

# 42<sup>TM</sup> Rules

*of  
Employee Engagement*

**SUSAN STAMM**  
FOREWORD BY: CURT COFFMAN



# “42 Rules of Employee Engagement” Book Excerpt

A straightforward and fun look at  
what it takes to build a culture of  
engagement in business

**By Susan Stamm**

**Foreword by Curt Coffman**



E-mail: [info@superstarpress.com](mailto:info@superstarpress.com)  
20660 Stevens Creek Blvd., Suite 210  
Cupertino, CA 95014

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## Foreword by Curt Coffman

Author Christina Baldwin once remarked: “*change is the constant, the signal for rebirth, the egg of the Phoenix.*”<sup>1</sup>

While so many organizations, leaders, and managers seem to reach for change, very few embrace it and see the opportunity for creating value in their enterprises. A good case in point is how we view employees and our philosophy about increasing productivity and impact. Fifty years ago, more than 80% of all jobs were industrial, manufacturing-based positions. Thus, the true value of the human contribution was the person’s hands and feet. The goal of managers and supervisors was to closely attend to (i.e., even babysit) every person to ensure they were doing what they were supposed to be doing, without interruption.

Frankly, we didn’t hire human beings 50 years ago, we hired pairs of hands! The manager or supervisor possessed great power over the individual employee. If the employee did not do what they were supposed to be doing, the manager or supervisor would fire them and dramatically impact their families’ financial security. The power base was clear—the employer did not need the employee as much as the employee depended upon the employer. Those days are now gone!

Today, less than 10% of all jobs in the United States are industrial, manufacturing-based jobs. This means more than 90% of all jobs require an employee to use their intelligence, instincts, and

ideas as means of creating value for their companies. Clearly, the true value of today's human contribution lies squarely in the head and heart of every person. While the employer possessed tremendous power in the past, the balance of power has shifted and today the employee owns the means of production and creation of value. In essence, the employer now needs the employee more significantly than the other way around.

The new challenge is simple, "*how do I get people to do what I need them to do, when I have no power over them?*" Management struggles with how to adapt to the new realities of fully utilizing and energizing the human side of their enterprise. The key is no longer merely satisfying or attempting to keep employees pacified or without angst. It is tapping into the core values and beliefs inherent in every individual. Creating a passion, rather than just providing tasks, is the key.

Successful organizations of tomorrow will be those that've adopted a holistic approach to managing the human condition. People are messy, but this messiness segues to unbelievable opportunity for innovation, contribution, and lifelong commitment. The best description of what a workforce needs is "engagement," not satisfaction or job security. Engagement is the degree to which we are relating to our employees and demonstrating a true commitment to their development, self-awareness, and the willingness to transform the workplace one person at a time.

Susan Stamm understands these issues on a truly intimate level. She has studied, observed, and ascertained both a poignant and pragmatic view of how organizations everywhere can leverage the new realities of the workplace. Through her *42 Rules of Employee Engagement*, she outlines the issues facing both managers and employees on a daily and even an hourly basis. Her ability to see the need for structure where structure is resisted is remarkable. Unless your organization can fully automate sales, production, service, and follow-through, you need this book! Sure, many believe they have adapted to the new world of emotional economics, but from my consulting experience, they are merely adapting the old paradigm. I challenge you to take a hard look at yourself as you read through these pages.

**Curt W. Coffman**

Coauthor, *First Break all the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*

(Simon & Schuster) and *Follow This Path:*

*How the World's Greatest Organizations Drive Growth by Unleashing Human Potential* (Warner Books)

## Intro

Have you ever hired someone who indicated very clearly on the job interview that they had little or no desire to participate in the work of your team? Not likely. You've probably never hired anyone who told you they planned to work hard at actively sabotaging your results either.

We hire employees who arrive on the job on that first day eager to make a contribution. They anticipate the good they can offer and the synergistic relationships they'll build within their new workplace. If that is so, why would so many people underperform on purpose after only a short period on the job? Why have engagement scores fallen to such low levels?<sup>2</sup>

Think of it this way. If your organization fits into the national norms for employee engagement, over half your team is not giving you what they could to help you achieve greater results. It is as if they take their talent, ideas, and experience, and place them in deep freeze while going through the motions of work. Why would anyone do this when work is central to our very identity? Naturally, we want to offer our best. It is this inner desire to give work our best effort that makes employee engagement the low hanging fruit of organizational performance. People want to be engaged, they really do.

