



**CONVERSATION:
An Operating System to Talk About**

by **BRADY G. WILSON**

You may not realize it, but your organization is home to an incredibly powerful operating system (O/S).

Think outside the realm of technology. What has the potential to engage and energize your employees, bring teams closer together, and create a high-performing workforce?

It's conversation.

Conversation is the common denominator behind “apps” like customer service, feedback, coaching, strategy and innovation. Conversation—that is, quality, meaningful conversation between leaders and employees—powers up all the things that make a business successful.

Not sure you agree that conversation is your organization's most mighty O/S? Consider what would happen without conversation. All those apps would crash—and your business would fail.

TALKING HEADS

Let's go a bit more “micro” and look at the human brain.

Conversation is, essentially, our brain's O/S. This is because every single message transmitted from one neuron to another enables us to see, hear, move...and think. If all those 100 billion neurons were to stop talking to one another, our bodies

and ability to process information would cease to function.

Meanwhile, science shows us that our own brains are significantly strengthened and enhanced by social conversations “between brains.” This is our native wiring: and consequently, the perfect O/S that we need to connect, understand and harmonize with others.

So, as neuronal conversations are the way the brain gets things done, employee conversations are the way that organizations get things done.

With this in mind, then, why do organizations not integrate conversation into their own employee engagement initiatives?

IGNORING CONVERSATION = MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Using engagement surveys as an example, consider how organizations often deal with results.

Rather than pause to consider the “why” behind results, leaders will rush to create strategies—one-size-fits-all, broad-brush strategies built on nothing but numbers.

But employees do not respond well to global solutions. They want to know that they have been listened to. Leaders who draft plans without taking time to

consider context or “backstory” practically guarantee employee non-compliance to any engagement initiative.

Organizations that ignore the importance of conversation are missing out on a range of opportunities to create a higher-performing workforce.

Here’s why: Science shows that when you have meaningful, face-to-face conversations that demonstrate value, respect and care, this boosts the brain’s processing power—forming a feel-good energy cocktail of connection, calm, concentration, creativity and curiosity. Essentially, conversation can deepen the leader-employee relationship, energize employees, and power those apps that make a business so successful.

NO TIME TO TALK?

Don’t feel you have time to talk to your employees?

Consider this: Concerns that are unaddressed tend to fester and simmer. And then...they turn into “crucial,” “fierce” or “difficult” conversations—consuming multiples of energy, time and mind-space from everyone in the organization.

Leaders save themselves a lot of headaches when they move beyond engagement as we know it today, and honour how the brain works.

And not only that: Conversations don’t have to take up a lot of time.

LET’S TALK ABOUT TALKING

Current engagement strategies are far more focused on fixing scores than discovering the real reasons behind negative—even toxic—employee behavior. However, science shows that employee behavior is the result of **Five Driving Needs** including:

Belonging: teamwork, inclusion, connection, relationship, acceptance

Security: consistency, clarity, predictability, rules and fair play

Freedom: autonomy, decision-making latitude, flexibility, creativity

Significance: achievement, feeling valued and respected, reputation, quality, excellence

Meaning: purposeful living, contribution, legacy, understanding the “why”

Short, simple “Energy Check” conversations are a proven and effective way to identify what matters most to employees, as well as to unlock insight and possibility in their minds. Done systematically, this technique can catch issues before they become calamity-based, saving time in the process.



To guide energy-boosting conversations, meet with your team and write the five above needs on a flipchart. In showing employees the flipchart, ask which one or two of those needs matters most to them in their work life. Then, share with your team the driving need that energizes you in your work experience—and how the absence of that need drains or depletes you.

Energy check conversations can also be as simple as asking employees one-on-one what is energizing them at the moment, and what is depleting their energy. While sitting face-to-face, watch for an opportunity to do two things: to listen for what matters most to them, and to

acknowledge those needs. For example, if your employee is feeling unchallenged, you could say, “It sounds to me like what matters most to you in this situation is the chance for more opportunity or responsibility. Is that it?” This creates a feedback-rich state.

EASY TO INSTALL

Conversation already exists in your organization. It’s simply up to leaders to embrace it as the key operating system that drives the business—and shifting their mindset to include conversation in all engagement endeavours. This generates energy, fueling a great customer experience as well as business results.



Brady Wilson is co-founder of Juice Inc., a corporate training company that services organizations from Toronto to Los Angeles. This article is based on principles from Brady’s latest book, *Beyond Engagement: A Brain-Based Approach That Blends the Engagement Managers Want with the Energy Employees Need*.

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