

**Public Sector Edition:**

**Gaining Collective Bargaining Buy-in for Workplace Cultural Transformation**

**By Carlos Conejo, Lean Six Sigma Master Black Belt**

So you want to kick-off and develop a new culture at your city or county?

You want to build bench-strength and have great plans about transforming your workforce and having people work together in cross-functional teams to improve operational performance.

**The Five P's**

Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance: Without proper planning and advance footwork on your part, your great plans may meet staunch resistance from the employees and the unions that represent them and simply become a "pipe dream." When it comes to employees taking on different roles, even for a short period of time, if it's not allowed under the union MOU's, Memorandum of Understanding, then you just might get more than a little frustrated in gaining ground in implementing your cultural transformational.

**Early Intervention Critical to Cultural Transformation**

By starting early with the unions, you'll have a plenty of time to communicate and gather information and have a better chance of a successful performance improvement and cultural transformation implementation. Offering the unions input in the development process is a major differentiator between a successful implementation, or not.

**Question of the Day**

If management takes a more active role in engaging its unionized workers, does that violate any agreements? Will unions view systematic efforts by management to keep employees happy and fulfilled as an attempt to undermine their own support?

How can organizations defuse the situation by working *with* unions to support employee engagement?

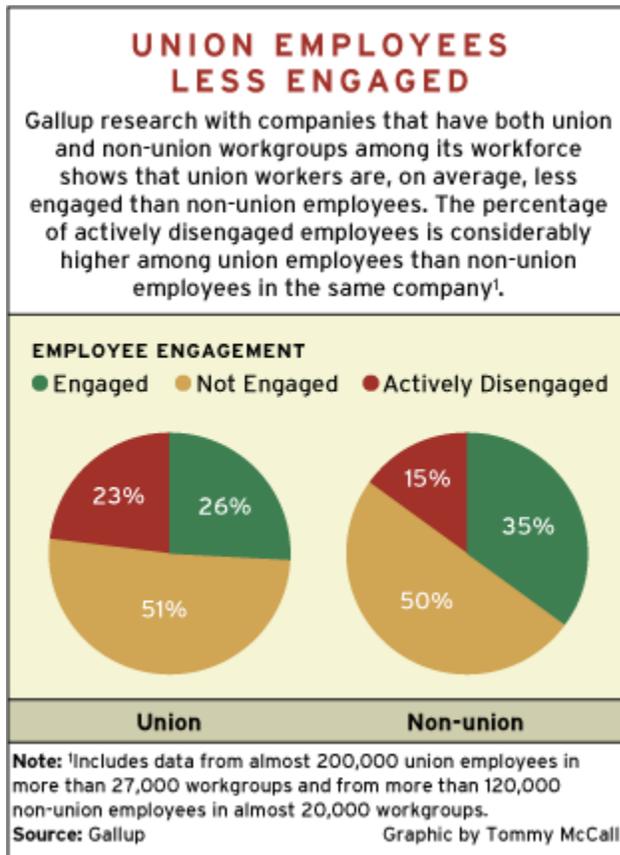
From a manager's perspective, the crucial question is how the presence of a union affects his or her relationships with employees? Gallup Poll data suggest that union employees are, on average, less engaged than non-union employees. As the graphic indicates, the percentage of actively disengaged employees is considerably higher among unionized than non-unionized employees in the same company.

In some cases, the sizeable differences may be because union employees tend to have different roles within the organization than other employees. For example, at a power utility, the electricians may be unionized but not the administrative staff.

Some people might think that union membership itself can contribute to an "us versus them" mentality that can also diminish employees' sense of rapport and engagement with their agency. An adversarial relationship may exist in some areas, and those can reflect in employee engagement. In this type of situation, union employees may experience the sense-of-security their union affiliation gives them. This may encourage unionized employees to stick around -- but that feeling doesn't translate into a greater emotional attachment to their jobs or to the organization.

