

**A Special Report from Values Coach Inc.**

# **Spark Plug Survey on Attitude and Engagement**

**A special report from Values Coach  
By Joe Tye, CEO and Head Coach**



**Values Coach Inc.**

**Transforming People through the Power of Values  
Transforming Organizations through the Power of People**

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## **The Cultural Blueprinting Toolkit**

Some of the content in this special report has been adapted from the Values Coach *Cultural Blueprinting Toolkit*, which includes 6 one-hour webinars and a 140-page workbook designed to help organizations create a “blueprint behind the blueprint™” for their Invisible Architecture™ of core values, corporate culture, and workplace attitude. You can learn more at:

[www.CulturalBlueprint.com](http://www.CulturalBlueprint.com)

## **The Real Crisis: The Engagement and Attitude Deficit**

*Important: Before you read this special report and jump to the conclusion that your organization – like all of the children in Lake Woebegone – is much better than the average on the Engagement and Attitude Index, look in the mirror and make sure that you are not wearing rose-colored glasses.*

Several years ago Values Coach conducted an observational study at a client hospital that had about 3,000 employees. We asked participants in one of our courses on values-based life and leadership skills to simply observe and record incidents of toxic emotional negativity (complaining, gossiping, etc.) for one month. At the end of that period we tabulated the results. Conservatively estimating that the average incident of toxic emotional negativity occupied the time of two employees for a total of two minutes each, we calculated that about 15% of all paid hours in that organization were wasted on such unproductive and counterproductive activities – a figure in line with findings of Gallup and other companies that study employee engagement, suggesting that in the typical organization, about 15% of employees are actively disengaged.

We then calculated an estimate for the total number of incidents of toxic emotional negativity in that organization per year. We projected that *ten million times a year* people engaged in nonproductive complaining and gossiping that cannot but help to have a negative impact on employee morale and patient satisfaction! I must emphasize that this was a well-regarded hospital that achieved respectable employee and patient satisfaction scores and quality outcomes. As scandalous as the figure of ten million per year seems – 10,000,000 events of complaining, rumor-mongering, and the like – that equates to just 1.1 per hour per employee, a figure that is not at all unrealistic – and one that most people consider about the norm within their organizations (if not worse).

**Imagine the deleterious impact on employee morale, productivity, customer satisfaction, and every other operational dimension of ten million incidents of toxic emotional negativity per year!**

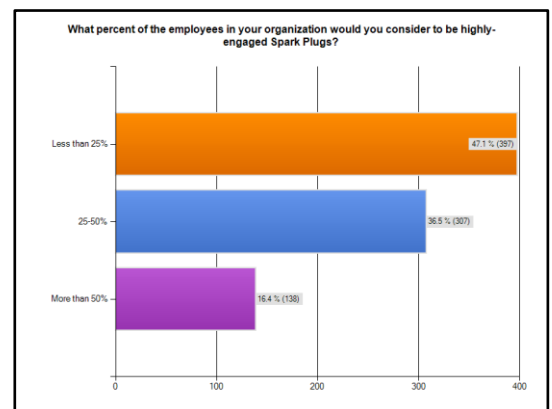
**Imagine how much more positive and productive that organization would be if those ten million hours per year were directed into more positive conversations.**

*The Spark Plug Attitude and Engagement Survey*

More recently, we conducted a survey of readers of our *Spark Plug* email newsletter asking these two questions: 1) what percent of employees where you work are highly engaged Spark Plugs, and 2) what percent of total paid hours are wasted on complaining, gossiping, and other forms of toxic emotional negativity? More than 800 people responded, and nearly 150 respondents left comments. The results were appalling!

