

VITALIZE workforce

**Conquering the
Crisis of Employee
Stagnation**



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with Dr James A Robertson

Vitalize Your Workforce Conquering the Crisis of Employee Stagnation

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CHAPTER 1

THE CRISIS OF EMPLOYEE STAGNATION... IS LOUD AND CLEAR

MANY STATISTICS SHOW THAT APPROXIMATELY 85 PERCENT of employees are disengaged.⁸ This is a well-known statistic, with many years of conversation surrounding it. But the truth is the term “employee engagement” is dead.

Over the past five years, we’ve seen an average annual turnover of 19 percent,⁹ with increasing absenteeism and skyrocketing “What’s in it for me?” attitudes. In 2015, cities such as Baltimore, Maryland, experienced devastating riots resulting largely from high levels of individual stagnation. In Baltimore’s Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood, more than half of the people between the ages of 16 and 64 are out of work and the unemployment rate is double that for the city at one in five,¹⁰ a serious breakdown of family structures, and no programs designed to productively engage their neglected human potential. These situations across the country have a direct impact on the vitality and resilience of our cities and our economy.

Stagnating water, stagnating thoughts, stagnating opportunities, or stagnating people—the longer the stagnation continues, the deeper the scourge. Stagnating people first become resigned, then apathetic, then resentful, then ultimately, they rebel. It is no different at work.

“Keep asking the question: What is the cause?”

We clearly see the problem and its myriad effects, but we need to keep asking the question, “What is the cause?”

A Closer Look

Many causes of personal stagnation are so commonplace that they are easily overlooked. Some of the stagnation-generating situations that erode employee potential every day are:

- overloading employees, then taking their time and effort for granted
- placing reluctant employees in “temporary” positions, then forgetting them
- considering employees in “low-value” jobs as low-value people
- leaving employees’ natural talents and interests unrecognized and untapped
- assigning issue-resolution and problem-solving authority to a select few
- not caring whether individuals don’t understand how they fit into the bigger picture
- honoring formal education over natural talent
- the tendency to regard managers as “people-controllers” rather than “people-leaders”
- minimizing recognition and celebration as expensive, optional budget items
- a company culture that conveys the message, “Don’t complain; just be glad you have a job.”

When you hear, “This can’t be all there is,” “There must be something else I can do,” “I’m bored,” or “I just stay here for the benefits,” you have unaddressed, viral stagnation. Stagnant employees invest the minimum amount of time and energy into their jobs. They stay mainly for the benefits, then go home. Is this what you want?

“Most stagnant employees do as little as possible.”

When you ask stagnant employees to do more, what happens? They do as little as possible. When asked for their input, they remain silent. Does that mean they are dumb? No. They are stagnant. What is to blame for this painful stagnation? Antiquated management habits.

The Start of Reductionism (Reductionist Thinking)

In the late 1800s, Frederick Winslow Taylor experimented with ways to achieve greater production with less effort and expense. In his book *The Principles of Scientific Management*, Taylor espoused reduction of individual thought (reductionist thinking), replacing it with robotic-style conformity to increase production while decreasing errors and reducing payroll. This made statistical analysis the guiding principle of performance. Employee directives came from a few at the top. “All others” had to meet their goals on time, the same way, and in silence—or lose their jobs. Competitive success depended on adopting these principles in as many functions as possible.

For over a century, US manufacturing experienced great success by focusing on statistically-led production efficiency. We will always need efficiency, and we will always be grateful for our proven ability to manage efficiency. We won World War II because of this approach. Efficiency was the key driver that made the United States the global leader in manufacturing from the 1930s to the 1990s. It gave us the lead in developing advanced communication, food production, and space travel. Today, statistically driven efficiency is so common globally that it is no longer a competitive differentiator.

“Unless we fully grasp the need to lead our employees with a focus on Vitality as our new core strength, we will be left behind.”

The statistically driven efficiency model claimed that the smartest people were naturally at the top of the organization, and the rest were merely a necessary workforce. This mindset became a habit of thought reinforced over many generations. Opportunities and reward were applied to the top echelon while the rest marched in place.

The 2000s saw a driving emphasis on corporate growth and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) with rapidly developing mergers and acquisitions and expanding business information systems.

In the decade beginning in 2010, computer capacity became effectively unlimited, unlocking technology’s full potential. Smart phones, tablets, and burgeoning applications signaled that previous business software was

becoming inadequate to meet the needs of an environment that was changing at a breakneck pace. The guiding initiative became the drive to tap the technology's full potential.

The coming decade of the 2020s will be about unlocking the constraint of people and applying their potential effectively. We now face an era when a huge number of mundane jobs will be replaced by computer technology and robots or will be totally redefined. Highly computer-and social-media-savvy Gen X, Y, and Z are rejecting conventional work models, management constraints, and measurements that have been traditionally applied.