This is good news because it is not large, complex issues that push engagement scores down. It is also bad news. Well sort of ... you see, employee engagement has a lot to do with you and your style of management. It's those everyday challenges that wear away at the soul of your team: the manager does not mention appreciation of effort; there is no clear performance goal; no coaching or support is available; or, no one seems to listen. The list goes on and on. The result is that many employees

leave to continue the search for the perfect workplace that will value their mind and spirit while others “quit and stay.” Either action impacts the engagement level of your team.

This book responds to those day-to-day situations that seem to drive employees away from offering you their best. These ideas are not difficult to understand, but for some reason they are not common practice among many leaders. Each rule challenges you to take action immediately. Use these actions to transform your team. Meet with your team weekly over the next 42 weeks and discuss the implication of each rule for your workplace. Hold each other accountable to actions and goals that come from these discussions.

Specific tools are highlighted in a reference section at the end of this book, including a set of templates you can download to track the actions suggested in each rule. Another reference area describes some of my favorite books on this important topic. It is my hope you will embrace these rules and add your own to the discussion. A blog has been created for you to discuss these rules and share your own: <http://www.tinyurl.com/chvthb> ([http://www.42rules.com/employeeengagement\\_blog/](http://www.42rules.com/employeeengagement_blog/)) I will look forward to meeting you there and hearing your contribution to this work.

Onward and Upward,  
Susan Stamm  
The TEAM Approach®  
[susan@teamapproach.com](mailto:susan@teamapproach.com)



## 2 Get “Under New Management”

**Think of “under new management” as an opportunity to try out changes that allow you to be open and upfront about what you are doing.**

Today I passed a business with a sign prominently displaying the message: “under new management.” Whenever I pass a business with such a sign, I begin to wonder about its intended outcome. It seems to be reaching out to all who pass by to say, “we’ve changed...come in and try us again, see how we have improved, we are really worth another look...”

What a great idea for team leaders too: “under new management.” As managers, supervisors, and team leaders, we can provide new management techniques and approaches to those we serve by making changes in our management style. You may be one who boldly tries new approaches with your team regularly, or perhaps you are like many team leaders who are a bit more cautious about changing their style and approach. Change is uncomfortable for anyone, but under the watchful eye of our team members we can let our imaginations get the best of us: “What will they think of me? Will it come off as planned? What if it doesn’t work?”

I once worked with a healthcare team that was in crises. As the group went around the table and shared concerns, it was obvious that the nurses did not perceive the physician as a caring person. One specific thing they challenged him with was that he never smiled at them or acted friendly. This physician operated from the “C dimension of behavior” (see Rule 18) and was quite reserved and task-oriented in his approach. He seemed surprised by this

feedback, however, and sincerely apologized to his team on the spot. Then he did an amazing thing—he made an immediate effort in the meeting to increase his affirming responses. As his team spoke, he smiled and appreciated their comments. To be honest, his smiles seemed forced and difficult for him, but his team rallied around him because he asked for their support and invited them to give him feedback any time in the future he was slipping up.

Think of “under new management” as an opportunity to try out changes that allow you to be open and upfront about what you are doing. A perfect time to put up the “under new management” banner is right after you have attended some training, gotten some feedback, or read a new book. Use these situations as an excuse to try new things. Get your team to support you. Openly announce that this is not comfortable or easy, but you believe it will make you more effective. Involve the team in a debriefing and get an even greater level of support from them. By showing your interest in their input and by allowing your direct reports to “coach” you, support and acceptance will come easier than expected.

Consider the benefits of taking the risk to try new behaviors and approaches and to involve your team in the process:

1. You are role modeling for your team the importance of trying new behaviors.
2. You are suggesting that improvement is always possible and that we can all work to be more effective.
3. You are involving your team and developing their observation skills and their ability to give feedback.
4. You are creating a learning culture.
5. You are growing and becoming more effective with each new skill you turn into a habit.
6. You are deepening trust and the relationship between you and the team by making yourself vulnerable.
7. You are modeling openness to feedback, a skill we all need to improve.

**Action:** Why not get started right now with this book? You can put up the “under new management” banner and seek support from your team right away. Follow the suggestions or ideas that are offered throughout this book and put your team under new management.

