

Engage! How WD-40 Company Built the Engine of Positive Culture

Stan Sewitch

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A compelling corporate-history-cum-guidebook, Engage! models business operations in depth for those looking to emulate WD-40's story of success.

Stan Sewitch's instructive business book *Engage!* chronicles how the WD-40 Company created a positive corporate culture that enabled success.

According to Sewitch, a consultant who worked with the company for decades, the San Diego-based manufacturer built "an engine" for itself—a strong company culture that complements its high performance product. With WD-40 as an example, the book reverse engineers the process of creating a space in which employees feel appreciated and rewarded. It lauds corporate values including trust and transparency alongside stories about the company's innermost workings, including processes of hiring, promotion, conflict resolution, compensation, leadership practices, and the company's "Maniac Pledge," which encourages employees to be accountable, self-sufficient, and self-starting. From this perspective, well-fit employees contribute to the bottom line by being more engaged and productive, especially when they are kept motivated.

The book is broken down by subject, beginning with the foundational idea of employee engagement before then drilling down into matters like involving organizational design, performance tracking and reporting, and the potential downfalls of its model. Concrete examples illuminate these concepts, as of "tough-minded and tender-hearted" coaching that left a choice of "whether to respond to the challenge or continue to wallow in self-righteous indignation." There's a mission statement quality to such work: the book notes that the company values its employees, validating such claims with specific boasts (for instance, there are no layoffs in WD-40's seventy-year history; and the corporation froze base salaries while navigating through recessions).

While the book is focused more on detailing the company's working operations as a model for others than it is with theory in general, it does include some enlivening citations—as with an appeal to Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, around which it encourages contemplation. There are also some thought experiments and psychological observations included, as with the idea that behavior that was reinforced during childhood carries into one's adulthood. Still, these teachings are most often tailored to businesspeople, and they speak to corporate workers at all levels. The book suggests that strong foundational principles can undergird even tenuous startups, even when their founders are focused on surviving. But, it says, they also help guide public companies to long-term stability. This compelling presentation is somewhat undermined, however, by the appearance of sentence fragments and typographical errors.

With insights into the company culture at WD-40, the corporate-history-cum-guidebook *Engage!* models business operations in depth for those looking to emulate its story of success.

JOSEPH S. PETE (December 23, 2023)

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