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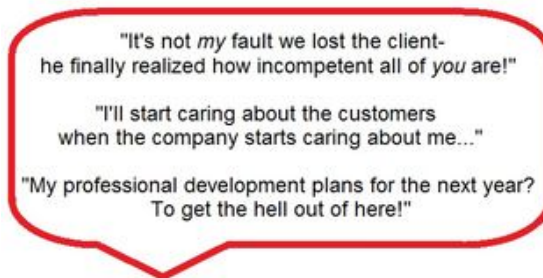
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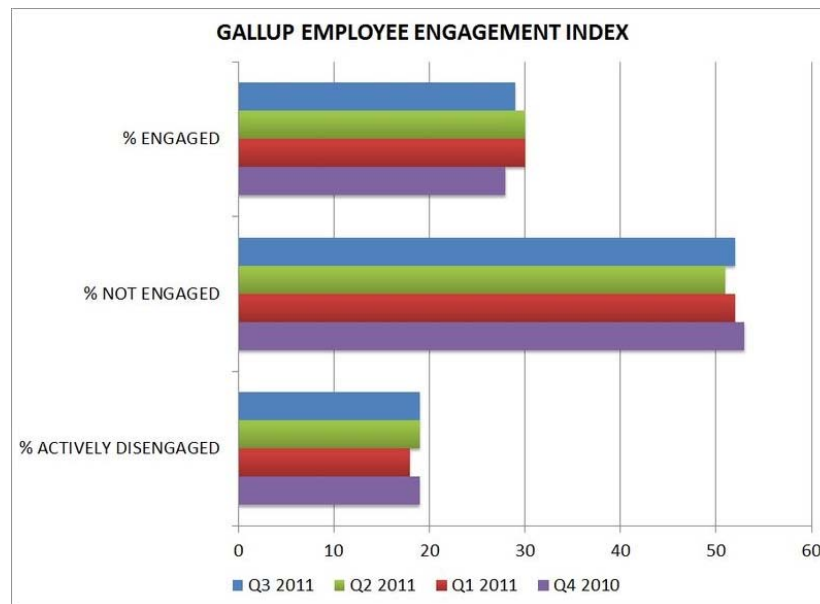
11/09/2011

Who's More Disengaged At Work? Survey Says Highly Educated Men!



Do these kinds of comments sound familiar? They're the hallmark of disengaged employees, and more than 70% of American workers share these attitudes.

By now, everyone is familiar with the concept that engaged employees are "better" employees, in terms of productivity, customer satisfaction, and the company's bottom line (do a Google search on "employee engagement" - you'll get about 5.4 million results). You're probably not surprised by the latest findings of the [Gallup Employee Engagement Index](#):



Currently, the percentage of engaged employees is similar to the historical high of 30% in 2006 and 2007. Despite the gains we've made through communicating clear goals and expectations to our employees, encouraging innovation, and cultivating a strong team environment and a sense of belonging, we still have an engagement problem. The percentage who are actively disengaged - [perhaps the most dangerous of the disengaged](#) - is near

