

Connecting the Dots

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For years, researchers, organizations, and leaders have been grappling with both the challenge of how best to create a motivating work environment and the role of leadership in inspiring and maximizing the work passion and performance of others.

Several years ago, The Ken Blanchard Companies[®] began exploring these issues as well as the relationships between leadership, employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and organizational performance. The first study included the creation of a model that we titled The Leadership-Profit Chain. This model was grounded in a literature review of hundreds of studies and meta-analyses from 1980 through 2005.

The study concluded that Strategic Leadership indirectly influenced Customer Devotion and Employee Work Passion by establishing policies, procedures, vision, and values, and that Operational Leadership directly influenced Employee Work Passion and Customer Devotion through the daily operationalization of Strategic Leadership policies. The study also found that Employee Work Passion, in turn, was a key factor in creating Customer Devotion and Organizational Vitality.

Further research allowed The Ken Blanchard Companies to create a model of how Employee Work Passion is formed, a definition of what Employee Work Passion is, and a core set of factors that must be present in the organizational and job environment in order for Employee Work Passion to be optimized.

EMPLOYEE WORK PASSION DEFINED

An individual's persistent, emotionally positive, meaningbased state of wellbeing stemming from continuous, recurring cognitive and affective appraisals of various job and organizational situations, which results in consistent, constructive work intentions and behaviors



EMPLOYEE WORK PASSION FACTORS AND INTENTIONS

ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

Distributive Justice—The extent to which resources, compensation, and workloads are fairly balanced

Procedural Justice—The extent to which policies and procedures are consistently and fairly applied

Growth—The extent to which there is support for current and future career growth

Performance Expectations—

The extent to which individuals feel that their work is compared to an agreed-upon standard and understand what is expected of them

JOB FACTORS

Meaningful Work—The extent to which people understand and resonate with the organization's purpose and believe they are working on projects that matter and produce positive results

Autonomy—The extent to which individuals can choose how tasks are performed, are trusted to do their jobs, and have the authority to make decisions

Workload Balance—The extent to which individuals feel they have ample time to accomplish their work

Task Variety—The extent to which individuals feel they have variety in both the type of tasks and the complexity of tasks

MODERATING FACTORS

Connectedness to Colleagues—

Our initial research surfaced eight key factors responsible for driving Employee Work Passion. These are Meaningful Work, Autonomy, Collaboration, Fairness, Recognition, Growth, Connectedness to Colleagues, and Connectedness to Leader.

While these eight factors were not all-inclusive, they represented a majority of the influencers of Employee Work Passion and accounted for approximately 64 percent of the variance that explained Employee Work Passion.

A subsequent study was devoted to understanding what additional factors might drive Employee Work Passion. A review of the literature produced a list of 33 possible factors.

A final set of 12 factors was selected based upon

- The number of times the factor appeared in the academic literature
- The amount of variance accounted for by the factor
- The frequency with which each factor correlated with various dependent variables
- The amount of non-overlap with other possible factors in the set
- The amount of face validity the construct might evolve in the respondent

These included six of the original eight factors (Growth, Connectedness to Colleagues, Connectedness to Leader, Meaningful Work, Autonomy, and Collaboration). In addition, some factors no longer correlated to the existing six, and new factors emerged. And in the final analysis, Recognition was replaced by Feedback; Fairness split into two new factors: Distributive Justice and Procedural Justice; and three new factors emerged, which were labeled Task Variety, Performance Expectations, and Workload Balance. This gave us the final set of 12 factors.

Regression analysis showed that each of the factors was interdependent of each other, and all must be present for Employee Work Passion to be maximized. While there was no statistically significant ranking among the factors (meaning one was not more important than another), Meaningful Work was generally perceived to be the most present in the minds of our survey population, while Procedural Justice and Growth were generally perceived to be the least present.

Through further statistical analysis, we learned that the factors could be grouped as organizational factors, job factors, or moderating factors. Organizational factors are influenced by the organization's senior leadership, policies, procedures, and organizational systems. Job factors are influenced by aspects of the job, colleagues, or leader. Moderating factors influence an individual's perception of both organizational factors and job factors. See **Sidebar**

In addition to the 12 factors, five key areas of intent, associated with employees who are passionate about their work, also emerged from our research. These are the intent to perform one's job well, the intent to remain with the organization, the intent to be a good organizational citizen, the intent to endorse the organization as a great place to work, and the intent to put forth discretionary effort. Intent is vital to understand and measure, as it is instrumental in predicting behavior.

