

AN EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY

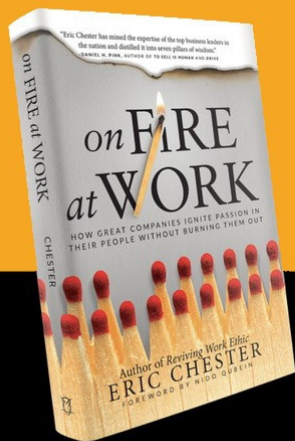
BY KA-SHEENA MINOTT

EADM 826

SEPTEMBER 11, 2020

ON FIRE AT WORK: HOW GREAT COMPANIES IGNITE PASSION IN THEIR PEOPLE WITHOUT BURNING THEM OUT

BY ERIC CHESTER
FORWARD BY NIDO QUBEIN



On Fire At Work

How Great Companies Ignite Passion In
Their People Without Burning Them Out

By Eric Chester

7 Pillars of Workplace Culture

SUMMARY OF BOOK

On Fire at Work: How Great Companies Ignite Passion In Their People Without Burning Them Out is one of the most renowned, practical field guide and roadmap to any organization's need for success, growth and having an engaged workforce that is *on fire*.

20 year veteran professional speaker and workplace researcher, Eric Chester speaks on the importance of employee engagement on the work culture.

Chester identifies 'seven pillars of workplace culture', i.e. the seven things that employees are asking of their employers: compensation, alignment, atmosphere, growth, acknowledgement, autonomy and communication.

Chester went "straight to the source" to uncover success stories and strategies from companies like Canadian WestJet, 7-Eleven, Wegmans, Ben & Jerry's and the Nerdery, to name a few.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

SUMMARY OF BOOK	PAGE 1
ABOUT THE AUTHOR & CONCEPTS	PAGE 2
CHAPTER ONE: STEAK KNIVES, THE OLD SCHOOL & THE NEW DEAL	PAGE 3-4
CHAPTER TWO: COMPENSATION	PAGE 5-6
CHAPTER THREE: ALIGNMENT	PAGE 7
CHAPTER FOUR: ATMOSPHERE	PAGE 8
CHAPTER FIVE & SIX: GROWTH & KNOWLEDGEMENT	PAGE 9
CHAPTER SEVEN: AUTONOMY	PAGE 10
CHAPTER EIGHT: COMMUNICATION	PAGE 11
CONCLUSION, CRITICAL ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	PAGE 12

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

“When people who work for you are on fire at work, their energy level increases, sparking an increase in productivity, motivation, creativity, and performance”

ERIC CHESTER

For almost 20 years, Eric Chester has been the leading voice and “trusted source in the global dialogue in employee engagement and building a world-class workplace culture.” Author of five ground-breaking bestselling books for leaders, managers, and business owners, Eric Chester’s ideas are focused on business ideas and strategies for finding and retaining frontline workers. Holder of the prestigious Certified Speaking Professional Award, Chester has delivered over 3000 “paid” keynote speeches on three different continents. In 2004, he was inducted into the International Professional Speakers Hall of Fame, an honour shared by less than 5% of all professional speakers of the world.

