the best time to ask, “What do you need from me?” Meet with your team when the waters are calm and build bridges of understanding before they’re needed. Ask each team member, “If you happen to go through a really tough time, what kind of support would you find most helpful?”

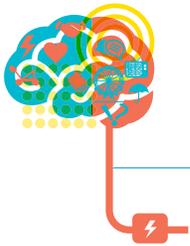
## 4 Seek Tension, Not Harmony

### What’s the Brain Science?

Your brain requires tension to innovate and do its best thinking, yet it avoids tension at any cost.

We would never learn or grow without tension. Our **brains are energized by it**, interpreting it as a fascinating novelty—a puzzle to be solved.<sup>11</sup> Cognitive tension is brain fuel. When your brain senses dissonance, or realizes something is missing, it goes to work to find it. In fact, if you never experience tension, you’ll never come up with a good idea.

Entrepreneur Guy Laliberté used this form of cognitive tension to release innovative energy and subsequently came up with an idea that has made him worth an estimated \$2.6 billion.<sup>12</sup> The tension Laliberté sought to harmonize resided between the fun and laughter of the circus, and the intellectual sophistication of the theater.



What emerged was an outlandish idea: the brilliant, beautiful, and eminently successful Cirque du Soleil—a perfect blend of fun, laughter, and intellectual sophistication that now travels the globe.

We've been taught that necessity is the mother of invention. It's not: *tension* is. That's because innovation is spawned by tension—not necessity. It's the tension between the *current* way of doing things and the *desired* way of doing things that sparks innovative thought. *In short, the human brain requires creative tension to think inventively.*<sup>13</sup>

## Where Does This Show Up at Work?

Epic tensions emerge from employee engagement surveys. For example:

- Employees want better wages and benefits—but managers need to cut expenses
- Employees want more work-life balance —but managers need more discretionary effort from employees to drive business results
- Employees want to know under-performers are being held accountable—but managers are often muzzled and can't share the corrective actions they've taken

Because the natural response of the brain is to interpret tension as a threat,<sup>14</sup> leaders become uncomfortable when these concerns emerge and will do everything in their power to remove the tension from the system.

But with training, leaders and managers can step into these epic tensions and draw out innovative solutions. A diagnostic (*The Treasure's in the Tension*, below) can be helpful: a simple tool that helps managers gain awareness of how they are showing up in their relationship with an employee.

Here's how to read the diagnostic:

- A drive to meet your own needs is valid and healthy (red arrow)
- It's also valid and healthy to want to help meet the needs of your employee(s) (blue arrow)
- Partnering is stepping into the tension between your needs and your employees' needs, and doing the good work of drawing out the innovative solutions





But in tension-filled situations, managers go binary and fulfill one of these drives at the expense of the other:

- The manager who is all about her needs and doesn't consider the needs of her employees has slipped into "overpower" mode
- The manager who is all about meeting the employee's needs at the expense of getting her own needs met has slipped into "comply" mode
- The manager who does not focus on her own or her employee's needs has slipped into "avoid" mode.

These three reactions remove the one element required for breakthrough innovations: creative tension. So engagement solutions to surveys are simplistic, pendulum-swing, black-and-white fixes that create unintended consequences in other parts of the system.

### Why Does This Matter?

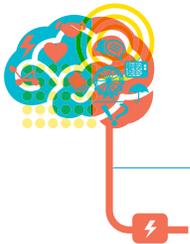
Avoid, overpower, and comply reactions produce a crisis of belief in employees: "Will anything meaningful ever come out of this engagement thing?"

This changes when leaders learn to pull the "treasure" out of the tension: the surprising innovation that takes competing priorities and creates sustainable solutions.

[\(Read the Case Study: An Army of Volunteers\)](#)

### How to Make This Work

*Practice Mindful Tension.* When you sense tension, you can do three things that will help you draw the creative energy out of it. 1. Notice it—be present to it and aware of how it is feeling in your body. 2. Accept it—rather than fighting or resisting tension, welcome it for what it can bring to you. 3. Hold it—leaders are those who can hold two opposing thoughts in their mind simultaneously. Don't ignore or dismiss the current reality, but don't let go of the preferred future either. Seek a solution that builds on the competing needs of the situation.