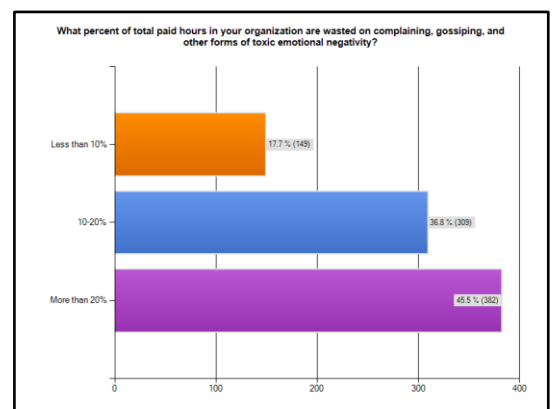
*Question # 1: What percent of employees where you work are highly engaged Spark Plugs?*

Nearly half of the respondents (47%) believe that fewer than one-quarter of their coworkers are Spark Plugs who are really engaged with their work, with their coworkers, and with the people they serve. This is in line with national surveys conducted by Gallup and others that show only about 25% of workers in the typical organization are really engaged. Only slightly over 15% thought that more than half of their coworkers are engaged Spark Plugs – and while that is a lot better than average, it still means that as many as half of their colleagues are not engaged.

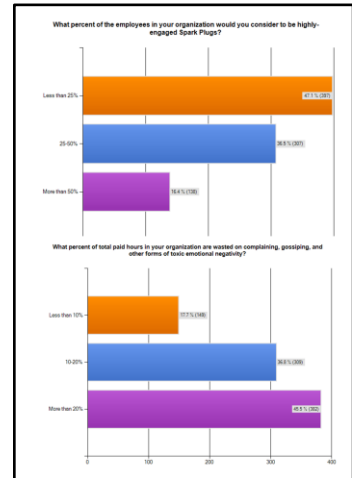


*Question #2: What percent of total paid hours are wasted on complaining, gossiping, and other forms of toxic emotional negativity?*

More than 80% believed that in excess of ten percent of all paid hours in their organization are wasted on toxic emotional negativity, with nearly half of all respondents believing that figure to be more than twenty percent. Think of the lost potential of those wasted hours. But the picture is even worse, isn't it? Because not only are those hours wasted, when people are engaged in toxic emotional negativity it affects everyone else within earshot – negative emotions are more contagious than flu bug in a kindergarten class (for more on this, see the book *Social Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman). Perhaps worst of all, it's hard for people who are engaged in toxic emotional negativity at work to leave it there at the end of the day. Rather, they are likely to go home and infect their families with it.



The juxtaposition of the charts shows the problem quite clearly – the configuration of the bars should be reversed (and in the best of workplaces they are). One of the best investments many organizations can make – in all likelihood including yours – is to work on reversing the shape of these two charts: increasing the number of highly-engaged Spark Plugs and reducing the amount of time wasted on toxic emotional negativity. This alone will have a huge impact on productivity, employee engagement, customer and patient satisfaction, competitive distinction, and ultimately on the bottom line of your organization. There’s more on this in the *Cultural Blueprinting Toolkit*, but your organization’s bottom next year will largely be determined by your strategies of this year, but the bottom line in two years will be more influenced by culture than by strategy (which is why Peter Drucker famously said that culture eats strategy for lunch).



If the engagement and attitude pattern in your organization looks even remotely similar to this, then one of your greatest opportunities for making the leap from good to great, winning a Baldrige Award, being awarded Magnet status, being recognized as a great place to work, and winning in the marketplace for great talent and loyal customers is reversing the picture depicted in these two charts. You cannot build a great organization with disengaged workers and a workplace environment that is permeated by toxic emotional negativity (complaining, gossiping, etc.).

In his book *The Coming Jobs War*, Gallup CEO Jim Clifton argues that doubling the percentage of engaged workers from the current 25% to 50% (still meaning that one of every two employees would not be engaged in their work) would be more effective in dealing with the biggest problems this nation faces than any other factor. If that’s the case (and I believe it is), imagine the impact that doubling the number of Spark Plug people and reducing the number of hours wasted on toxic emotional negativity by one-half would have for your organization.