Today's employees become (directly or indirectly) resentful of reductionist thinking. With the advent of the internet, the leadership value of this approach has disintegrated. Efficiency is always necessary, but unwanted employee turnover, resistance to reductionist practices, and workforce stagnation tell a different story.

In today's tech environment, the nanosecond need for new idea generation and problem solving requires almost instantaneous collaboration in every area of the organization. Add to that the need for quick recovery from catastrophic events and the need for committed employees and Vitality becomes an imperative rather than an option.

“We need to take action to change our own story or change will be made for us. It is as simple as that.”

The challenge for the 2020s will be to expand and channel these newly liberated human capabilities. *Vitalize Your Workforce* is geared toward addressing this goal and enabling corporations to harness the full potential of all generations within their workforce.

CHAPTER 1

SUMMARY

THE CRISIS OF STAGNATION IS VERY REAL. WE NEED TO TAKE action and change how we think about our employees and the importance of their potential, or unwanted change in our businesses will be made for us.

The causes of employee stagnation have been around for so long they are easily overlooked. When you hear, “This can’t be all there is,” “There must be something else I can do,” “I’m bored,” or “I just stay here for the benefits,” you have unaddressed, viral stagnation.

In ten short years, we have moved rapidly through the development and growth of new technologies to the ubiquitous application of those technologies, often rendering traditional business planning obsolete. We are now facing the coming decade of the 2020s, in which the focus will turn to unlocking the constraint of people and applying their potential effectively. Are you ready?

Vitalize Your Workforce is geared to address this situation directly, enabling corporations to harness the full potential of their workforce. Stagnation won’t be solved overnight, but we need to take action to change our own story, or the change will be made for us by our competition. It is as simple as that.

NOTES

Actions: _____

Call Whom: _____

By When: _____

“Don’t fear criticism; fear stagnation.”

— DEBASISH MRIDHA, M.D.

CHAPTER 2

STAGNANT OR VITALIZED?

THE TERMS “AGILE” AND “ENGAGED” ARE VALID IN THE CONTEXT of organizations and the people within those organizations. However, they are overused and are only a part of the essential goal we are talking about. I prefer to talk about Vitality and Vitalized employees, which is the subject of this book.

The opposite of Vitalized is stagnant—numbed out, dumbed down, demotivated, disinterested, job-seeking people who come to work because they have to earn a living and who watch the clock from the moment they arrive, earnestly desiring to be free of their captivity. Research shows that approximately 85 percent of employees in the United States are stagnant, and worse, have been for a long time. We need to look at the issue in a different way to generate a different answer and create highly responsive Vital organizations.

Vitality is not an adjective or an adverb. Vitality is a way of thinking. It is a way of *being* in life... at work, at home, wherever you are.

It reflects a confidence that you have the capability and freedom to learn anything—a freedom to apply what you learn, to create something new in any moment.

It is a freedom to become. Even more, it is a permission and willingness to reach, increasing your ability to give.

Vital people don't blame; they find a way to participate more. They collaborate more, share more, create more. Vital people consider options, look for alternatives, and help other people see alternatives. Vital people look for ways to evolve their perspective about where they are and what they are doing rather than complain that others won't “let them” do anything new.

Vital people want the best for themselves and find a way to share that best. They share the best around them to create “better” for others—for individuals, teams, organizations, companies, and country.

Vital people see more, not less. Vital people learn to listen, and listen well, so they can understand more, communicate more, and collaborate more because it is interesting, fulfilling, and fun. It is joining the creative energy of life that makes life expand, not sitting silent, unmoving, and stagnant.

Vital people can be both leaders and followers. They can work with leaders at the top and people at the bottom equally well. They are present to the needs of the moment. They are willing to be open to possibilities and participate to their fullest in the moment knowing the moment is only part of a larger whole in which they live.

Vital people learn quickly that the habitual language in their head is only one of many possibilities. They know that being fixed on one idea or way of doing things causes hardship—for themselves and everyone around them. They know that Vitality is listening to, working with, and evolving ideas.

They know that becoming a Vital thinking person is becoming a fluid person who not only goes with the flow but is willing to take a new route, to learn new things and new ways of being that create greater freedom for themselves and the people around them.

Do you want that? Would you rather have employees like that or employees who have done the same things for years because that is all they were allowed to do?

When the market changes rapidly, you need employees you can train and who will work with you to help find the best way to get the job done. When you need employees who will exercise personal initiative, do you look for people who have only one view of your organization, or employees who have a broad understanding of it? People who feel encouraged and respected for stepping out and applying themselves to something new or people who are numb to possibilities?

We are talking about building a full powerhouse of Vital employees.

“Success is a fusion of company potential and employee potential.”

— DR. JAMES A. ROBERTSON

The concept of Vitalized employees is embraced by progressive-thinking companies such as Google and Intel. We need these companies.

We need their examples. We respect and admire them. But with the ever-increasing confusion and complexity in the world, we must also learn from them and share what we can to create ever greater strength and clarity in our own actions. We need to go beyond what they have accomplished. This is Vitality!