### Employee Engagement- Gallup Study

Although this study is a few years old, we can still infer that employee engagement is a critical piece of the pie. [http://www.gallup.com/topic/employee\\_engagement.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/topic/employee_engagement.aspx)



## Key insights

Experts have divided up employees into three distinct categories:

The Three Types of Employees	
1	<b>ENGAGED</b> employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.
2	<b>NOT-ENGAGED</b> employees are essentially "checked out." They're sleepwalking through their workday, putting time -- but not energy or passion -- into their work.
3	<b>ACTIVELY DISENGAGED</b> employees aren't just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.

## Ten Tips to Workplace Transformation

1. **Partner Up with the Unions.** Discuss your plans and Partner up with the Union representatives well before any announcements are made.
2. **Get an endorsement letter from the Union.** An Endorsement letter on the union's letterhead is a powerful transformational tool. Meet with your Shop Stewarts along with the Union Representatives to discuss their support of the initiative and answer any questions that might arise. Be prepared to answer the "What's In It For Me (WIIFM) question. Answers might include: Less stress because processes will be improved, greater communication between departments, teamwork, a more predictable or better environment, etc. People rarely change because it's going to make the organization more efficient or in the private sector, more profitable!
3. **Make the engagement-building process open, inclusive, and non-threatening.** You might want to start off with an employee survey requesting feedback on what would make the organization better? What are some tools or skills that would make their work easier? Then build your Continuous Improvement model to include these factors.

If union employees perceive an employee engagement survey and subsequent impact planning processes as open and constructive, then it will be better received from the beginning. The union, then is more likely to do whatever it can to keep its members happy and encourage participation.

4. **No Witch-Hunts:** Unions and employees want to know that the new culture fosters growth and a new, non-threatening and open learning environment. That this is not being used to single anyone out in order to get rid of them. Once that is clearly established, the union can throw its weight behind the agency's efforts to improve engagement.
5. **Involve union officials in the change process.** The County of Ventura allows union officials to “spectate” during the Continuous Improvement training classes and Kaizen events, or if there is an area of concern or great sensitivity. Union officials are often highly skeptical of, and sometimes downright hostile to anything that can negatively impact the employee. “Is management really going to listen to line staff? You say that you are going to incorporate the employees in this process, but do you really listen?” You want to assure union representatives and staff that everyone at the table has equal input on the issues, the processes, and the solutions, and more importantly: that **all staff** has a voice in the implementation of the solution. Be careful against allowing the union to hijack the engagement/transformation program for the union's own purposes. Attempts to raise employee engagement and transformation in a union workplace should include close communication with union representatives, and, ideally, their active support.
6. **Involve Employees as part of the Solution.** Employees and unions are suspect if everyone on the steering committee is from management. By also including front-line employees to participate in all aspects of the planning and deployment, it keeps people from thinking that, “this is just another way for management to get more out of us.” The message you want to demonstrate is that this is actually a way to give input in a process that will actually make people more productive and their work easier and less frustrating. It’s a way that staff can play a major part in the solution.
7. **Identify Change Agents.** Get people onboard early on that want change and that you can count on to be change agents. This will help you establish “critical mass.”
8. **Department Head Orientation.** Make sure you get ALL department heads at your kick-off. Make it educational. Use case studies from other agencies and municipalities. If your budget permits, you might want to get everyone a coffee mug, baseball cap, or other small reminder of the initiative. Then create an internal brand that will reinforce the change at all levels of the organization. Ultimately, you want to tie-in results and

Department Head commitment by adding these duties to the department head Performance Reviews, and measure progress towards goals on a quarterly basis.

9. **Create a Knowledge Base on your Intra-net.** It is critical that people have access to the new tools and a running account of improvements. Eventually this knowledge base will house a centralized historical trail of projects and improvements, that anyone with your agency can revisit and take to the next level.
10. **Publicize Results.** Caution here in what you should and shouldn't publish: focus your publicity based on celebrating results. You don't want to embarrass or single anyone out, but you also want to show people what good results look like. Examples: "Lean Six Sigma at Work, JOC Cost of Construction \$1.2 million Saved! Motor pool Rightsizing Saves \$300,000, Building Permit Time Reduced from 60 Days down to 7 Days, You may want to showcase a team picture recognizing the participants for doing a fine job, etc.