**In a world where 75% of the people in a typical organization are *not engaged* in their work, an organization that can promote a highly-engaged culture of ownership will create an incredible source of competitive advantage for recruiting and retaining great people and for earning the enduring loyalty of raving fans” customers!**

## **Spark Plugs, Zombies, and Vampires**

We call people who are engaged, not engaged, and aggressively disengaged Spark Plugs, Zombies, and Vampires respectively. In every organization, there is a bell curve reflecting the distribution of positive, disconnected, and negative attitudes of the people

### Response from Survey

*“We have a lot of very good workers but most of them are her just doing a job. The ones who are engaged stand out, not only to management, but to [everyone else] as well.”*

within that organization. One of the most important duties of leadership to honor and encourage the Spark Plugs; to wake up and motivate the Zombies to become Spark Plugs; and to marginalize the Vampires and, if they refuse to adopt more positive attitudes and behaviors, to direct them toward employment with the competition.

**Spark Plugs (Owners):** In the typical organization only one-quarter of employees are actively engaged in their work, meaning that they work with real passion and have a strong sense of connection with the mission and with their coworkers. Think of these people as Spark Plugs – people who take pride of ownership in their work and their organization. When a Spark Plug walks into a room, he or she “sparks” others with their energy and their enthusiasm. They don’t sit around waiting for someone to tell them what to do – they see problems and they fix them, they seek opportunities and pursue them. Spark Plugs think and act like owners and partners, not like renters and hired hands.

*Response from Survey*  
“We have a very loving, caring, enthusiastic work community.”

A critical mass of Spark Plugs is vital to a culture of ownership. In our training initiatives on [The Twelve Core Action Values](#) we call participants Spark Plugs because that’s what we expect them to do – bring a spark to their own lives and to their organizations. Spark Plugs think and act like partners in the enterprise, not just hired hands. For Spark Plugs, the job description is a floor, not a ceiling; it defines the basic requirements of the job to which they add their own special contributions, not a limitation on the work that they will consent to perform.

**Zombies (Renters):** About 60% of today’s employees are not engaged with the work, with their coworkers, or with the mission of their organizations – meaning that they’re just putting in their time. They are “sleepwalking” through the workday without much enthusiasm, and without a strong sense of connection with the work they do or pride in the organization that pays their wages. They are hired hands, not partners, and make little or no contribution to innovation and improvement. Think of these people as workplace Zombies. They are renters, renting a spot on the organizational chart until something better comes along. In our experience, many of these so-called Zombies really want to be (and might already see themselves as) Spark Plugs. One of the most rewarding experiences a leader can have is to help their people improve their performance (and their lives) by changing their attitudes.

*Response from Survey*  
“By and large, I’d say that ‘middle management’ is disengaged and uninterested in quality in the workplace.”

**Vampires (Squatters):** Finally, about 15% of employees in the typical organization are actively disengaged, meaning that their lack of enthusiasm and commitment are on open display, and that they exert negative peer pressure on others to join them in the swamp of toxic emotional negativity. Think of these people as workplace Vampires. They suck the energy out of the people around them, and they suck the life out of their workplace. They sabotage productivity, customer service, and the brand image of the organization that is giving them a paycheck. Vampires often

have domineering personalities, which means they exert disproportionate negative peer pressure in their work units, and disproportionately influence perceptions customers and community have of the organization. They are squatters in the organization, drawing a paycheck while actually working against the best interests of their employer.

Response from Survey  
“People in my hospital cannot even talk about patient care without complaining. Everything around here is very negative. Even when good things happen, people are negative about it.”

In order for there to be a culture of ownership, it is imperative that the organization’s leadership have the courage to confront these Vampires and demand appropriate attitudes and behaviors, and discharge them if they do not comply.

## The Attitude Bell Curve

Looking at the bell curve below, what percent of your employees would you consider to be Spark Plugs, Zombies, and Vampires? How does that compare with the averages of 25-60-15 found by organizations that study employee engagement? Being as candid as you possibly can, would front line workers in your organization make the same assessment?



Is the curve in your organization better or worse for the management team? If it’s worse than the average – and especially if it’s worse for the management team – you have a real problem on your hands. What actions can your management team take to shift the bell curve to the right by transforming Zombies into Spark Plugs and marginalizing the impact of Vampires by raising expectations, coaching and guidance, and (hopefully as a last resort) encouraging them to take their toxic attitudes to work for one of your competitors. As Jim Clifton said in his book *The Coming Jobs War*, a disengaged employee – and especially a disengaged manager – is a quality defect every bit as much as sending the wrong product to a customer or giving the wrong medication to a patient.