How Is Employee Work Passion Different from Engagement?

We make several distinctions between the concepts of Employee Work Passion and engagement. First, Employee Work Passion is supported by a theory and model that explain how work passion is formed. We feel Employee Work Passion is better explained by social cognition, appraisal theory, and research—and encompasses both job commitment and organizational commitment; therefore, it is a different and more expansive concept than engagement is.

Second, *both* organizational and job factors influence an individual's level of Employee Work Passion. Not simply one or the other. Engagement has been generally associated with either job commitment (burnout, well-being, etc.) or organizational commitment (intent to stay, endorsement, etc.) but typically not associated with both.

Third, the literature on engagement usually describes three states of engagement: engaged, disengaged, and actively disengaged. These three states lack a positive upper range of passionate commitment that comes with repeated involvement in self-defining activities and is distinguished by the concept of Employee Work Passion or active engagement. Employee Work Passion goes beyond simple engagement in various work activities to the incorporation of self-defining activities that become a central feature in an employee's identity.

Understanding How Employee Work Passion Is Created—A Review of the Appraisal Process

We define Employee Work Passion as, "An individual's persistent, emotionally positive, meaning-based state of well-being stemming from continuous, recurring cognitive and affective appraisals of various job and organizational situations, which results in consistent, constructive work intentions and behaviors." In order to understand how Employee Work Passion occurs, one must consider the process an individual goes through in deciding to engage in a specific behavior. As stated earlier, much of the research does not take the full scope of this process into account. Through deeper exploration of the literature, we began to incorporate significant ideas found in cognitive psychology.

An individual's choices are driven by his or her understanding of how the experience or event being appraised impacts his or her well-being. Since all people are meaning-oriented and meaning-creating, they are constantly reacting (cognitively and emotionally or affectively) to their environment to form judgments (appraisals) as to how their well-being is affected by environmental events.

Cognition and affect go hand in hand, happening almost simultaneously, over and over, as individuals make sense of a situation to reach their conclusions about what is happening, what it means to them, how it will affect them, how they feel about that, what they intend to do, and—finally—what they actually do, all filtered through the lens of who they are. **See Figure 1.**

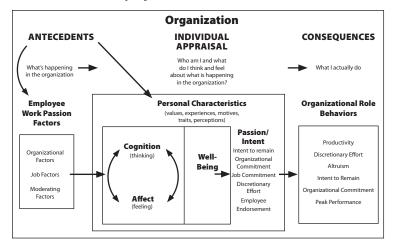


FIGURE 1: The Employee Work Passion Model

The extent to which colleagues make an effort to build rapport and personal and professional relationships

Connectedness to Leader—The extent to which leaders make an effort to build rapport and personal and professional relationships

Collaboration—The extent to which the organization encourages the sharing of ideas, teamwork, and collaboration on projects and tasks

Feedback—The extent to which individuals receive adequate feedback on performance and are recognized for improvements and ideas

INTENTIONS

Discretionary Effort—The extent to which the individual intends to expend his or her discretionary effort on behalf of the organization above and beyond agreed-upon requirements

Intent to Perform—The extent to which the individual intends to do his or her job well and work effectively to help the organization succeed

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors—The extent to which the individual is committed to supporting fellow workers and behaving in ways that are respectful, considerate, and sensitive to others

Employee Endorsement—The extent to which the individual readily endorses the organization to others as a good place to work and as a quality supplier of goods and services

Intent to Remain—The extent to which the individual plans to stay with the organization

The model suggests that the appraisal process begins with an assessment of the organizational, job, and moderating factors or environmental antecedents (the 12 Employee Work Passion factors). During the appraisal process, an individual makes sense of how he or she feels about the extent to which the 12 factors are present in the work environment.

The appraisal process is divided into two phases. In the first phase, individuals assess the environment's impact on their sense of well-being. In the second phase, individuals make judgments to form conscious intentions about how to cope with the environment and its impact on them. Without experiencing the first phase of the appraisal process, individuals cannot grasp the significance or meaning of what is happening as they try to adapt to what the environment requires of them. Without experiencing the second phase, individuals would not be able to choose between alternative values and courses of action, nor could they form intentionality and motivation to shape their future behavior. The appraisal process is vital to an individual's positive mental and emotional well-being. By defining Employee Work Passion as a sense of well-being that results in constructive work intentions and behaviors, we are implying that an individual becomes passionate about the work he or she does through the appraisal process.