## 5 Practice Partnering, Not Parenting

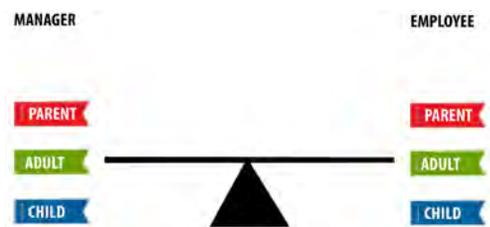
### What's the Brain Science?

The emotional brain perceives “shared responsibility” as a threat and will trigger people to become under-responsible or over-responsible.

There's a **fixed amount of responsibility** that can be assumed in any relationship, so when one person becomes over-responsible, the other will subsequently become under-responsible.

### Where Does This Show Up at Work?

Responsibility can be seen as the see-saw, an illustration of transactional analysis. An employee and a manager can show up as a Parent, an Adult, or a Child in their relationship with each other. The goal is for employees and managers to function solidly in the adult-to-adult mode.



But employees can sometimes feel stuck and powerless and begin to think like victims. When employees' under-responsibility causes them to slip from adult thinking to child-like thinking, it triggers over-responsibility in managers. Before the managers know it, they have slipped into parenting.



How does an enlightened, well-intentioned manager turn into a “parent” in the workplace? The answer is in the brain, which *interprets shared responsibility as a form of threat* and naturally avoids it.<sup>15</sup>

When leaders share responsibility with employees, they may experience:

- Loss of control
- Lack of certainty
- Fear of failure
- Conflict sparked by competing needs

Sharing responsibility with someone else means relinquishing some ownership and control, and that can feel like a risk to managers. So the brain has a simple solution: go binary. Managers either take all the responsibility, letting employees off the hook but giving them ultimate control over the results,



or they give all responsibility over to the employees, relinquishing control but getting off the hook in the risk department.

Depending on the situation, managers can slip into parenting behaviours that are too directive with one employee, too supportive with another, and too hands-off with yet another. These three types of parenting behaviours, mentioned in the section above, are known as overpower, comply, and avoid.

When managers share responsibility and partner with their employees, each person's reputation is placed in the other's hands, making managers feel vulnerable. So taking an either/or, binary approach to responsibility seems much safer to the managerial brain.

## Why Does This Matter?

Managers who slip into parenting introduce into the organizational culture:

- Guilt, shame, compulsion
- Control, manipulation, micro-managing
- Intimidation, threat, bullying
- Unhealthy employee versus employee competition

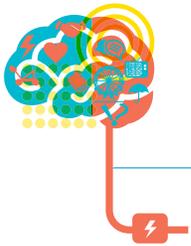
Managers who have become self-aware of their natural parenting instincts and have shifted to partnering unleash energy that:

- Cultivates decision-making capability among employees
- Grows people's talents
- Calls people to higher levels of accountability
- Unlocks employee performance and results
- Helps employees own and manage their own engagement

## How to Make This Work

*Build a Partnering Ladder.* You can beat the all-or-nothing, binary impulse of the Responsibility Virus by creating a ladder of incremental ownership for your employees accompanied by a ladder of incremental delegation from you. Every upward rung your employee climbs in the areas of skill, knowledge, experience, and responsibility is met by a further chunk of delegation and ownership—a downward rung of responsibility for you.

[\(Read the Case—The New Time-Off Policy\)](#)



## ⑥ Pull Out the Backstory, Not the Action Plan

### What's the Brain Science?

Conversation is the operating system (O/S) of your brain. In brain operations, neuron A transmits information to neuron B, and neuron B receives it.<sup>16</sup> That's the basic unit of communication. In this way, **neuronal conversation** provides the two-way communication interface between the brain and the body.<sup>17</sup>

Your brain is a network of 100 billion neurons and each one has conversations with up to one thousand of its neighbours.<sup>18</sup> These conversations are how your brain **organizes and controls your "hardware" and "software," so that the device it lives in (your body) behaves in a flexible but predictable way.**<sup>19</sup>

The first and foremost priority of the human brain is **social cognition**—or, according to renowned psychologist Matthew Lieberman, "making sense of other people and ourselves." In his book *Social*, Lieberman says, "This is what our brains were wired for: reaching out to and interacting with others."<sup>20</sup>

And reaching out to and interacting with others is precisely what conversation is all about. It's our native wiring—the perfect operating system for connecting with, understanding, and harmonizing with others.

