

# A WEEK IN *Learning*

## In the Neighborhood of Engagement

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I'd like to ask a couple of questions before we get started. Don't answer these now - just keep them in the back of your mind. I promise this will all make sense by the end of the article.

The first one is for the leaders. When it comes to your team, are you their landlord, or are you their neighbor? The next question is for all of us. Do you own your job, or are you merely renting it?

When I bought my first house, I had a lot of work to do when I moved in. Painting the walls, hanging up blinds, planting bushes, and even digging a fire pit in the backyard in the middle of summer. If I was missing a tool, or needed some help, I would ask one of my neighbors. I wouldn't describe any of this work as "fun", but it was my top priority. I *owned* this house. It was a reflection of my family and myself. In the end, I felt a great deal of pride when this work was accomplished.

Conversely, I would have never even considered doing this kind of work when I was renting a house. If the yard needed to be trimmed, a pipe bursts, or a door came loose, that's when I called the landlord. Sure, I had all the tools in the garage to take care of these issues, but why bother? Not my house. Not my problem. Any time, or effort, I spent fixing the place would ultimately just benefit someone else.

There's a lot of talk these days about the importance of employee engagement. Unfortunately, there is far less talk about what employee engagement actually is. As I thought more about this, I discovered that there are actually many parallels between my experience of owning my first house, and the behaviors exhibited by a truly engaged employee. To me, it all boils down to our core value of ownership, and I'll explain why. To get a good definition of employee engagement, let's look at those questions I posed at the beginning of the article.

**For the leaders. When it comes to your team, are you their landlord, or are you their neighbor?**

Many of us have worked for both "landlords" and "neighbors", and there are stark differences between the two. You only talk to the landlord when there's a problem, or something needs to get done outside your area of responsibility. They aren't there to help you with your chores, and they certainly aren't invited to



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the block party. Leaders that are landlords are much the same. They are only in contact when something goes wrong. They also make their position over their team members, and the separation of responsibilities, very clear.

Neighbors are a different story. A neighbor is there to offer advice, recommend a reliable landscaper, help you with some home improvements, and keep an eye on your place when you're out of town. They may have a bigger house and a nicer car, but everyone on the street is equally responsible for the upkeep of the neighborhood. Leaders that are neighbors are equally helpful. They offer their team members the same tools and advice that they have found useful. They work alongside their employees and chip in when needed.

To engage your team, be their neighbor, not their landlord.

### **For all of us. Do you own your job, or are you merely renting it?**

During different points in our careers, we've all probably been owners and renters. A renter has little to no desire, or incentive, to upgrade their environment. That burnt orange shag carpet from the '70s is certainly an eyesore, but what's in it for the renter to swap that out? Team members that are renting their job usually think the same way. They notice what needs improvement, they *could* do something about it, but they feel it's someone else's responsibility.

Owners typically have a different point of view. That shag carpet definitely needs to go. Those loose cabinets are getting tightened up. Even if they notice some litter on a neighbor's lawn, they'll pick it up while walking to the mailbox. There is a sense of pride and responsibility for not only their house, but their community. Team members that own their job have that same attitude. They don't need to review their job description when they see something that needs to be fixed – they just do it. If another team member needs help, they jump right in. They are personally invested in the organization's goals, and see their work environment as a reflection of themselves. To create an environment that everyone wants to work in and accomplish our goals, you need to own your job, not just rent it.

In my opinion, an engaged employee is one that truly takes ownership in what they do and feels responsible for their work environment. This is the Processor that picks up a few hangers off the floor on their way out the door. The Career Advisor that gladly helps a jobseeker draft a resume 2 minutes before closing time. The manager that's willing to work alongside their team members when due dates are closing in and the work is piling up. It starts with engaged leaders creating a positive environment, and ends with engaged team members being able to achieve their fullest potential. Own your work, be a good neighbor, and together we can drive the business forward.

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