Stated more simply, the result of the appraisal of one's environment can lead to a sense of well-being and coping. The presence of well-being or lack of it leads to the intention to behave in a certain way within both the job environment and the organizational environment, as measured through the five intentions. Intentions ultimately lead to either positive or negative job and organizational behaviors.

Proving the Employee Work Passion Model

To further explore the Employee Work Passion Model and understand the connections between the main components, The Ken Blanchard Companies conducted a study (Study 1) with a division of an electronics firm in the western United States. Prior to launching the study, several hypotheses were formed.

Hypothesis 1: Work cognition and work affect are positively related

Hypothesis 2: Work cognition is positively related to job well-being

Hypothesis 3: Positive affect is positively related to job well-being

Hypothesis 4: Job well-being is positively related to work intention

Hypothesis 5: Work affect is positively related to work intention

Hypothesis 6: Work cognition is positively related to work intention

Hypothesis 7: The impact of work cognition and work affect on work intention is mediated by job well-being

Methodology

Statistically validated scales were used for each of the dimensions of the model, including work cognition, work affect, job well-being, and work intention. A total of 447 respondents completed the survey and the results were analyzed using a confirmatory factor analysis to determine adequate fit, and a structural equational model was used to compare the main components of the proposed model.

The results from the analysis of Model 4 indicate that it is the best fit with the highest statistical correlation, as the indirect effects of work cognition and work affect were both significant, which directly supports Hypothesis 7. You will notice that as variables were added in paths 1–4, the chi squares (x2) got smaller, while the CFI increased, as shown in Path 4.

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELS

	Х2	DF	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	R ²	LR OF X2 MODEL
 Work Cognition + Work Affect → Job Well-Being → Work Intention 	898.90	248	0.07	0.92	0.92	0.65	49.10, df 2, p 0.001
 Work Cognition + Work Affect → Job Well-Being → Work Intention and Work Affect → Work Intention 	868.50	247	0.07	0.93	0.93	0.69	18.70, df 1, p 0.001
3. Work Cognition + Work Affect → Job Well-Being → Work Intention and Work Cognition → Work Intention	860.50	247	0.07	0.93	0.93	0.70	10.70, df 1, p 0.01
 Work Cognition + Work Affect → Job Well-Being → Work Intention and Work Cognition → Work Intention and Work Affect → Work Intention 	849.80	246	0.07	0.93	0.93	0.71	

LR = likelihood ratio test.

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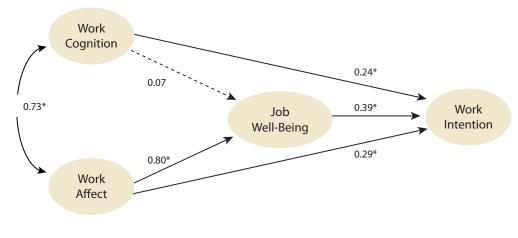
The structural equational model in Figure 2 shows the supporting evidence for our hypotheses.

- Work cognition does not strongly correlate (.07) to job well-being, which may be explained by the fact that work cognition does not have a direct impact on job well-being without an accompanying affective impact. More simply stated, while an individual's thoughts and feelings both play a role in creating work intention, cognition on its own does not influence job well-being.
- Work cognition and work affect were strongly correlated (.73)—which again supports statements made earlier in this paper that the appraisal process is both affective and cognitive, happening simultaneously—and are, therefore, connected components of the appraisal process.
- There was a strong correlation (.80) between work affect and job well-being, but clearly some of the variance is not explained by work affect.
- There is also a correlated path between work cognition and work intention (.24), which is explained by the presence of higher-order reasoning, such as the way people process intellectually (expectation processing, evaluation processing, and attribute processing). Cognitive processing is necessary to arrive at clear and specific intentions. This explains by the second phase of the appraisal process in which the individual forms intentions to cope with either a positive or negative sense of well-being and comes to terms with the resulting decisions about which alternative actions are best.
- Work affect is correlated to work intention, which may be explained by the idea that affect is needed to sustain intention beyond a sense of well-being. Academic literature suggests that the degree to which intentions are well formed shapes how affect influences behavior. When intentions are well formed, they mediate the effect of affect on behavior. When intentions are poorly formed, the mediating role of intentions is reduced and affect has a stronger influence on behavior. Said another way, when an individual is unclear about how he or she intends to behave, affect or emotion can trump rational thought and influence behavior. When an individual has clearly formed intentions, affect has less influence on intentions and the resulting behavior. This is in keeping with certain schools of thought in academic literature that advocate that in order for intention to be sustained, there must be a strong desire to do so.