### Where Does This Show Up at Work?

If conversation is the O/S of our individual brains, it shouldn't surprise us that conversation is also the O/S of our organizations—in other words, the organism shapes the organization.

And just as the neuron is the basic unit of the brain, the employee is the basic unit of the organization. As neuronal conversations are the way the brain gets things done, employee conversations are the way the organization gets things done. That's because conversation is the O/S that enables the "apps" in an organization to work: fantastic apps like customer service, sales, feedback, coaching, strategy, and innovation. Remove conversation from customer service (or any of these other apps) and what happens? They crash.

Leaders who fail to realize that conversation is the operating system of the brain and the organization forego conversations with employees and respond to engagement survey results with broad-brush, global solutions.



But implementing an action plan without having conversations fails to honour how the brain operates. Being presented with a solution devoid of conversation practically guarantees employee non-adherence or even covert resistance to any engagement initiative.

## Why Does This Matter?

Any engagement activity that is devoid of conversation runs the risk of coming across to employees as parenting, not partnering.

When it comes to responding to employee engagement survey results, conversation is the O/S that enables managers to pull out the backstory behind the results, so they don't entirely miss the mark.

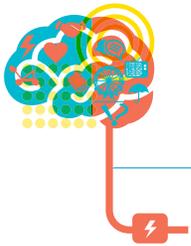
Short, simple **energy check conversations** honour and utilize our native wiring. These types of conversations power up the apps that drive results: sales, customer service, innovation, coaching, and feedback.

Everything changes for the better when leaders use simple conversations to get to the backstory and draw out what matters most to employees. It produces a powerful impact: *employees begin to manage their own engagement.*

## How to Make This Work

*Create a Power-Up Team.* The case study YUM! Restaurants—Powering Up! shows you how to create an employee-led, cross-functional engagement team that draws out the backstory behind the engagement results.

[\(Read the Case: Yum! Restaurants—Powering UP!\)](#)



## ⑦ Meet Needs, Not Scores

### What's the Brain Science?

The brain makes decisions for emotional reasons, and then justifies them with rational ones.

The emotional brain acts as the **inner arbiter** in every decision we make. You may think reason is in the driver's seat and emotion is in the back seat—offering a preference here and an opinion there - but nothing could be further from the truth.

Over 20 years of science shows us that, when it comes to decision-making, emotion is in the driver's seat in ways we can hardly imagine.<sup>21</sup> It's not that reason isn't involved—it clearly is, but simply to defend and justify the conclusion that emotion has already decided.

### Where Does This Show Up at Work?

Humans have **emotional needs** that drive their decisions<sup>22</sup> —needs that feel as vital and urgent to them as their need for oxygen. As such, employee behaviour can best be described as an attempt to get their emotional needs met.

Employee behaviour is the result of Five Driving Needs:

1. **Belonging**—acceptance and inclusion, identification and “insider-ness,” relatedness and intimacy, connection and fit.
2. **Security**—safety and protection, predictability and control, consistency and clarity, order and structure.
3. **Freedom**—autonomy and independence, mind and psychological “space,” decision-latitude and support, variety and change.
4. **Significance**—respect and value, affirmation and acknowledgment, success and achievement, challenge and growth, efficiency and productivity, excellence and distinction, power and status.
5. **Meaning**—purpose and making a difference, understanding and connecting the dots, justice and fairness, altruism and service, creating positive change and inspiration, moral and ethical correctness.



Every score on your employee engagement survey is simply an indication of whether your employees feel these five needs are being met. The challenge (and the opportunity) is that every employee has one or two needs that matter most to them in a specific situation.

Current engagement strategies focus more on fixing scores than discovering the unmet needs of employees. Unmet needs trigger a predictable reaction: De-energized employees with a stunted executive function act out in **unskillful ways** to try to get those needs met.