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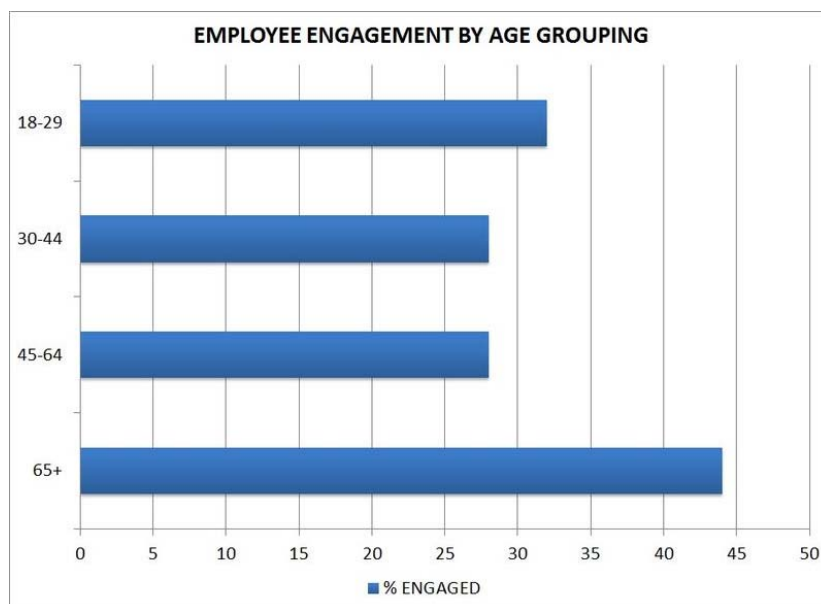
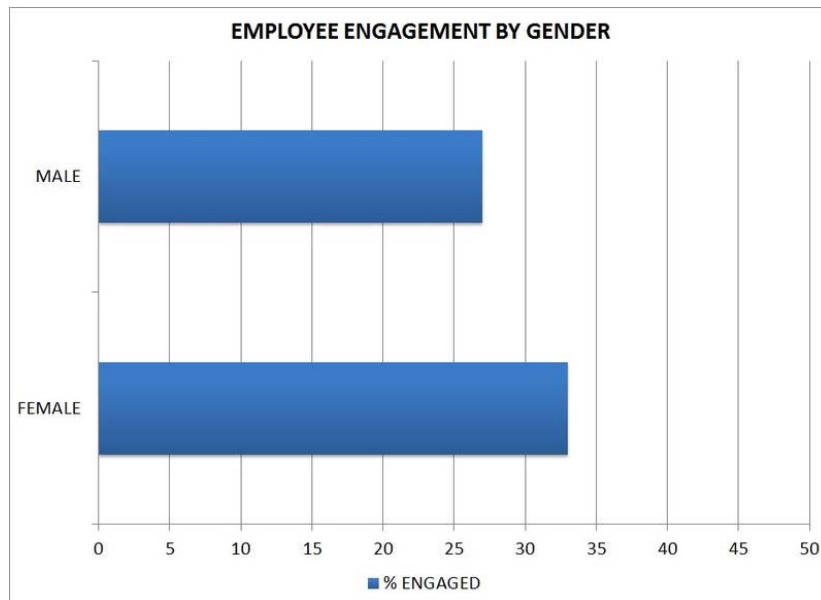


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the high of 20% recorded in 2007 and 2008.

Where do we need to focus our employee engagement efforts? According to the Gallup Index, on highly educated men between the ages of 30 and 64:



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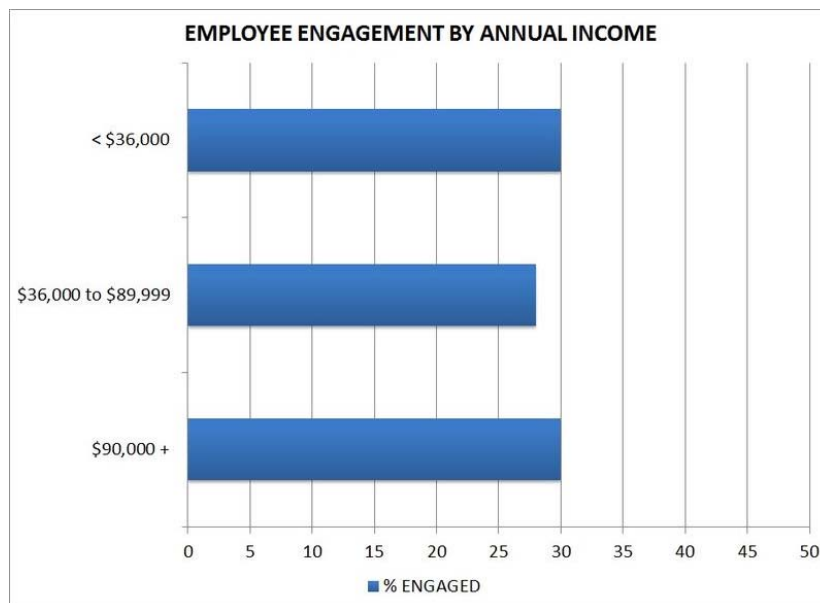
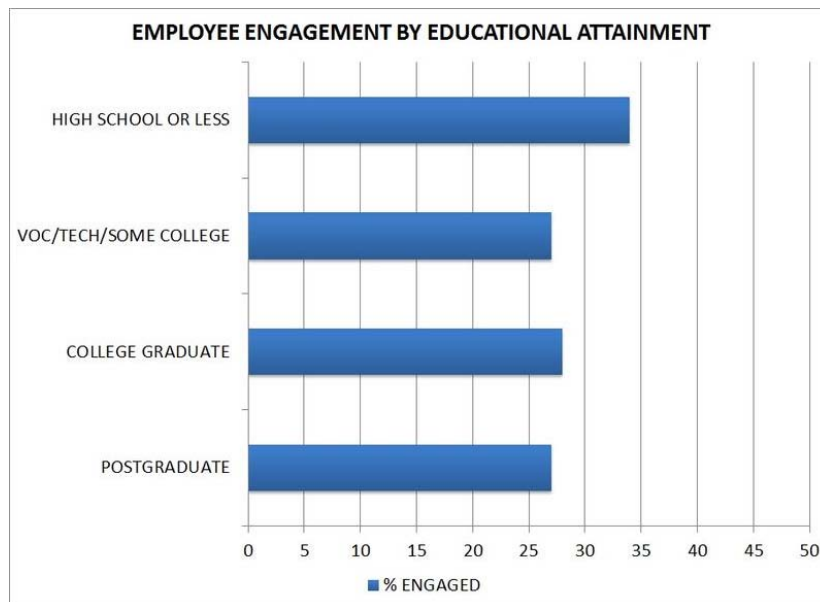
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If we stop and think about the results, they make sense. There are several possible explanations for why men are more likely to disengage. Some are empirical (men [typically work more hours during the week](#) than women) and some are sociological (many men believe that the purpose of work is to earn money and support their families, regardless of whether they like their jobs or not).

Looking at age and employee engagement, the differences in engagement appear at the ends of the spectrum. The higher engagement of employees under the age of 30 could be attributed to a "honeymoon" phase - they're early on in their careers, and they're enthusiastic and optimistic about their contributions. As they "settle in" to their careers and become jaded, they're more likely to disengage. The higher engagement of employees 65 and older may be due to the fact that retirement is in sight, some have already retired from their "careers" and are now working at jobs they truly enjoy, or they're finally in a position where their voices are heard and their opinions matter.

When it comes to educational attainment and employee engagement, some of the causes may be beyond our control. We may be seeing disengagement

because of structural underemployment. In the current labor market, people are taking jobs wherever they can get them. This means that there may be a lot of people out there who are overqualified for their jobs - but they took the position because they need to be working and generating some kind of income. There are a lot of highly educated people out there who currently have very low-skill jobs. They're likely to disengage because they're not intellectually challenged by what they're doing. If you're a scientist who's used to poring over data alone in your lab all day, and now you're in a job requiring very little brain power but lots of interaction with people (the horror!) you're probably not going to be that engaged.

The takeaway from all of this? You're not going to be able to completely eliminate disengagement in your workplace. So rather than spread your engagement efforts thinly throughout the entire organization, think about concentrating those efforts on highly educated men between the ages of 30 and 64 - you may get more bang for your buck!

[Stephanie R. Thomas](#) is an economic and statistical consultant specializing in EEO issues and employment litigation risk management. Since 1999, she's been working with businesses and government agencies providing expert analysis. Stephanie's articles on examining compensation systems for internal equity have appeared in professional journals and she has appeared on NPR to discuss the gender wage gap. Stephanie is the founder of [Thomas Econometrics](#) and is the host of [The Proactive Employer Podcast](#). Follow her on Twitter at [ProactiveStats](#).

Posted by Stephanie R. Thomas on 11/09/2011 at 05:55 AM in [Performance Management](#), [Total Rewards](#) | [Permalink](#)
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