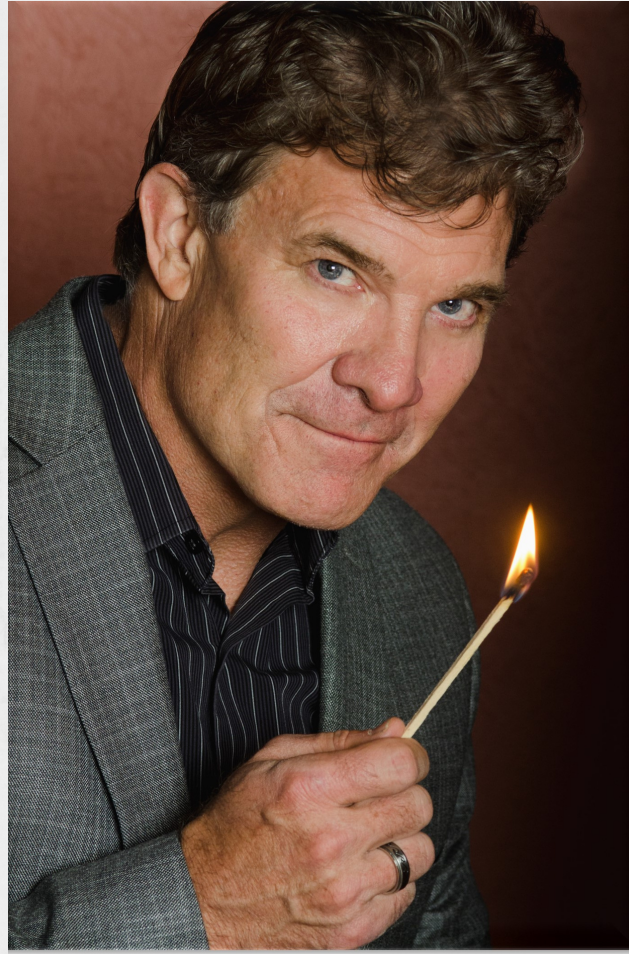
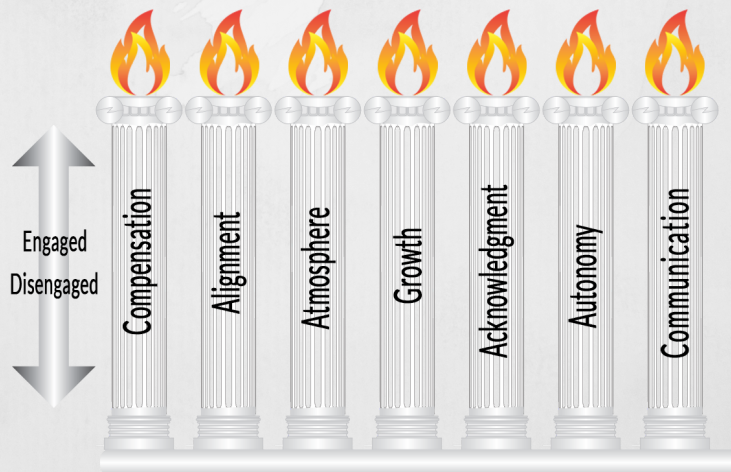


Image source: <http://onfireatwork.com/>

KEY CONCEPTS (SEVEN CULTURAL PILLARS)



“The challenge facing employers isn’t how to engage employees. It’s how to keep the fires of passion burning once the honeymoon period is over” (p. 20)

on FIRE
at WORK

Chester spoke about seven core characteristics, interpersonal skills and aptitudes that many employees look for in their prospective employees. These seven core attributes, also called “soft skills” or the ER (employer) list are:

- **positive attitude** - approaching work with a positive “can-do spirit
- **reliability** - be punctual, be consistent
- **professionalism** - dress appropriate at all times and be great company ambassadors
- **initiative** - taking steps to improve oneself to add value to the company
- **respect** - Adhering to company policies and acknowledge the chain of command
- **integrity** - be honest and have strong moral principles and upfront in altercations
- **gratitude** - going above and beyond expectations

“Engagement occurs when the basic needs and expectations of both the ER [employer] and the EEs [employee] are met” (p. 25)

Engagement isn’t the ultimate goal –it’s merely the starting point” (p. 26)

“Today, great companies recognize that the employee is number one” (p. 33)

Employees also have expectation of their employees; i.e. the seven ‘pillars of workplace culture’:

- 🔥 **Compensation Salaries** - benefits, and work-life balance
- 🔥 **Alignment** - employee and employer both having similar values and principles
- 🔥 **Atmosphere** - an enjoyable and safe work environment
- 🔥 **Growth** - opportunities for personal and professional growth
- 🔥 **Acknowledgement** - be recognized, rewarded and celebrated
- 🔥 **Autonomy** - “encouragement” to act independently and make decisions
- 🔥 **Communication** - Open and honest communication and feedback between employer and employee

CHAPTER ONE: STEAK KNIVES, THE OLD SCHOOL, AND THE NEW DEAL

Chester starts the book off by drawing a famous movie, *Glen Gary Ross*, the scene where Blake (played by Alec Baldwin) gives the employees an ultimatum to boost productivity and sales or they are fired. There are only two winning positions first place and second place; the latter gets a set of steak knives to commemorate them surviving another “cut.” See the play on words? There was a work-hard, and keep-your heads-down and ‘winner takes all kind of culture.’ It was every man (or woman for him/herself).

