

## Podcast Transcription

### **Rules of Employee Engagement in Challenging Time**

Interviewer: Rachel Moody

Thought leader: Mark Phelps, Practice Leader and Manager of Employee Engagement, DDI

Pre-recorded opening: Welcome. You're listening to the DDI Podcast series, heard around the world by people who propel their organization's talent strategies. Turn to DDI to close the gap between today's talent capability and the people you need for tomorrow's business strategy.

Rachel: Thank you for joining us. I'm Rachel Moody, your host for today's Podcast. I'm joined by Mark Phelps, DDI's Practice Leader and Manager of Employee Engagement. Mark is here to share his insight on the importance of employee engagement during challenging economic times. Thank you for joining us, Mark.

Mark: Thank you, Rachel.

Rachel: Mark, DDI's recent White Paper, Striving and Thriving in Today's Economic Environment, lists engagement as one of seven key issues for talent management professionals in our current economy. Why is engagement so crucial now? Maybe perhaps more so than ever.

Mark: In today's economy there are so many more outside issues and stressors, distractions for employees that for organizations to continue to be effective and to be able to come out of this recession strong, they absolutely need highly engaged employees.

Rachel: And certainly now with things like staff reductions, bonus cuts, and project scale back occurring, it really seems more difficult than ever to maintain a positive climate in an organization. Do the rules of engagement change during tough times?

Mark: Yes, they do, during tough times. Think about it, every closed door meeting that your boss has, people are more concerned about what might be happening behind those doors. And if HR is involved as well, that is just an added level of concern, anxiety, the fear of the unknown. So the rules of engagement change, yes. Things like trust and transparency are critical as well as more two-way communication. Not just communicating the challenges the organization faces and how they are planning to respond, but also for more of the senior leaders, mid-level leaders listening to

employees, understanding their concerns, and their issues, some of which may be business related and some are in their personal lives.

Rachel: So it's almost a situation where you have people, would you say, waiting for the other shoe to drop?

Mark: Absolutely. And most senior leaders today don't have all the answers but—even if they don't have the answers—for them to reach out and to be as open and share as much information as they do have allows people the opportunity to listen and see that their leaders are concerned about them and are trying to keep them as engaged and motivated and focused as possible.

Rachel: Now Mark, what can HR do to maintain the level of engagement of both workers and leaders?

Mark: We have four things that we'd like to share today. First, HR leaders need to be proactive, help your leadership groups to focus on the key and important things that are happening in the business so that you, as an organization, can achieve your main goals and objectives. Number two, many of your groups are going to be facing changing priorities. Often with downsizing and reorganizations, certain groups will either be coming together or maybe less people have to do more that, as HR, you can offer resources to help them reprioritize, possibly recharter that group, help that new group structure function as effectively as possible. Third, definitely encourage your leaders to adopt a bias for action. It is not the time to hunker down and to wait for that other shoe to drop. It is the time to be out there thinking of new ways, new ideas, new approaches because this is a time when the most successful organizations are going to find new ways to deliver their services. And fourth, as HR you're in a unique position to help leaders and staff in your organization keep focus on a long-term, positive view. That's very helpful and helps people focus on what they can do to help the organization succeed. And again, that will help as people come out of the recession to be most effective and have you set up for success.

Rachel: And at the senior leader level, with your CEO or other members of the C-suite, how important is communication during these times?

Mark: During these times, communication from that C-suite is critical. And it's communication that isn't always the formal communication, the announcements, the weekly newsletters, those are important, but it's also the informal communications.

During these times, it's very important that your senior leaders are visible, that they're walking around, they are checking in with people, they are asking how people are doing, being available for questions even if they don't have all the answers because that way they'll be able to convey their enthusiasm and their personal commitment.

Rachel: Now in addition to keeping the lines of communication open, are there other things the senior leaders can do?

Mark: Yes, in fact, one thing that senior leaders should focus on more in this type of an economy than normal is the engagement level of their mid-level and front-line leaders. Often times those leaders are engaged and motivated by business success, hitting their goals, they're getting projects done on time. In this type of an economy, they also have fears and concerns about their own livelihood, the business, and so on. So for senior leaders to really understand and reach out to their leadership team to meet their personal needs and to make sure that they're OK. Because even if they still have a job and they're secure, there might be people in their lives that are not and so they may have just as many concerns or fears about moving forward as front-line employees.

Rachel: Well thank you so much, Mark, for sharing your expertise with us today.

If you would like to learn more, please read the White Paper, [Surviving and Thriving in Today's Economic Environment](#), which is available at [ddiworld.com](http://ddiworld.com).

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