Understanding How the Factors Influence Intent and Behavior

Much of our study in regard to what creates Employee Work Passion has been focused on understanding which organizational and job factors are important to employees. Our research has also focused on which intentions and resultant behaviors are characteristic of individuals who are passionate about their work and

FIGURE 2: Structural Equational Model for Employee Work Passion*



LEGEND FOR FIGURE 2

Solid lines represent a correlation Dotted lines represent a lack of correlation

Any value of more than .20 is considered statistically significant. A value of .20 is a small degree of correlation, .35 is a medium degree of correlation, and .45 is a large degree of correlation.

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their organizations. But it is just as important to understand the connections of specific factors to specific intentions.

In a separate study (Study 2) using a partial random sample of a 1,500-respondent panel, we ran a regression analysis to understand the hierarchical correlations between the factors and the intentions.

The following table allows us to understand the relationships between the 12 Employee Work Passion factors and the five Intent scales. Using statistical analysis to examine the connection between the Intent scales (dependent variable) and the 12 factors (independent variable) enables us to understand to what extent the 12 factors influence the five intentions, which in turn influence behavior. It also allows us to understand which factors have the most impact across all five intentions. To interpret the correlation values, .500 represents a large correlation, .300 is a medium correlation, and .100 is a small correlation. **See Table 2.**

Table 2 shows that all 12 factors have a certain degree of correlation to the five work intentions, ranging from trivial or small to large. This supports earlier statistical analysis that allowed us to conclude that all factors must be present in order for Employee Work Passion to be optimal.

For the purpose of this article, we will focus our explanation and rationale of the correlations by highlighting the larger correlations.

TABLE 2: Correlation Analysis between Employee Work Passion Factors and Intentions in the Workplace

	Discretionary Effort	Intent to Perform	Employee Endorsement	Intent to Remain	Organizational Citizenship Behaviors
Growth	.460	.298	.545	.618	.345
Connectedness to Leader	.417	.305	.431	.417	.319
Connectedness to Colleagues	.513	.346	.450	.286	.506
Workload Balance	.137	.090	.243	.234	.190
Task Variety	.603	.520	.491	.359	.526
Performance Expectations	.388	.336	.465	.412	.345
Collaboration	.450	.376	.535	.468	.540
Meaningful Work	.488	.475	.505	.492	.477
Distributive Justice	.396	.262	.496	.519	.333
Procedural Justice	.511	.377	.635	.530	.476
Autonomy	.531	.390	.539	.524	.483
Feedback	.385	.338	.483	.454	.370

Discretionary Effort

An individual's intent to expend discretionary effort on behalf of the organization is directly influenced by all of the 12 factors. The top four, listed in order of both importance and correlation strength, are

- 1. Task Variety
- 2. Autonomy
- 3. Connectedness to Colleagues
- 4. Procedural Justice

WHAT THIS MEANS

This means that the extent to which individuals perceive they have variety in their jobs and are doing different types of tasks that go beyond routine, have personal and professional connections to their fellow workers, perceive policies and procedures are equitably applied to all, and have a certain level of autonomy in the way they approach their job all influence an individual's desire to exert discretionary effort in their job and on behalf of their organization.

WHY

Task Variety correlates to Discretionary Effort because people are more engaged, less bored, and more apt to go the extra mile when they have autonomy and variety in their role. Individuals who have a greater degree of Task Variety are more inclined to exert Discretionary Effort because they tend to have a greater degree of interest in their jobs and they find work engaging.

Peer pressure can also play a role in influencing Discretionary Effort, so the more connected an individual is to their colleagues, the more likely he or she is to expend extra energy on behalf of the organization. Individuals who perceive that their colleagues are willing to expend extra energy on behalf of the organization are more likely to do the same.