## Why Does This Matter?

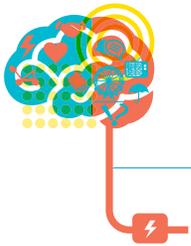
When managers stop focusing on engagement scores and learn how to help employees get their driving needs met, this releases energy and pre-empts the interference that:

- Depletes employee energy
- Spawns frustration
- Short-circuits employee performance
- Erodes the employee experience
- Corrodes the customer experience
- Consumes the manager's time

When employees' **felt needs (vs. wants)** are met, this generates a cycle of healthy decisions, reduced interference and sustainable energy that powers up performance.

## How to Make This Work

*Get to "What Matters Most."* In any team meeting, customer service interaction, coaching conversation, or sales call there is an opportunity to say, "We've talked about a lot of things here. Can you tell me what matters most to you in this situation?" After you've confirmed that you "get it," by acknowledging back what you heard them say, ask, "I know why that would be important to me, but can you tell me why that matters most to you?"



# Conclusion

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The machinery of employee engagement has promised much but delivered little. Organizations can achieve what they started out to do by managing energy, not engagement—by taking a more humanizing (and more sensible) approach: short, simple energy conversations that provide the human magic that makes employee engagement sustainable. These energy conversations are the operating system of the organization:

- Drawing out real-time intel about what's working and what's not
- Generating energy by meeting felt needs and removing interference
- Recalibrating the unhelpful beliefs that thwart the vital sense of agency

And here's the kicker: Energized employee experiences are the key to sustainable, high-quality customer experiences.

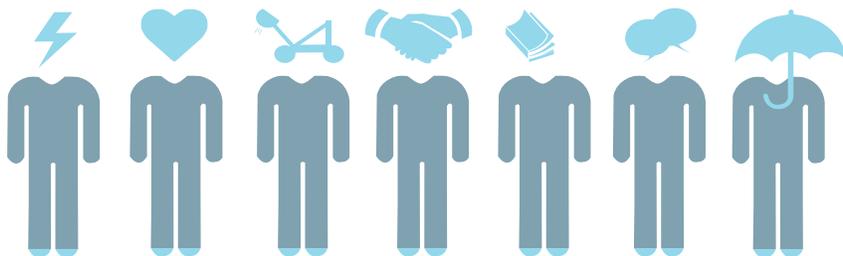
## What Do I Do Next?

If you are a people manager and want to implement these principles and energize your team, we would love to partner with you! Contact us to learn how.

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## How to Make It Work

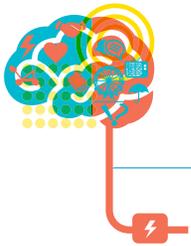
On the next page you will find the *How to Make It Work* box summarizing the actions you can use right away.





## How to Make It Work

- 1. Switch Markers.** Instead of making engagement your marker, step into coaching conversations, team meetings, and client interactions with the marker of “How much innovative energy can we generate here?”
- 2. Do Energy Checks.** It’s a simple thing to ask employees, “What’s energizing you in your work right now?” After you’re clear on that, ask them, “What’s depleting your energy in your work now?”
- 3. Build the Bridge Before You Need It.** When the waters of calamity are raging in an employee’s life, it’s not the best time to ask, “What do you need from me?” Meet with your team when the waters are calm and build bridges of understanding before they are needed. Ask each team member, “If you happen to go through a really tough time, what kind of support would you find most helpful?”
- 4. Practice Mindful Tension.** When you sense tension, you can do three things that will help you draw the creative energy out of it. 1. Notice it—be present to it and aware of how it is feeling in your body. 2. Accept it—rather than fighting or resisting tension, welcome it for what it can bring to you. 3. Hold it—leaders are those who can hold two opposing thoughts in their mind simultaneously. Don’t ignore or dismiss the current reality, but don’t let go of the preferred future either.
- 5. Build a Partnering Ladder.** You can beat the all-or-nothing, binary impulse of the Responsibility Virus by creating a ladder of incremental ownership for your employees accompanied by a ladder of incremental delegation from you. Every upward rung your employee climbs in the areas of skill, knowledge, experience, and responsibility is met by a further chunk of delegation and ownership—a downward rung of responsibility for you.
- 6. Create a Power-Up Team.** The case study: YUM! Restaurants—Powering Up! shows you how to create an employee-led, cross-functional engagement team that draws out the backstory behind the engagement results.
- 7. Get to “What Matters Most.”** In any team meeting, customer service interaction, coaching conversation, or sales call there is an opportunity to say, “We’ve talked about a lot of things here. Can you tell me what matters most to you in this situation?” After you’ve confirmed that you “get it,” by acknowledging back what you heard them say, ask, “I know why that would be important to me, but can you tell me why that matters most to you?”