This culture was predominant in the 1980s, and in this culture, “there are no winners” (p.14). One does not want an employee staff made up of steak-knives. Eric posited that the success of one’s business is tied directly to:

1. The quality of the people you attract to your business;
2. Your proficiency in getting those people to perform beyond expectations, consistently;
3. Your ability [as the employer] to keep your employees on the payroll, for as long as possible.

Corporate Culture, Old School Style

The ‘Old School’ Management Style focuses on a top-down positional authority. Do what is asked of you, and your job is secure. This concept borders on the ideology on the exchange of money for time and effort.



The assumption behind this culture is that there is an inherent tension between management and employee, where managers push for high performance, and employees work hard in fear of losing their jobs.

'Unhappy employees are Unproductive Employees'

“Today’s old school employers don’t place much credence in buzzword-sounding mumbo jumbo like employee engagement and workplace culture,” Chester explains. Lack of engagement is a prevalent issue being faced by many hrms.

'Engagements don't last forever'

"Engagement is a two-way street" (p. 20)
Both parties need to be engaged for a business to be successful. Hrms and organizations are contiunously struggling to keep the "fires of passion burning" once the employee has gotten comfortable, or disengaged.

“The challenge facing employers isn’t how to engage employees. It’s how to keep the fires of passion burning once the honeymoon period is over” (p. 20)

CHAPTER TWO: COMPENSATION: COUNTERBALANCING THIS AND THAT

Compensate- derived from the Latin word *compensate*, meaning “weighing one thing against another or counterbalancing” (p. 36) Employees need money to meet their basic daily requirements, thus agreeing to perform certain tasks in exchange for money. Both the employee and the employer are usually motivated by their own reasons. Studies have shown that compensation does not equate to job satisfaction. According to Gallup annual Work and Education survey, 31-41 % of Americans said they would quit their jobs if they won the lottery or get any big financial breakthrough.

There are “no right ways to compensate all employees,” however, as an employee, it is your duty to find the best way possible to compensate **ALL** your employees



*“An employee's paycheck and his or her level of engagement are not joined at the hip”
(p. 37).*

At some point, money ceases to be a motivation for employee engagement and can be very ineffective for employee morale; others include:

Promote the idea that one size fits all - All employees have similar skills and experiences, but they all work differently and produce different results. “One size doesn’t fit all because it’s impossible to rationalize paying all employees the same- at least not when it’s your goal to generate lasting, on fire results from all the employees in your organization” (p. 42)

Exchange money for time - Three most common compensation programs are hourly pay (i.e. gross pay), salary (i.e. “pre-negotiated contract amount”) and salary (based on tenure). Chester states that employees need to be paid according to their actual contribution to the organization, which increases employee engagement. Boosting benefits packages and performance bonuses are increasingly becoming effective in employee engagement.

Race to the idea the bottom of the wage scale - Employers who “buy cheap” workforce end up costing themselves more in the long run, that is, “the money saved on payroll will be gobbled up by additional costs in training, employee mistakes and blunder, lost sales...and employee turnover (p. 46).

Dangling Nebulous Carrots - Pretense and promises of future plans for an employee, often by offering a lower starting salary with promises of promotions or growth but out of reach. Talented employees often do not stay retained for long.

“even the best-intentioned ambiguous promises have no place in the compensation strategy of a great culture” (p. 47)

“simply paying high wages and offering elaborate benefits won't guarantee that your employee will be on fire for you or your company” (p. 48)

COMPENSATION (CONT'D)

Three Most Effective Compensation Models:

1. *Strive for Transparency* - Operate your business with honesty, openness and transparency; that is, salaries of executives and managers should be open knowledge for everyone in the organization.