Additionally, the concept of Procedural Justice (or the extent to which individuals feel involved in decisions that affect them and feel that decisions, policies, and procedures are equitably and fairly applied to all) influences Discretionary Effort, because if people perceive there is a *lack of* fairness in the work environment, they are inclined not to be fair or expend additional energy on behalf of the organization. On the other hand, people feel good about working extra hard when the organization they are working for treats them fairly. Research in the area of procedural fairness has shown that people are more willing to accept decisions when procedural fairness is alive and well in the work environment.

Intent to Perform

An individual's intent to perform at peak levels is directly influenced by all 12 factors. The top three, listed below in order of importance and correlation strength, are

- 1. Task Variety
- 2. Meaningful Work
- 3. Autonomy

WHAT THIS MEANS

This means that the extent to which individuals intend to perform at peak levels is influenced by their perception that the work they do has meaning to the organization, that the work the organization does has meaning to the customer, that there is variety in their work and tasks, and the degree to which they have autonomy to decide how to best approach tasks.

WHY

In looking at the correlations, we believe that when individuals find meaning in their work, they are more compelled to perform the tasks and roles of the job.

Task Variety influences Intent to Perform because the more that individuals feel their jobs contain variety, keep them from being bored, and include more than routine tasks, the more likely they are to work efficiently and effectively and to do their jobs well. Autonomy is correlated to Intent to Perform because most people feel the need to have the ability to decide how their tasks are performed and to have the authority to do their jobs; the more this is the case, the stronger their intent to do their jobs well.

Intent to Endorse

An individual's intent to endorse the organization as a great place to work and to do business with is directly influenced by all 12 factors. The top three, listed in order of importance and strength of correlation, are

- 1. Procedural Justice
- 2. Growth
- 3. Autonomy

WHAT THIS MEANS

This means that the extent to which individuals perceive that policies and procedures are equitably applied to all, they have growth opportunities in their roles and a career path within the organization, and they have some amount of freedom when deciding how to approach roles and tasks all influence an individual's intent to endorse the organization as a great place to work and to do business with.

WHY

Endorsement correlates highly with Procedural Justice because fairness in the work environment is important to people and its presence causes people to form an attachment to the organization or group. This attachment makes individuals more likely to endorse and speak positively about their organization. People want others they care about to come to work in a place that is fair, offers people a voice, and uses decision-making processes that focus on the benefit for all.

The connection between Growth and Autonomy and the intent to endorse the organization stems from people's need to feel they can see a future for both their job and career growth and that they have the autonomy to make decisions about how they accomplish their work. This influences their willingness to endorse the organization as a good place to work and to recommend the organization to their family and friends as well as to potential customers.

INTENT TO REMAIN

An individual's intent to remain with the organization is influenced by all 12 factors. The top four, listed below in order of importance and strength of correlation, are

- 1. Growth
- 2. Procedural Justice
- 3. Autonomy
- 4. Distributive Justice

WHAT THIS MEANS

This means that individuals' intent to stay with an organization is influenced by their perception that there are opportunities to grow within their current role and within the organization; by their perception that benefits, resources, and compensation are fairly and equitably distributed to all; and by the degree to which they have autonomy to do their jobs.

WHY

We generally find that Intent to Remain with an organization has the lowest ranking of any of the intention scales. People see their intent to stay with an organization as a right and a statement of confidence in leadership as well as the organization. If individuals don't perceive that there are growth opportunities in the organization or that benefits and pay are not equitably distributed, their intent to stay diminishes over time. There is a prevalent school of thought that presumes it is an individual's relationship with his or her leader that is the key determinant of retention. While this relationship is important, it is not as important as the presence of growth opportunities, autonomy, and fairness or Distributive Justice. Procedural Justice is also important in regard to retaining key talent. Leaders need to be careful that policies and procedures are consistently applied to all and that people are involved in the decisions that affect them.

Intent to Be a Good Organizational Citizen

An individual's intent to be a good organizational citizen is directly influenced by all 12 factors. The top four, listed in order of importance and strength of correlation, are

- 1. Collaboration
- 2. Task Variety
- 3. Connectedness to Colleagues
- 4. Autonomy

WHAT THIS MEANS

This means that people's willingness to be valuable organizational citizens is influenced by the extent to which they feel connected to their colleagues, the degree to which they feel they have variety in their tasks and their job, the degree to which they feel their work and the organization's work are meaningful and provide value to the customer, the degree to which they feel their work environment is collaborative, and the degree to which they feel they have freedom to approach their goals and tasks.

