

First Break All The Rules

In the book First Break All the Rules, the Gallup Organization's Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman identify characteristics common to the world's great managers and the traits found most frequently in their best teams. After interviewing a million employees and 80,000 managers in 400 companies, Buckingham and Coffman were able to formulate a system for creating engaged employees and high-performance work places. The success of the companies was measured in four areas: productivity, profitability, employee retention and customer satisfaction.

The Gallup team discovered that of the hundreds of questions they asked the staff members surveyed, only twelve really determined how well those employees would perform. Team members were asked to rate the questions on a 1 – 5 scale with one being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree.”

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel my job is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?
11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
12. This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

The pollsters discovered that in order to get the clearest “strongly agree and strongly disagree” answers it was important to ask the questions exactly as they are worded above including the extreme qualifiers such as “best friend” and “every day”.

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A telling exercise for your company would be to create a survey of the 12 questions and give it to all of your employees asking them how much they agree or disagree with them. The employees with the highest scores are the ones who feel most engaged by their work. The departments or stores with the most 5's and the fewest 1's are probably the most productive, most profitable departments that have the lowest employee turnover and the best customer satisfaction.

The scores will tell a great deal about the effectiveness of your managers. Those whose employees have the highest scores are probably innately terrific managers. They can teach the rest a great deal about managing their employees.

What did the Gallup surveyors learn about the business of management? Buckingham and Coffman found that if managers learn to do four things well, their employees would answer positively to most of the questions. The best managers were exceptionally good in *selecting employees, setting expectations, motivating their people, and developing their people.*

Good hiring, for instance, leads people to respond positively when asked, "At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?"

Those who excel in setting expectations will find their team members answering positively to questions like "In the past six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?"

A manager who is a good motivator will find positive answers to questions such as "In the past seven days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?" And a manager who is focused on developing his or her people will have positive answers to questions such as "This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?"

First Break All The Rules may well be the best management book I have ever read. The theories in the book are based on well-researched data. More important, the theories make sense, are easy to implement and provide a way to measure management performance and employee satisfaction. The best managers make the best teams. The best teams have little turnover, make companies productive and profitable while delivering superior customer satisfaction.

That's the ultimate win-win-win.