### *Attitude and Engagement Determine Perception*

Gallup research suggests that people do not see the workplace as it is, they see the workplace as they are. People with a positive attitude are predisposed toward being intrinsically motivated and engaged; people with a negative attitude are predisposed toward rumor-mongering, finger-pointing, and avoiding real work. Gallup research also shows that positive employees are more likely to focus on challenges than they are frustrations, while negative employees actively seek out things to complain and gossip about. Positive and engaged employees are far more likely to perceive their relationships with supervisors and coworkers in a positive light, while for disengaged workers the reverse is true.

Furthermore, Gallup findings show that engaged workers are far more likely to be happy with their lives overall than are unengaged and actively disengaged workers; a culture of ownership is not only good for people's careers, it's also good for their personal lives and for their families. People do not see the workplace as it is – they see it as they are. Disengagement leads to a negative perception of the workplace and coworkers, and not that a bad workplace environment and unpleasant coworkers leads to disengagement.

People who are renting their spot on the organization chart, or claiming squatter's rights to a job to which they do not intend to give their best efforts – see the job description as a ceiling – a limit on what they are expected to do. People who own the work and take pride in their organizations see the job description as a floor – the minimum they expect of themselves, and to which they add their own individual efforts to make a difference in the lives of customers and coworkers.

## **Disengagement negatively affects every aspect of your organization**

Disengaged employees exert a disproportionate negative impact on every dimension of your organization including:

- *Product and service quality:* Disengaged people don't go home at the end of the day and read professional journals or books on how to do a better job at whatever it is they do – they go home and watch reality TV (and their image of what work is like comes from cynical shows like *The Office*).
- *Customer and patient satisfaction:* Someone cannot be a negative, bitter, cynical, sarcastic “pickle-sucker” in the break room and then instantly flip an inner switch when dealing with a customer or patient, and people see right through the fraud. (We call them “pickle suckers” because they look like they're sucking on a dill pickle).
- *Workplace safety:* A substantial proportion of workplace accidents and patient care incidents come from simple inattention – from being disengaged. In our course on *The Twelve Core Action Values*, Core Action Value #3 is Awareness (the cornerstones are mindfulness, objectivity,



empathy, and reflection). One of the most important things you can do to enhance workplace safety is to teach people how to be more mindful (and yes, that is a skill). One study showed that disengaged people are five times more likely to be involved in workplace mishaps.

- *Productivity*: Disengaged people don't work as hard or as smart as do people who own their work. At Southwest Airlines they "hire for attitude and train for skill" – and the airline has the highest productivity in the industry. One of Zappos 10 Core Values – do more with less – is a statement that inspires employee pride there but would be more likely to elicit a negative response in many organizations where the saying is seen not as a core value to be embraced by all but as a management mandate (or worse, a take-away).
- *Marketing image*: You can spend a million dollars on advertising and promotion and have it all go down the drain when one employee badmouths the company in a public place.
- *Turnover (wanted and unwanted)*: A negative workplace will attract and retain negative people and repel positive people.
- *Job security*: This is the ultimate irony: when all of the above happens the company loses customers and revenue and the things that the Zombies and Vampires are most worried about – losing their jobs – becomes a self-fulfilling reality.

In *The Coming Jobs War*, Gallup Chairman Jim Clifton writes: "a miserable [aggressively disengaged] employee, particularly a miserable manager, is a defect – a defect for the company, the customer, and ultimately the country... Whatever the engaged do, the actively disengaged seek to undo, and that includes problem solving, innovation, and creating new customers." He goes on to say that "Going from 30 million engaged workers to 60 million engaged workers would change the face of America more than any leadership institution, trillions of stimulus dollars, or any law or policy imaginable." The implications of this for your organization are staggering!

