

The Untapped Secret for Inspiring Employee Engagement

Alaina Love

What if I told you that you've been missing something in your leadership approach that can drive higher engagement and better results? Well there is, and I'm willing to bet that you're not making the most of an advantage that's right at your fingertips.

The [Social Self and Identity Lab at Monmouth University's Department of Psychology](#) recently conducted a groundbreaking study of more than 4250 respondents to the [Passion Profiler](#), a psychometric tool that codifies and measures [individual passions](#). What's most significant about the Monmouth study is the groundbreaking confirmation that it provides, not just about the importance of identifying and leveraging the passions of the people on your team, but also about the major role that reflection plays in building greater workplace affiliation and engagement. ***It turns out that the capacity for reflection that you and your team demonstrate directly correlates to the level of engagement the team is likely to experience.***

Dr. Natalie Ciarocco, director of the Monmouth study, worked with her team to unpack the components of the Passion Profiler and identify those that relate to how leaders can inspire engagement in the workforce. The tool divides passions into 10 distinct "passion archetypes" that we all possess to great or lesser degrees. But it measures more, including how we express those passions at work; the degree to which we feel connected to our work and the organization we belong to (work affiliation and engagement); and the propensity that we demonstrate for thinking and reflecting in a contemplative way, about both personal and work-related experiences.

After a series of complex analyses, the research team specifically focused on the two forms of reflection measured by the Passion Profiler because some interesting patterns were emerging.

The first form, called *reflective contemplation*, is a measure of the degree to which respondents think about, reflect on and make meaning of experiences in their personal lives. This type of reflection is what helps us determine our values, define our convictions, and understand the roles we play in the relationships we share with others. In essence, "reflective contemplation" is the route by which we shape and develop who we are and how we present ourselves to the world around us.

Work-inspired Reflection, the second form measured in the study, identifies the degree to which our work inspires us to reflect, and the manner in which we engage in that activity. Do we use our daily job experiences to learn more about our strengths and weaknesses, for example? Do we exhibit our values and convictions when they are challenged by an event at work or by a person with whom we

interact? Do we use both positive and negative work experiences to learn and grow, or do we shut down reflection when things aren't going as planned?

The study team uncovered several important facts related to reflection and the use of passions at work. The first and most significant finding is: ***work-inspired reflection is the best predictor of affiliation to work and the engagement that accompanies it.*** The researchers found that as reflection levels increased among employees, so did their degree of engagement.

However, the data revealed that the reverse is also true. When employee reflection levels were low, or there was insufficient focus on reflection within the workplace, engagement dropped. Similarly, limiting the opportunities for employees to apply their true passions at work resulted in the same decrease in engagement. Analysis revealed that as a respondent's level of passion increased, so did their likelihood of demonstrating that passion at work. When that person was also highly reflective, it drove up their work affiliation score, a direct measure of engagement on the job. The results indicate that passion, reflective capacity and workplace engagement are intimately connected, while highlighting the importance of providing an outlet for employee passions at work.

Work-Inspired Reflection

Work Inspired Reflection

Affiliation to one's Workplace

There is a **strong** link between work inspired reflection and workplace affiliation. The more one's work inspires them to reflect, the more connected they are likely to feel to their work.

Gender and Work Inspired Reflection

There are no differences between men and women regarding work-inspired reflection.

However, differences were detected between the age categories defined by The Passion Profiler.



The Age of Inspiration

Individuals **OVER 55** are significantly more inspired by their work to reflect than individuals ages 18-50.

Work Inspired Reflection

Reflective Contemplation

There is a **strong** link between work inspired reflection and general reflective practice. The more one reflects on a regular basis, the more they are likely to feel inspired by their work to reflect.

The Archetype Breakdown:

Which Archetypes Report the Highest Levels of Work Inspired Reflection?



Analyses of The Passion Profiler™, trademark of Purpose Linked Consulting, a division of HRx Renaissance Consortium, Inc. were conducted by Dr. Natalie Ciarocco director of The Social Self and Identity Lab at...

MONMOUTH
UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

The Monmouth study offers significant and actionable insights for all leaders that should shape the way you approach your team to inspire innovation and drive results. Here are 5 ways to encourage more reflection on your team and better connect employee passions with roles:

1. **Build reflection into weekly or monthly staff meetings.** Start by asking your team to reflect on the time period since the last meeting. What did they learn about the business, themselves, your customers or their roles that has provided them with a new insight or idea? Make your meetings more than a data dump exercise or fire drill to address the latest business crisis.
2. **Devote time each year to staff retreats, where the focus is on self and team development.** While it's tempting to limit the time spent on formal training or in-classroom work sessions in favor of team social events, insist that whatever training you implement includes sufficient reflection processes and time so your team actually benefits from the investment you're making in the retreat. Look for programs that include post-retreat follow-up sessions to reinforce the learning and support employee development.
3. **As a leader, take time to reflect on the week ahead and share your insights with your team.** This could be as simple as a Monday email to the team outlining the focus areas most critical to moving the business forward in the week ahead and how they can contribute. Include a personal insight that you developed during the previous week and how you plan to apply that insight going forward. If your team observes you modeling reflection, they're much more likely to embrace the practice.
4. **Look for learning opportunities everywhere and share them with employees based on their interests and passions.** If a special project arises that would be perfect for that person in your marketing group with a Builder/Conceiver passion, be willing to reshuffle work assignments to aid talent development.
5. **Although it may seem to be counterintuitive, get comfortable with pausing.** In a fast paced market your natural tendency will be to rush to get results or solve problems. Yet, a lack of reflection may have you solving the wrong problem, really well. Instead, consider establishing a practice on your team of answering two important questions before making a major decision: What question haven't we asked that we should? What insights are we missing?

As a leader, your success is rooted not just in the ability to look forward, but also the capacity to reflect on what has transpired in the past. Leaving room for reflection in your day is essential if you expect to make the best decisions possible and build a team that can do the same.

This article by Alaina Love first appeared in [SmartBrief on Leadership](#), February 2017.