WHY

Individuals who feel more highly connected to their colleagues and see their workplace as collaborative tend to focus more on the welfare of the organization. This connection is due to the concepts of sportsmanship, fair play, and taking care of those they care about. Organizational Citizenship is the goodwill that an organization keeps in the bank, which, in turn, offsets sabotage, stealing, and abusing organizational resources.

Task Variety correlates to Organizational Citizenship because it has a sense of justness to it that makes individuals feel good about their roles, which, in turn, translates to feeling good about the organization. Additionally, a sense of Task Variety tends to make people feel more engaged about their jobs and therefore their organizations.

Meaningful Work and Autonomy connect to Organizational Citizenship because individuals are more invested in their organizations when their work has meaning and when they have a certain amount of freedom to choose how to approach their projects and tasks. When individuals feel more invested in their organizations, they are more inclined to act in ways that benefit the organization.

Summary

This first study, mentioned on page 4, was meant to be an evolution and a refinement of other engagement studies that have focused on providing data about the state of engagement or to what degree certain percentages of the workforce were engaged or disengaged. These studies typically define engagement as vigor, absorption, and dedication, while others include certain antecedents–organizational and demographic factors, for example– in an effort to define additional facets of the engagement puzzle such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance. The challenge with these approaches is that they have not attempted to differentiate and examine the relationships and differences between work cognition, work affect, job well-being, and work intention. And some studies that use concepts like job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job commitment often blur the lines between work intention and work affect rather than attempt to differentiate them.

In general, Study 1 supports the definition of Employee Work Passion in that it can be argued that constructive intentions are the result of the emotionally positive, meaning-based state of well-being and that cognitive and affective appraisal, are, in a sense, the variables that cause this to happen.

Even though job well-being did not completely explain the relationship between what employees thought, and what they felt about their jobs and their organizations, and their resulting intention, it still plays a role in the formation of Employee Work Passion. The findings of this study indicate that the formation of Employee Work Passion is a process by which employees form cognitive conclusions and affective appraisals about their work environment that result in a sense of well-being that yields work intentions. The study findings further indicate that an individual's appraisal of their work experience is a function of work affect, shaped by their cognitive processing of the evaluations of their work experiences.

We know from our research that all 12 factors must be present in the work environment in order for Employee Work Passion to be optimized; however, the data in Table 2 clearly shows that some factors are more influential than others in regard to intentions and their resulting behavior.

A caveat to the data and conclusions in study 2 is that the analysis was conducted using a random sample of employees from many organizations. When we look at these same correlations within a specific organization and also compare organization-to-organization correlations, we find that culture is the most powerful influencer of how the 12 factors are represented, and those results differ not only from organization to organization but also from the results of our national sample.

When looking to create environments that encourage people to have positive intentions in the work environment, organizations and leaders should examine the extent to which the 12 organizational and job factors are present in their current culture. In particular, leaders should ask themselves the following questions:

- To what extent does the culture allow individuals to find meaning in their work and their roles, and also in the organization's purpose?
- To what extent are policies, procedures, benefits, and compensation transparent and equitably applied to all?
- To what extent is the organization providing growth opportunities for individuals in their current jobs and in their careers? And do the feedback mechanisms allow individuals to improve and advance?
- To what extent are individuals clear about what is expected of them and have a reasonable amount of autonomy when engaging in projects and tasks? And are they provided opportunities to collaborate with others?
- To what extent are job roles balanced and reasonable, with enough variety to challenge people to stretch and perform at optimal levels?

Employee Work Passion is an individual's persistent, emotionally positive, meaningbased state of well-being stemming from recurring cognitive and affective appraisals of various job and organizational situations, which results in consistent, constructive work intentions and behaviors.

Therefore, we recommend that organizations provide their employees a sense of meaning beyond simply making a profit; the autonomy and flexibility for individuals to give their all at work; opportunities for growth, collaboration, and recognition; and a sense of connectedness. In addition, organizations must ensure that processes and procedures are fairly and consistently applied to all employees.

While it may seem daunting to address the 12 factors and to incorporate them into the workplace, organizations that support the development of Employee Work Passion will be rewarded by passionate employees who are dedicated to creating devoted customers, achieving sustainable growth, and increasing profits for the organization.

About The Ken Blanchard Companies®

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