**If doubling the number of people who are engaged in their work could eradicate every substantial problem this nation faces today, imagine the impact it could have on your organization!!!**

*Work Disengagement is Life Diminishing*

The real tragedy of employee disengagement is the impact on the employee him or herself (and most likely on that employee's family). As psychiatrist Edward Hallowell stated in a *Harvard Business Review* article (December, 2010), "Disengagement [is] one of the chief causes of underachievement and depression." Last year Americans spent more than ten billion dollars on anti-depressants,



which are the number one medication being prescribed for employees through employee health programs at many organizations (most likely yours included). What Hallowell is saying is that simply by getting people to engage in their work and with their coworkers, we could dramatically reduce that cost while at the same time increasing the level of happiness. He's also saying that being disengaged in the work is strongly correlated to having a dysfunctional life outside of the workplace – and you intuitively know that's true, don't you? The most negative people at work are also in many (or most) cases the ones in awful relationships, over their heads in debt, and bouncing from one personal drama to another.

When an organization makes a commitment to promote a culture of ownership, it is often the most negative people (or their families at home) who end up being the greatest beneficiaries. When someone can make the switch from being a negative, bitter, cynical, sarcastic pickle-sucker to being a positive, cheerful and optimistic person the results can be nothing short of miraculous (indeed, “miracle” is a word we hear fairly often from people who have changed their lives by making a commitment to live their values).

“One toxically-negative person will drag down the morale and productivity of an entire work unit. Just as we once eradicated toxic smoke from the workplace, it is now our obligation to eradicate toxic emotional negativity.”

Joe Tye (with Dick Schwab): *The Florence Prescription: From Accountability to Ownership*

## The Passion-Performance Matrix™

|         |      | PERFORMANCE                |                                     |
|---------|------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|         |      | LOW                        | HIGH                                |
| PASSION | HIGH | Attending a sporting event | Doing your best on work you love to |
|         | LOW  | Watching sitcoms on TV     | Doing your taxes                    |

The Passion-Performance Matrix is a tool we use in courses on *The Twelve Core Action Values* to help people identify their authentic goals and personal identity. You are most likely to be your authentic self where you are engaged in work that you are passionate about, and that you do well and are committed to doing even better. You are least likely to be authentic when you are not engaged and not performing. In fact, the amount of time that you spend in each quadrant each day is probably about as good a predictor of your success and happiness as you will find.

Not only that, understanding this matrix is essential to business success. Organizations dominated by people in Quadrant 4 – High Passion, High Performance – will always out-compete those where employees are less engaged. This is the secret of superstar companies like Southwest Airlines, Zappos, Disney, and the Pike Street Market. Let's look more closely at each quadrant.

**Quadrant 1 – High Passion, Low Performance:** This is the cheerleader quadrant. Last night, millions of people around the world watched the Super Bowl. There were a lot of people who were very passionate about the game – wearing cheesehead hats and waving terrible towels and screaming themselves to hoarseness – but with the exception of a handful of people actually out on the field, nothing was expected of them, they were not accountable for any level of performance, and their passionate cheering had no impact whatsoever on the final score of the game. Quadrant 1 activities play an important role. Bowling leagues, company picnics, dinner and movie dates, kids' soccer games – bring joy and zest to life. But as everyone for whom college was the highpoint of life knows, they don't make for a very profitable or rewarding experience of life.

**Quadrant 2 – Low Passion, Low Performance:** This is the drudge quadrant. Most television watching falls into this quadrant. This is the quadrant where Dilbert and the denizens of his comic strip live out their lives – doing a lousy job at work they hate. Although no one on their deathbed ever says “I wish I'd watched more television,” according to AC Nielsen, that is precisely where many Americans spend the biggest chunk of their “leisure” time – plugged into the boob tube, the plug-in drug. We all need some downtime, and TV can be relaxing and (so I'm told, though I've never personally found this to be the case) rejuvenating. But every hour spent lounging around in this quadrant should be with the acute recognition of what economists call the “opportunity cost” – that time is lost and gone forever and can never be invested in one of the other three, more profitable, quadrants.

