



Rule 1: Rules are meant to be broken

Sometimes organizations create policies for the masses the moment an individual employee (or customer) slips up.

To develop a fully engaged team, everyone in your organization needs to be a leader. This means the entire team needs to be able to exercise judgment on the day-to-day challenges and opportunities that present themselves. Whether or not this happens has a lot to do with your approach to managing.

Think about it. How can any organization win without everyone's full participation? Participation is a key indicator of engagement. In some organizations, however, rules, policies, and procedures are designed to cover every possible contingency so employees do not need to think. Have you ever written to your Senator or Congressman and received a form letter response that barely addressed your concern? Have you ever complained about a product you've purchased and received what appeared to be a memorized response from an employee? Contrast this to IKEA, where a prominent sign in their Philadelphia area store was used to recruit employees who would "think for themselves." This enlightened approach will attract top talent and build engagement.

Sometimes organizations create policies for the masses the moment an individual employee (or customer) slips up. Creating policies may seem easier than coaching and managing performance, but the results are dramatically different. When coaching, you clarify misunderstandings about performance and usually discover that few employees try to do poor quality work on purpose. Rules and policies are usually perceived by employees as an expectation of future poor performance- generally not the best way to build an engaged team.

Following memorized sequences and prescribed patterns such as "thank you for shopping at ...", is counter to a team approach which actively solicits the input, ideas and good thinking from every member of the team. If your organization has rules, you may find that sometimes it is necessary to break a rule in order to provide extraordinary service or to go around a system that is not serving the customer. You and your team should actively discuss these rules to determine their impact on customers and desired results. By inviting discussions around rules and policies you send a message that sometimes the rule may not be the most effective approach. Such discussions increase engagement.

Shortly after our youngest daughter began dating, there was a surge in her text messages; but we did not discover this until our bill arrived from AT & T. In addition to the monthly service for her phone, she had over \$90 in text message charges above and beyond her monthly allotment. As we discussed this situation with our representative, we were surprised and delighted that she was empowered to remove the charge entirely and help us secure a plan that would prevent this from occurring in the future. True, AT&T was out our \$90, but as new customers who had left another supplier only months before due to poor service, we were feeling really good about the new relationship. And, considering

the long term monthly increase in our fee, AT&T was not out anything at all. Yet the customer representative skillfully positioned the increase as a great service to us, which of course it was.

Yes, rules may be necessary, but they often prevent people from being actively engaged. Rules will never take the place of directly dealing with performance issues on your team. They certainly cannot replace excellent service skills and they should be scrutinized regularly to evaluate how they are helping to promote success for the team and organization as well as their impact on engagement.

Action: Make a list of all the rules and policies that are active in your organization for both employees and customers. Discuss these with your team and begin to analyze their impact. How are they serving employees, the customer, and the organization?

IKEA - Furniture Retailer that originated in Sweden and now has stores throughout the world. Offers a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them.<http://www.ikea.com/>

AT&T is the largest US provider of both local and long distance telephone services, and DSL Internet access. AT&T is the second largest provider of wireless service in the United States, with over 77 million wireless customers, and more than 150 million total customers.<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AT&T>