What are the key elements to becoming a Vital company with Vitalized employees? Does Vital mean creating more and more outsource channels so you can enlist more and more cost-effective employees? No. That would only dilute the inherent wisdom and morale of your current employees. Outsourcing to people who have little or no experience in your company, and often not even in your industry, will only place you further behind.

It *does* mean being willing to look at your organization and the history of managing that organization to find stagnation—where it begins, where it is hiding, how it is growing... and stop it!

It means being willing to lead in a different way—by example, with a clear continual flow of communication across the organization, both vertically and horizontally. It means instilling a strong foundation of basic common skills that starts moving sludge of stagnation and creates a flow of interactivity that inhibits stagnation's growth.

It means creating continual personal development goals for individual employees and team participation. Creating “reach goals” associated with “what's in it for me” generates interest, spurs learning, and develops Vitality.

It means instilling core skills across the organization that develop quality communication and collaboration, recognized and practiced by every employee in every function at every level. Let's take that a step further: It means instilling foundational skills that are recognized, expected, respected, and requested of every employee at every level throughout your organization.

It means accepting that employee stagnation has been the norm in your organization for a long time, but it is no longer acceptable. It means recognizing that “busy” doesn't mean Vital. It means identifying and clarifying locations and practices that make employees stagnant and disinterested... and changing them.

It means creating a new enhanced Vision and Mission to be a leader in reaching, tapping into, and leveraging employee potential as your key asset. It means focusing on skills, practices, incentives, and rewards designed to

nurture, encourage, and partner with your employees to recognize and expand their potential—every day.

It means connecting with your employees' innate need for confidence and personal internal assurance that they can support their families and contribute to their communities in a better way all the time—by working for you.

This is why I am here, writing this book. Evolving the human potential in your organization is not an option; it is an imperative. The landscape of our leadership thinking must change if we are to become Vital, flexible businesses and organizations capable of withstanding rapid change. We must develop our core asset of employee potential to step up to the challenge of chaos and the confusion of complexity, while continuing to attract quality customers, investors, and top talent.

Even the attraction of top talent has to change. The driving requirement for top talent is no longer just to be a degreed specialist. Top talent now must also demonstrate proven people-leadership skills in enhancing employee potential in every function and every level. And boundaries for negative behavior must change. Sharpen your focus on Vitality!

This book's intention is to help you understand the depth, breadth, and challenges of the stagnation crisis. We will help you take the first step by providing new foundational programs for employees and leadership that you can employ right now to start overcoming stagnation of thought and action, and create a new competitive energy for the company.

The problem is over a hundred years in the making, and it won't be solved overnight. But it won't be solved at all unless you take the first step to change your perspective as a leader—a leader of extraordinary human potential, not just numbers.

Vitalize Your Workforce provides new ways of thinking about employee stagnation, and new leadership paradigms to lead and maintain Vitalization. Finally, you can measure and understand the depth of employee stagnation anywhere in your organization—before, during, and after implementing our Vitality. Leadership and Employee Vitalization Programs. I will work with you to help define, prioritize, and customize the key elements of your Vitalization initiative and help keep it on track.

As part of your Vitalization initiative, I will introduce leadership programs that will gain employee attention and interest in your new vision for the company. And I will introduce new foundational employee programs

that effectively start clearing the debilitating sludge of employee stagnation and instilling a sense of personal employee responsibility and opportunity—reaching for their own future while working for you.

CHAPTER 2

SUMMARY

*“Success is a fusion of company potential
and employee potential.”*

— DR. JAMES A. ROBERTSON

VITALITY IS NOT AN ADJECTIVE OR AN ADVERB. IT IS A WAY of thinking. It is a way of *being* in life... at work, at home, wherever you are. It is a confidence that you have the capability and freedom to learn anything—a freedom to apply what you learn, to create something new in any moment. It is a freedom to become. Even more, it is a permission and willingness to reach, increasing your ability to give.

The concept of vitalized employees is embraced by progressive thinking companies such as Google and Intel. We need these companies. We need their examples. We respect and admire them. But with the ever-increasing confusion and complexity in the world, we must also learn from them and share what we can to create ever greater strength and clarity for our own actions. We need to go beyond what they have accomplished. This is Vitality!

Leading for Vitality means being willing to lead in a different way—by example, with a clear continual flow of communication across the organization, both vertically and horizontally. It means instilling a strong foundation of basic common skills that starts to clear the sludge of stagnation, creating a flow of interactivity that inhibits stagnation’s growth.

Vitalize Your Workforce is here to provide a new way to measure the depth and breadth of stagnation in your organization, help you embed new Vitality Leadership concepts and accountabilities, and reach employees with new sustainable programs designed to continually release the sludge of personal stagnation, while sparking personal initiative, interest, and loyalty. And that is just the start!

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