**Quadrant 3 – Low Passion, High Performance:** This is the Rutledge Quadrant, named for the character Sarah Rutledge in my book [The Florence Prescription](#). Sarah was a highly competent nurse who was also a negative, bitter, cynical and sarcastic pickle-sucker. We all know people like Sarah Rutledge, and truth be told have all fallen into this quadrant ourselves. It is, unfortunately, a difficult box from which to escape. According to Gallup, HR Solutions, Press-Ganey, and every other company that studies employee engagement, this is unfortunately the quadrant where most people spend most of their working lives. This is really a tragic situation because, as Dr. Edward Hallowell wrote in the *Harvard Business Review* article referenced above, disengagement is a leading cause of underachievement and depression. In other words, most people would get a lot more done and be a lot happier if they were to just be more passionate about their work.

This is really ancient wisdom. In the book of Ecclesiastes, we learn about a man who tried everything and found fulfillment in nothing. Neither wine, women and song nor scholarly pursuits nor public service nor spiritual introspection brought the man joy or peace. And what, in the end, did he find to be the secret of a meaningful life? Whatever your hand finds to do, he said, do it with all your might.

**Quadrant 4 – High Passion, High Performance:** This is the sweet spot. People who work to be in this quadrant most often enjoy the experience of optimal achievement, self-actualization, and flow (a word coined by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi for the state of total absorption in one's work, which he says is the highest form of human motivation and satisfaction).

*This is the key:* There are three critical choices to be made in reaching Quadrant 4. First is the choice of the work you do. Choosing work that you could never possibly be good at or that you could never bring yourself to enjoy sets the stage for a lifetime of frustration and unhappiness.

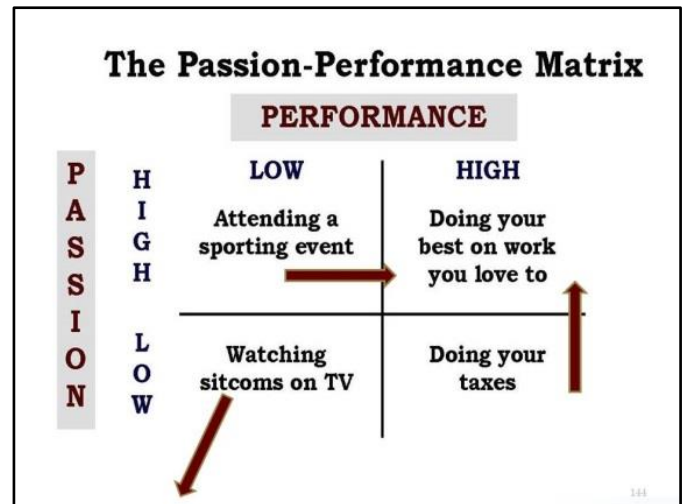
Second is the choice between continuous improvement and stagnation. Even if you choose work you love, you'll slip back into one of the other quadrants if you aren't consistently working to be better at that work. This kaizen approach to your own work is the source of the confidence and pride that mark every top performer in every field, from parenting and personal money management to sales and leadership.

The third and most important choice is the attitude with which you do your work. In our work with hospitals, I've met housekeepers and food service aides who have clearly chosen to work with pride and passion in Quadrant 4. And I've met senior managers who, despite their generous paychecks, come across as martyrs and victims.

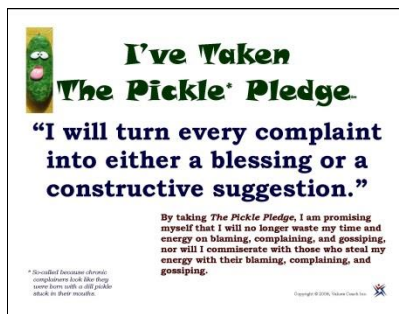
**Accountability and Ownership:** If you've read *The Florence Prescription*, you know that in one chapter consultant Carol Jean Hawtrey talks about the interaction of left-brain and right-brain qualities in an organization. Left brain is accountability – holding a nurse accountable for giving patients the correct medications, holding a manager accountable for meeting a budget. You can hold people accountable for the performance dimension of the Passion-Performance Matrix. But you cannot hold people accountable for passion, pride, caring, loyalty, trust, compassion, and the other right-brain qualities that characterize all great organizations. These must come from within. The motivation of accountability is extrinsically imposed; the motivation of ownership is intrinsically driven. What percentage of your employees would you estimate fall into each of the four quadrants of the Passion-Performance Matrix? How about for the management team? How about for you personally – which quadrant do you fall in most days?