Chet talked to me about how QuikTrip employees are never left in the dark about what he makes, which cuts down on the animosity that so often arises between management and labor.



2. *Pay People More Than You Have To* - Companies should pay their employees what they are worth and invest in their professional development, which often leads to low employee turnover and increased employee engagement.

3. *Tie Employee Income to Employee Outcome* - Employees invested in the company's successes, like buy bonds and stocks, are more engaged. Chester (2004) refers to it as "foundation of shared objectives" (p. 53)

While compensation is the motivating factor to help employees approach their jobs better, it is no evidence that suggests that compensation can "ignite and sustain on fire-employee engagement" (p. 60). *Compensation Is Only the Baseline for On-Fire Performance.*

CHAPTER THREE: ALIGNMENT: INCULCATING CORE VALUES

This chapter explores the importance of great organizational culture by arguing that there needs to be a “perfect alignment between leaders and workers” (p. 73). While this perfect culture is almost impossible, the pursuit of this “perfect alignment” of core values and principles keeps cultures moving forward.

Great Companies Align Employees with Core Values

Using several examples, Chester (2014) posited that true alignment can only be achieved when all boxes have been checked for both ERs and EEs.

Powerful Words Sell, but Employees Aren't Buying

Having core values and principles posted in and around company buildings is great for the consumers to see. However, at a time when people are yearning for “time-honored values and social mores of the past,” the employees themselves need to embody and display these same values and principles. Again, it is a two-way street.

Enron Corporation

- Underlying Company Values: Communication, Respect, Integrity & Excellence
- “Most Innovative Company in America” for six years running
- Fortunes “100 best Companies to Work For” three consecutive years
- Nearly 25,000 employees
- The corporation went bankrupt after the Chiefs were charged for fraud, costing the corporation more than \$60 billion in assets and legal fees, and is now filed as one of the biggest bankruptcy scandals in United States history. The company values were a farce.
- Enron Chiefs wanted to “convince the general public of the company’s virtue,” which was merely a projected image to the outside world

Five Ways to Ensure ER (Employer)-EE (Employee) Core Value Alignment

Chester (2014) identified a five-step process to create core organizational values and culture:

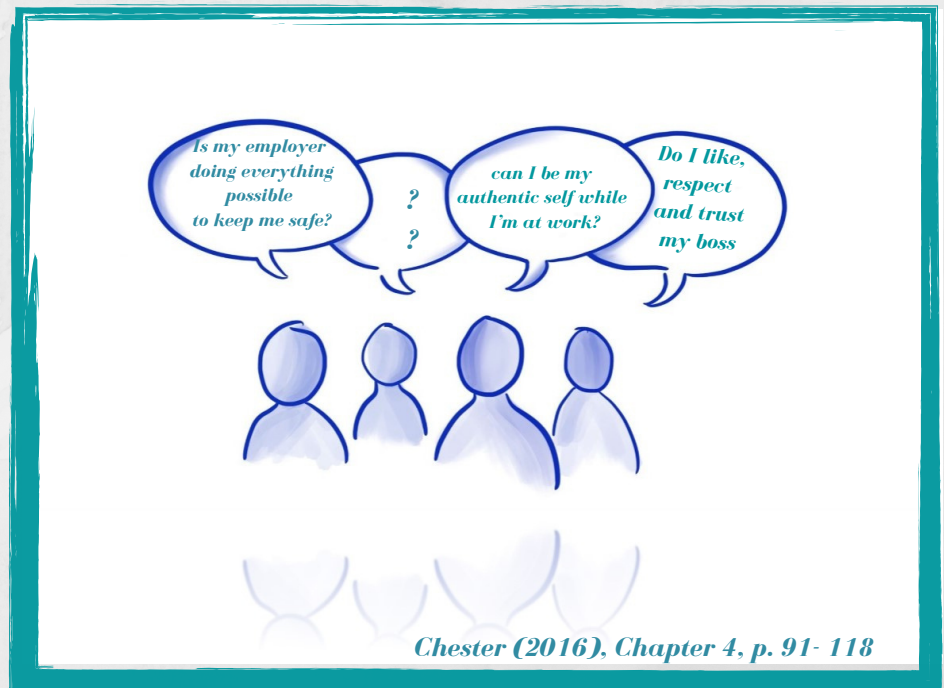
1. ***Interview and hire according to your values*** - Vet and hire employees whose core values aligns with those of the company.
2. ***Train around those values*** - training of employees should be continuous and used to help the employees “to reflect upon hypothetical situations and real-world examples” (p.83).
3. ***Discipline employees who don't honor the values, and reward those who do***
4. ***Evaluate performance in accordance with core values***
5. ***Model behaviors***

