

## An Ample Appetite For Apathy

### 3 Strategies To Curb Your Associate's Appetite For Apathy

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Americans love appetizers. And, as a precursor to nearly every meeting, a staggering number of associates dine on an amazing sampler of appetizers. Not the same appetizers served in your favorite restaurant, but instead a platter filled with those mental strongholds of defeatism, despair, and hopelessness – they have no passion for what they do or what they could contribute.

Denotatively, apathy is defined as an absence of passion. Associates are fed up with ineffective meetings, they are frustrated by ineffective communication, and they are fed up with being taken for granted by their peers, colleagues, and supervisors. Such conditions are sure to siphon off associate passion resulting in increased levels of apathy. It is these and similar experiences that fill the apathy sampler platter. Consequently, apathy abounds in abundance.

The unspoken question is when is enough, enough? My guess is you've seen various manifestation of apathy around you. But, what have you done to address it? Why would a leader accept or tolerate an apathetic attitude on behalf of his or her direct reports, peer or colleagues. In today's workplace apathy is being served up like an endless basket of Red Lobster's cheese biscuits. Based on the prevalence of apathy in the workplace, we can rightly conclude, that for many, it must be appetizing and addictive.

Unfortunately, too many leaders are apathetic about associate apathy. It would appear these leaders have accepted apathy as par for the course. To do so is both an erroneous assumption and a debilitating conclusion. I challenge you; there has never been anything of extreme importance or significance accomplished with an accompanying attitude of apathy. When was the last time you were propelled to greatness because of your personal apathy? If you don't care, you can't excel. It only makes sense. Apathy has never been the secret ingredient for outstanding quality or cutting edge innovation. But as more and more of the workforce are deemed disengaged or actively disengaged the prospects of a productive and profitable future become increasingly more evasive for a growing number of organizations.

Research in the UK and the US shows that associate apathy in the workplace is a significant drain on organizational productivity. Tickbox, a British Research firm, found that apathetic employees spend as much as three hours a workday surfing the internet instead of focusing on their assigned task. If we simply extrapolate the data from the Gallup organization regarding overall levels of disengagement in the workplace, it becomes palpably evident that this is no small problem.

If the leaders are not invested enough to challenge the apathetic behaviors of any team member, there is little chance the behavior will rectify itself. Sadly, when presented with such a challenge, many leaders find their only recourse to be an empty and hollow, "Hey, c'mon guys. Get it together!" The associate's reaction is usually that of confusion and even resentment.

Understanding that leaders are facilitators of results, each leader should (must) be willing to proactively invest and intervene to minimize - if not preclude - the frequency and intensity of episodes of apathy in the workplace.

Here are 3 strategies to curb your associate's appetite for apathy:

**Ask The Question:** The first step in addressing the challenge of associate apathy is investigation and clarification. Given that few of us have honed our psychic skills to the hilt, we must engage the other party in a substantive discussion highlighting how their recent behavior is incongruent with team expectations. Ask the question about the associate's level of engagement, investment, and commitment to the task and the overall goals.

**Accentuate The Benefit:** At times, associates lose sight of the many ways their tasks contribute to the greater good of society. While the actual assignment may feel mundane, the impact created by your product or service is anything but! It may just be a loan application to your associate, but to the client it's a new home, a life accomplishment, or the resource to reinvest in the community. Without the efforts of your associate, none of those dreams is possible.

**Acknowledge The Person:** One surefire way to combat apathy is to celebrate the whole person and his or her contribution. Appreciation is a guaranteed antidote for apathy. Encourage team members share their appreciation for how their coworkers assist in reaching specific goals. Additionally, provide team members opportunities to get to know more than the "professional competence" of their coworkers. Where inclusion and appreciation abound, apathy is hard to find.

If we learn to look at apathy as a symptom of a larger problem, we will be better able to address and obviate the challenge. If left unaddressed, apathy is assured to erode morale, collaboration, and productivity. An apathetic associate is guaranteed to be an underperforming associate. It doesn't take many apathetic associates to have an adverse impact on your bottom line.

**Leadership Lesson:** Apathy has never been the secret ingredient for outstanding quality or cutting edge innovation. Generally apathy is a reaction to an absence of leadership investment and feelings of insignificance. Actualizing Leaders proactively prevent the conditions conducive to associate apathy. The demands and expectations of the dynamic global marketplace cannot be met, and surely can't be exceeded, by associates with an ample appetite for apathy.

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