*The leadership challenge – filling up the upper right quadrant*

Your leadership challenge is to move people from Quadrant 1 (high passion, low performance) into Quadrant 4 (high passion, high performance) through a combination of training, coaching, higher expectations, and so forth; to move people from Quadrant 3 (low passion, high performance) into Quadrant 4 by engaging them in the work and in the organization (if they don't make this shift they will ultimately and inevitably slip back into Quadrant 2 as their negative attitude causes their performance to suffer); and to give people in Quadrant 2 (low passion, low performance) a chance to improve both before giving them the opportunity to go to work for your toughest competitor.



## Take The Pickle Challenge™



An essential first step toward promoting a more positive and productive culture is confronting and eradicating toxic emotional negativity in the workplace. The emotional climate of your organization is determined by what you say you expect (in values statements, job descriptions, and other documents) and by what you tolerate. Over the course of time what you tolerate will dominate what you expect. Whatever is included in your organization's statement of values, toxic emotional negativity is a violation of those values. Gossip – talking about people behind their backs – violates fundamental principles of integrity, respect, and compassion. Chronic complaining – playing victim because the world has not bent over backwards to make your life easy and convenient – violates fundamental principles of personal responsibility and self-empowerment. And when gossip and complaining come to dominate the informal dialogue within an organization, teamwork becomes little more than a management buzzword.

According to Gallup and others who study employee engagement, in a typical organization about 25% of employees are fully engaged, 60% “show up” for work but are not really engaged, and 15% are aggressively disengaged. These disengaged workers have a disproportionately negative impact on the culture and emotional environment of your organization. One toxically negative person can drag down an entire work unit the way one person lighting a cigarette pollutes the air breathed by everyone else in the room. Just as we once eradicated toxic cigarette smoke from the workplace, we should now work to create a cultural intolerance for whining, gossiping and rumor-mongering, passive-aggressive finger-pointing, and other toxic emotional behaviors. It is a leadership responsibility to protect the people who want to be committed to and passionate about their work from the baleful effects of emotional vampires.

One of the most practical and immediately effective tools in *The Cultural Blueprinting Toolkit* is The Pickle Challenge (so-called because chronic complainers look like they’re walking around with a dill pickle stuck in their mouths). It begins with the simple promise of The Pickle Pledge – a promise that people make to themselves and to each other:

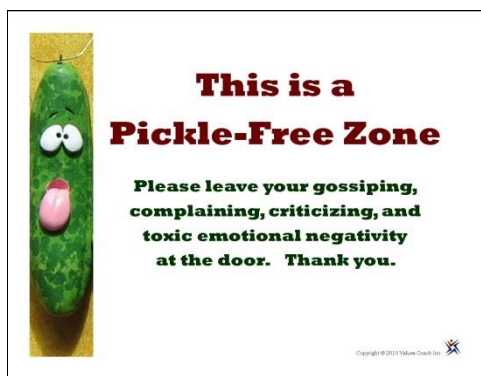
**I will turn every complaint into either a blessing or a constructive suggestion. By taking *The Pickle Pledge*, I am promising myself that I will no longer waste my time and energy on blaming, complaining, and gossiping, nor will I commiserate with those who steal my energy with their blaming, complaining, and gossiping.**

Cultivating a habit of turning complaints (“I had to park six blocks away and walk all the way into the mall!”) into blessings (thank God you have legs and a mall in which to shop) or constructive suggestions (if you’d exercise more a six block walk wouldn’t be so taxing) can be a life-changing discipline. It certainly has been for me. After Lasik eye surgery left me with severe double vision, impaired visual acuity, and chronic eye pain I fell back upon this promise to make something constructive come of the experience. I started asking questions and discovered that thousands of others suffer permanent eye damage every year as a result of Lasik. I’ve now become an activist warning people (especially young people who are guinea pigs in an uncontrolled medical experiment about the long-term complications of surgical cornea sculpting) of the serious risks that are played down by the Lasik industry and by eye surgeons who have a profound financial conflict of interest in recommending the procedure. I’m much happier being an activist than I would have been playing the victim role.