CHAPTER FOUR: ATMOSPHERE: ENSURING EMPLOYEES ARE SAFE, WELL- EQUIPPED, AND GOOFING OFF!



This chapter focuses on the workplace atmosphere. Chester (2016) stated that the atmosphere in the workplace should be created purposefully. Workplaces should be welcoming, engaging and fun to increase employee engagement and productivity. Chester (2016) identified seven atmospheres which influence a workplace culture:

- 1. The Safety Ring** - employees will only give on fire performance when they feel their employer has taken every possible precaution to ensure their (employee) safety on the job.
- 2. The Acceptance Ring** - Having a diverse workforce “guards against groupthink and promotes innovation,” collaboration and creativity.
- 3. The Tool Ring** - Employees need to be equipped with the most up-to-date tool available for their duties and tasks
- 4. The Boss Ring** - Managers need to empower their employees, be compassionate, “knowledgeable, accessible, fair, and supportive” (p. 96). Once an employee is not feeling engaged or empowered by their leaders, or else they will quickly find another job at another company
- 5. The Coworker Rings** - A company *on fire* fosters what Chester refers to as “camaraderie and teambuilding.” These team members work hard to develop a strong workforce bond and often work towards a common goal.
- 6. The Sensory Ring** - A workforce atmosphere must have sensory input: smell, sight, sound, taste and touch. Whatever information gathered using any of the five senses can either influence positivity or repel employee engagement and on fire performance.
- 7. The Fun Ring** - Companies like Google Corporation and Zappos, who provide fun outlets for keeping their employees attracted and engaged, tend to retain their staff.



CHAPTER FIVE: GROWTH: GROW EMPLOYEES BIG OR THEY WILL GO HOME

In this chapter, Chester (2016) stated that employees need to feel a sense of loyalty from their employers, often by providing ongoing training for personal and professional growth so that they can advance within the organization, or they will look elsewhere.

Employees need to be encouraged to “build stronger skills and grow at the company,” which Chester refers to as an essential part of the solution for getting employees to become on fire.

Chester argues that to have a workforce *on fire*, it is the employers’ responsibility to give them a reason to be *on fire*.



The Growth - Retention Index

Employees who are given the opportunity for growth and gaining more experience in their respective areas are more inclined to stay with their employer. Chester highlights that this choice to stay is also contingent on the pillars from the previously discussed chapters.

“The more skilled and talented employees are, the more likely they are to be motivated to learn a new skill, develop their talents and expertise, and improve their perceived value”
(p. 126).

CHAPTER SIX: ACKNOWLEDGMENT: WHAT IT REALLY MEANS TO PUT PEOPLE FIRST

Acknowledging an employee’s hard work and accomplishments is one of the best ways to utilize engaging power in the workplace. Some workplaces, like Wegmans Food Markets, acknowledge their employees, and they ensure that this mentality is engrained in their culture. Chester (2016) argues that *Acknowledgement Trumps Recognition*, by stating that “employees want to be seen. They want their employers to know they exist.” Recognition is no longer enough in workplaces; it does not carry enough weight by itself, thus why so many employers “fall back on Old-School incentive programs” (p. 146).

Chester also argues that in this day and age, when employees are the driving forces of all organizations, they [employees] now come first and the customer comes second. Chester asks that we “break free of the 10-80-10 Management Mindset,” which is where managers focus 80% of their time on 20% of the workforce: that is, the 10% who are exceptional employees and the other 10% who are underachievers. This leaves the ‘steak-knife’ employees in the middle ignored. This group becomes disenfranchised and often leaves the company, seeking acknowledgement elsewhere for their hard work and contributions.