# Running the Boston Marathon: How Energy, Not Engagement, Fuels High Performance

## A CASE STORY

I ran the Boston Marathon in 2012. The race organizers had warned it would be an unseasonably warm day and gave us the opportunity to defer to 2013. But I had trained hard, driven for almost 10 hours, and paid a handsome price for my hotel room. I felt a strong sense of compulsion, obligation, and gritty perseverance. I was going to run this race.

I barely finished. It was a gruelling four hours and thirty minutes, and there were times I thought I'd have to quit, but somehow I soldiered on to the end. The best summary I can give is that I was engaged but not energized.

At Juice we see this engaged but not energized dynamic playing itself out in today's workplace. Large numbers of employees are engaged by the popular definition of "engagement." They will "say, stay, and strive": say good things about the organization, stay with you, and even strive to do their best. But despite their loyalty, commitment, and soldiering on, they feel overwhelmed and inadequately fuelled.

Varying forms of self-determinism such as personal values and work ethic drive them doggedly forward, but they do so without energy, focus, vigour, and that vital sense of passion and purpose. In the long run, they are in danger of falling by the wayside. They get stuff done, but it's simply not sustainable.

Despite my struggle, I fell head-over-heels in love with Boston that year: the city, the devoted spectators, my fellow runners from around the world, and the Boston Athletic Association, which put on such a phenomenal race. But even though I was smitten with Boston, I said to myself, "I'm never doing another marathon again—I'm done with that."



And then, in 2013, the bombs went off.

My friend Stan was running in the marathon that fateful day and his typical completion time would have put him right at the finish line when the first bomb exploded. I was frantic and madly texted him, inquiring after his safety. I breathed again when he texted me back: "I'm OK. I crossed the line and heard an explosion."

In the ensuing hours, I witnessed the horror: 22 victims, runners and spectators alike, mutilated by this senseless act of terror. This may sound odd to you, but it was the nature of the injuries that evoked such a strong empathetic response in me. Most of the 22 victims had severe leg injuries; as someone who loves to run—lives to run—this is what gripped my heart.

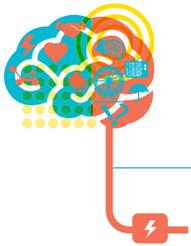
Something rose up within me in that moment—the same thing that rose up in thousands of runners around the world: "I am so running Boston next year. I will not be intimidated by this." I felt solidarity with the victims and their families. I felt solidarity with the city of Boston. I felt solidarity with the Boston Athletic Association, whose pristine race had been ravaged by a senseless act.

So in the following month, with little time to prepare, I ran a marathon, hoping to achieve a time that would qualify me for Boston in 2014. I was thrilled to come in under my qualifying time, but that was still no guarantee I'd get into Boston. I had to wait until the fall of 2013, when tens of thousands of runners like me from around the world would sit poised by their computers, hoping for a spot in what promised to be the most historic Boston Marathon ever.

I was ecstatic when my letter of acceptance arrived. I would have a chance to show my love for Boston—for its victims, its runners, and its fans.

I began training in earnest, but the Canadian winter of 2013/2014 was not a training-friendly one. The temperatures were torturous and the snow was deep. Because of the icy conditions, I ended up with a hip injury that threatened to dash my hopes.

I tried physio, chiro, massage, rollers, sticks, balls—every way to heal that you can imagine. But when race time came, my wife, Theresa, and I were left to deliberate: Should I bow out? Should we cancel our hotel and our travel plans? Eventually, we decided to go: "Even if I can't run," I thought, "at least I could cheer my fellow runners on and be part of the great crowd. And who knows? Maybe my body will find a way to finish the race, injury and all."