*Taking The Pickle Pledge at Star Valley Medical Center in Afton, Wyoming*

The “Pickle” has taken on a life of its own. At client organizations, we’ve seen pickle piñatas, singing pickles, and pickle door-hangers (LYPAD: Leave Your Pickles At the Door). We’ve designed a sign people can use to designate their work area to be a “Pickle-Free Zone” the way we once posted no-smoking signs. The Pickle Challenge has taken on a life of its own! We have seen singing pickles, dancing pickles, pickle piñatas, Pickle Pledge bulletin boards, and pickle jars to collect fines from people who engage in toxic emotional negativity. People are setting out pickle jars to which coworkers can contribute each time they bitch, moan, whine, and complain (the other BMW club!). As people see the quarters pile up, it is a powerful awareness-raising tool for combatting emotional negativity in the workplace. Having groups of people take the Pickle Challenge together can have an immediate positive impact on the workplace environment in a light-hearted and fun way.



*People everywhere are declaring their workplace to be a “pickle-free zone” the way we once had to post signs declaring our workplace to be a smoke-free zone*

It takes courage to confront toxically negative people, who often have intimidating personalities. If you do, however, you will achieve significant enhancements in employee engagement, productivity, and customer satisfaction. Paradoxically, the real beneficiaries are often the very people who are required to change their attitudes and behaviors. By insisting that they break their addictions to emotional negativity you will help them, and often their friends and family members, achieve happier and healthier lifestyles.



If you could get everyone in your organization to take *The Pickle Pledge*, just imagine how much more pleasant it would be to go to work every day! Imagine: no bitching, moaning and whining; no finger-pointing, no blame-gaming, no rumor-mongering. Now, before you tell me I'm crazy, that it could never happen, let me remind you that not long ago a vast majority of people believed it would be impossible to achieve a smoke-free society, yet look how far we have come in just the past ten years or so. Toxic emotional negativity is as corrosive to the soul as toxic cigarette smoke is to the body. Why can't we expect our workplaces to be pickle-free the way we now expect them to be smoke-free?

“When someone dumps their toxic feelings on us... they activate in us circuitry for those very same distressing emotions. Their act has potent neurological consequences: emotions are contagious... Like secondhand smoke, the leakage of emotions can make a bystander an innocent victim of someone else's toxic state.”

Daniel Goleman: *Social Intelligence*

## **Conclusion: We Need a New Movement**

The costs of disengagement and negative attitudes in the workplace are incalculable. And not just the economic loss experienced by the organization – the personal cost of wallowing around in toxic emotional negativity and of coasting through a work day on autopilot is also beyond reckoning. Hours spent sitting around complaining and gossiping can *never* be reclaimed.

That's why we need a movement. Just as, not that long ago, we had a movement to eradicate toxic cigarette smoke from the workplace, we now need a movement to raise our intolerance for toxic emotional negativity and to re-engage in the work. Khalil Gibran wrote in his beautiful little book *The Prophet* that work is love made visible – and if you cannot do your work, whatever it is, with love then you should just go beg for alms at the city gate. Think of how much more beautiful our world, and the places where we work, would be if *our* work was love made visible.

That is our purpose and our vision at Values Coach. I hope you will join us.

Joe Tye is CEO and Head Coach of Values Coach Inc. He is a frequent speaker on personal and organizational effectiveness and a leading authority on building a culture of ownership in organizations. His books include *The Florence Prescription: From Accountability to Ownership* and *All Hands on Deck: 8 Essential Lessons for Building a Culture of Ownership*. To inquire about his availability for speaking at your organization contact Michelle Arduser, Director of Client Services, at 319-624-3889 or [Michelle@ValuesCoachInc.com](mailto:Michelle@ValuesCoachInc.com).