CHAPTER SEVEN: AUTONOMY: BUILDING AN ARMY OF INTRAPRENEURS

In this Chapter, Chester (2016) argues that autonomy, coupled with trust, is the key to creating an engaging workforce and keeping employees *on fire*. These *on fire* employees “are looking for some latitude to make decisions in the workplace.” He continues to explain that “the best kinds of employee training enable employees to build the confidence they need to face a variety of situations without freezing up” (p. 170).

Considerations that can foster autonomy among ALL employees:



Fostering a Workforce That Can Think on Its Feet -

Well-trained employees help build confidence and take care of themselves in unprecedented situations. Chester (2016) states that these employees are “trained so well that they act on instinct,” and they also “give the manager the freedom to build a foundation of trust” (p.174).

Build a spirit of “intrapreneurism”

Employees are encouraged to work on behalf of the business while also working for themselves. Chester (2016) states that this is a combination of independence, creativity, passion, and a desire to succeed” (p. 174). Employees then take this workplace intrapreneurial-spirit and build a workplace where everyone feels safe to perform as if it were their own company.

Empower intrapreneurs to make decisions

Employees should be encouraged to make workplace decisions, using their judgements. Employees love to feel trustworthy, and empowering intrapreneurship often leads to employee engagement and *on fire* performances.

Let go...

Allow employees to make mistakes and learn from them

“Give them [employees] the tools they need to succeed, then get out of their way- trust them to do the job they’ve been hired to do” (p. 180).

CHAPTER EIGHT

COMMUNICATION: THE LINK BETWEEN TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST

Information should be clearly and straightforwardly communicated to all employees.

Chester states that poor communication is a culture killer and identifies three types of information flow from the ERs to the EEs:

1. **What employees Need to Know-** Basic information like the training needed to perform their jobs.
2. **What employees should know-** Basic company knowledge such as its history, management hierarchy, core values, mission and vision statements. Information that is released to the general public should also be made available to the employees.
3. **What employees want to know-** The Good, The Bad and all Changes. Chester (2016) states that “changes is a term applied to information about what the company is doing differently today than it did yesterday” (p.199)

Workplace cultures change when employees feel like they are being kept in the dark with their companies.

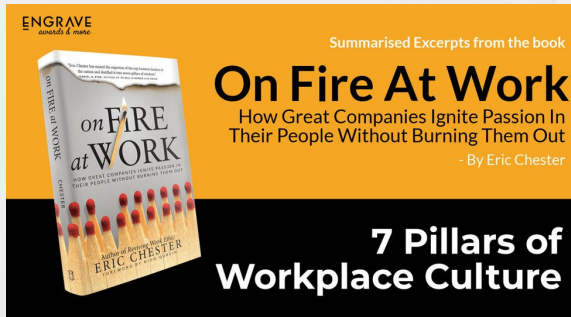
Transparency is necessary to keep workplace cultures alive and “in theory, an open-door policy is the quickest way to facilitate a transparent culture where information flows freely between the ERs and the EEs” (p. 208).

Transparency requires conscious effort on the manager's part. Your door may be open, but your employees may still see a Berlin Wall separating management and staff.

Ten Tips for Maximizing Communication with Your Employees

1. **Speak Up** - “openly share concerns with people as they arise” (p. 215). Do not let a flame turn into a forest fire.
2. **Get to the point** - Managers should engage employees in straightforward and direct conversations to maintain open communication.
3. **Give employees your full attention**
4. **Ask open-ended questions** - When people are encouraged to speak freely, rather than a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response, it opens up communication
5. **Give the straights scoop** - Do not hide anything from your employees. Chester encourages workplaces to avoid tiptoeing around employees. They are not children nor fine china.
6. **Explain why** - Always provide employees with a rationale behind what you are asking of them. Employees need to be allowed to “embrace the bigger picture and understand how what you’re asking of them” (Chester, 2016, p. 216).
7. **Ask employees what they think** - Your employees have all the creativity your organization need. Let them use it.
8. **Keep your door wide open** - Managers should have an open-door policy, but people should be informed of what that policy means “and what, if any, ground rules are in place” (p.216).
9. **Manage individuals, not group s-** Managers should make authentic connections with individuals, getting to know each EE as individuals and treating them as such.
10. **Course correct** - it is important to “always be evaluating your communication methods, modes, and techniques” among everyone in the organization.