But how would I express my solidarity with Boston? “I’ll take a Canadian flag,” I thought. “That way I can declare ‘Canada supports you, Boston.’”

No. Support was not a deep enough emotion for what I felt. It was more like love. So I thought, “I’ll put a Canadian flag on my shirt that says, ‘Canada Loves Boston.’”

No. Not personal enough. It’s not just Canada; it’s me that loves Boston. So I asked myself, “What is it that I really, authentically feel?”

The answer was immediate: **Brady Loves Boston**. I felt love for the victims, for the city, for the fans, and for the BAA. And so I resolved to print this message on a Canadian flag and put it on the front and back of my shirt.

Every runner knows that when you put your name on your shirt, spectators will call you by name. But I never could have predicted the sort of response my Brady Loves Boston message would evoke.

I was only minutes into my run when I began to hear the cheering. Not general cheering, but very personal cheering. One million spectators lined the road from Hopkinton to Boston. Fans were reading my Brady Loves Boston shirt and shouting, “Boston loves you right back, Brady.” I was shaken. People were looking me right in the eye and saying, “We love you, too, Brady.”

I was amazed and thought, “You don’t owe me that. I don’t deserve such a personal encouragement.” I waved, even blew kisses to the people who cheered for me, and said, “Thank you!”

My race was a series of hundreds of mini conversations:

Spectator: “Thanks for coming down here, Canada!”

Brady: “You’re so welcome!”

Spectator: “Canada rocks!”

Brady: “Yes, and we love you!”

Spectator: “We love you, Brady.”

Brady: “Thank you!”

When a complete stranger reaches out to you and says (with feeling), “We love you”—well, it does something to you.

I confess: I LOVED it. But I began to feel badly for the runners surrounding me—I was the only one



being cheered on and encouraged by name. I turned to the man next to me and said, “I’m sorry for this.” He laughed and said, “No, you don’t understand: my last name is Brady—I’m not leaving your side!”

By the halfway point, I was in a lot of pain and feared I might have to give up. But the moment I’d think that, someone would shout out, “Boston loves you, Brady!” and my energy surged.

The energy I felt was like nothing I’d ever experienced in my life. It even got me up Heartbreak Hill (actually a series of four hills, coinciding with the spot in the race where you “hit the wall”). I never stopped—I ran up all the hills, fuelled by the energy of the crowd I felt so connected to.

Meanwhile, back home, my kids and friends were tracking my progress online, following my little runner avatar on the BAA website. They were texting Theresa, who was waiting for me at the finish line, so when I completed the race, she already knew my finishing time. (Most runners wear a watch so they can track their time, but I hadn’t bothered to put one on because I felt I would do so poorly.)

Theresa and I had a tearful reunion, and I said, “Well, it was no great finishing time, but I had the time of my life.”

“No, no,” she said. “Your time was 3:48—three quarters of an hour faster than the last time you ran it. You ran a fantastic race!”

In the days and months that followed, I compared my “grind it out” Boston Marathon of 2012 to this freakishly energizing Boston Marathon of 2014. In 2012, I burned the fuel of engagement, of obligation, and compulsion. Although I was engaged, I was not energized. In 2014, I burned the fuel of passion, purpose, and connection that both energized and engaged me.

A life-lesson imprinted itself on me: Engagement is not enough. **It’s energy—not engagement—that fuels high performance.**





# About Juice

At Juice, we believe that energized and engaged employees fuel great customer experiences and better business results. That's why we develop scalable processes with simple tools leaders can use to maximize results.

Our clients think of us as their performance partner. Our unique capabilities include:



## ENGAGEMENT

### Beyond Engagement

Energized Employees Get Better Results.



## CONVERSATION

### Power of Conversation

Unlock Results. Deepen Relationships. Release Energy.



## CONFERENCE SOLUTIONS

### Learning Simulations & Keynotes

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## INNOVATION

### Innovation in a Box

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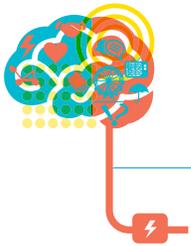


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