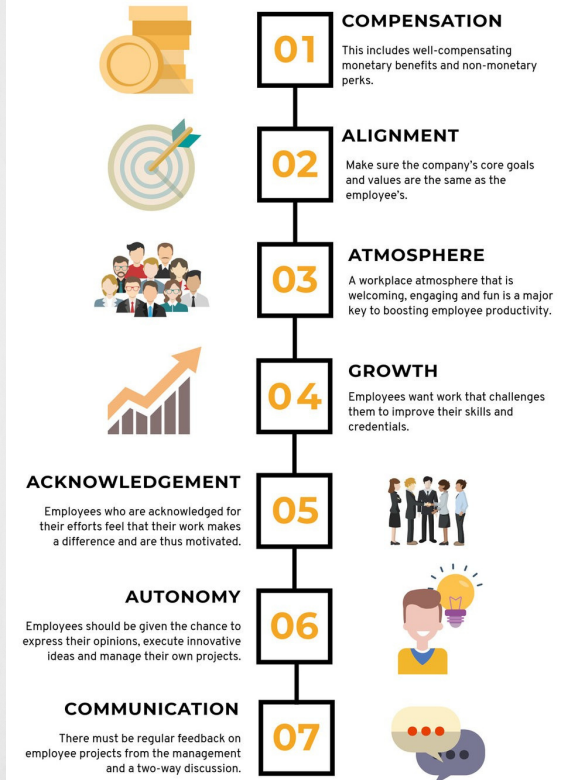
CONCLUSION & CRITICAL EVALUATION



In this book, Chester informs us that in order to have an *on fire* staff within your organization, there are specific actions to take. The 'seven pillars of workplace culture' sound straightforward enough, yet Chester explains the concept so brilliantly, using examples and stories from Fortune 500 and Forbes 'Top 100' companies, even the layman can understand. Once these pillars of workplace culture are put into action, employees will share ideas without fear. Chester (2016) posited that “employee disengagement may be toxic, but employee engagement isn’t the antidote- it’s just the starting point” (p. 239). This book borders on the concept that there is an undeniable link between empowering leadership and employee engagement through the seven pillars of workplace culture.

There are many companies that have not realized they cannot control employee performance, increase engagement and maintain retention. Using world-famous companies and CEOs like the Nerderly, Zappos, Google LLC., and the Marriot, Chester (2016) did a superb job of helping me reflect on some workplace situations I have encountered. The good, the bad and the indifferent. Human resources management teaches us how to manage the human capital and physical assets of a company effectively and efficiently, but the information out there is vast.

This book clearly explained (in less than 250 pages) how core values, principles and empowering leadership can positively impact employees, thus leading to retention, increased performance



boosts EE morale, improve company profits and create on fire employees. Despite the limited literature of teacher engagement in schools, one can still argue that there exists a relationship between empowering leadership and what the employees genuinely want, and this goes the same in schools. Teachers need to be adequately compensated, have a positive and comfortable work environment, feel acknowledged, have the autonomy to be creative and think outside the box, and have good communication with everyone in the school community. Igniting passion in one’s employees all boils down to “providing them with the spark.” Teachers need that spark, and once you “Be a better ER ...you’ll be rewarded with better EEs “(p.239).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 🔥 What type of workplace culture or atmosphere do you prefer? What changes, if any, would you make to your existing workplace culture?
- 🔥 What could you purposefully do in your present workplace to make it feel more diverse, safe and *on fire*?
- 🔥 In light of Covid19, how important is it for you to be kept informed on policies and precautionary procedures at your workplace or educational institutions?