## 5

**Be a Hands-On Manager**

**Silver bullets take a “hands-off” approach that allow the manager to pass off the problem to some piece of technology or to someone else.**

We are all busy people. Problems pop into our lives without first calling for an appointment. Yet, as managers, problems “are” our work. I am not suggesting we alone must solve them, but we have responsibility for making sure they are solved. Working hands-on with our team to solve problems creates an opportunity to build engagement, but the use of silver bullet solutions often prevents this from happening.

It is hard to avoid the lure of a silver bullet when their abuse has become so widespread. One major abuse of silver bullets today is the overuse of technology. Whenever you place a call and wade through seven different menus you are experiencing a hands-off, silver bullet solution. The offending organization has successfully eliminated the “problem” of answering incoming calls, and perhaps has reduced costs; but does it create engagement? When customers finally reach the “live employee,” how engaged does the employee feel when greeted by a succession of frustrated customers throughout the day? And then, of course, there is the customer...

It seems that technological silver bullets are pervasive today. As my son and I waited at the jewelry counter of a major discount retailer for a replacement watch battery, he gave me the details on why he had hated working there. He pointed to an electronic device on the counter and told me: “that was my manager.” I was a bit confused until he explained that he carried this device around with him and did

what “it” told him to do, complaining that some days it only provided about 4 hours of work for an 8-hour shift. He had no real manager to discuss things with and he felt frustrated by the lack of interest from, and connection with, the management team (if one existed).

Silver bullets are not exclusively technologically based. Let's take a look at my favorite magical solution: training. I usually become aware that I've been hired as a silver bullet when I discover that what I am training has nothing at all to do with the real problem. The participants in a silver bullet training session often have the distinction of knowing they have been labeled as “broken” and they have been sent to training to get “fixed.” This can make for a “stimulating” learning environment.

In one such event, the manager told me that his employees were not being nice to the customers. After finding my trainees were rather passionate customer service representatives who cared deeply about the customer, we set out to define the real problem, brainstorming possible solutions (see Rule 33) to make things work better. The employees felt they had been heard (perhaps for the first time) and were energized about the possible ways they might move forward as a team. All that remained was to sell the manager who, sadly, felt he was too busy to sit in a training event and hear the concerns of his employees. Well, I was lucky that day to have found the manager open to what I shared and this story had a happy ending.

Silver bullets take a “hands-off” approach that allows the manager to pass off the problem to some piece of technology or to someone else. Yet, to build engagement with your team and with your customers, you need to be a hands-on manager. In the example above, the manager could have participated in the training process to build connection and greater relationship with his team. While he got the result, he distanced himself from the process and his team.

**Action:** Reflect on your personal and organizational use of silver bullets. How have they served the employee and the customer? Have they built stronger relationships and engagement? Is there a silver bullet you and your organization could give up? How might this impact customer satisfaction and employee engagement?

## 10

**Support Team Members When Needed**

**It can happen to anyone, they insisted; yet it tends to provoke alienation and a lack of empathy from those who work around the person in trouble.**

A while back, a story in our newspaper captured my interest. It was about a great whale swimming down the River Thames. It must have been quite a show as huge crowds of people were trying to view this enormous Bottle Nose Whale normally found only in the deep Northern Atlantic Ocean. The story went on to explain that the whale was likely in distress which had caused it to make its bizarre visit to London.

As you would hope and expect, elaborate plans were in the making to save this great creature. A whale in distress is something that touches our hearts and we want to do all that we possibly can. But are not humans also magnificent creatures worthy of saving in times of trouble? How often do we see employees on the job exhibiting somewhat bizarre behavior only to be greeted with criticism, reprimands, or worse yet, to be completely avoided and ignored? How often do we take the time to try and see these employees as potentially "in distress" and try to rally around them to help them return to the safe waters again?

I will never forget a particular group of employees I had the pleasure to work with at a manufacturing plant in Tennessee. We were completing a unit on the Attitude of Understanding when the group discussed the inevitability of having "a bad day." It can happen to anyone, they insisted; yet it tends to provoke alienation and a lack of empathy from those who work around the person in trouble. They

insisted that this was exactly the time that an attitude of understanding was needed the most.

The team came up with a brilliant idea: the blue uniform. At this particular plant everyone wears white uniforms to reduce the separation and distinction between production and management. This group suggested that, upon hire, everyone could be issued one blue uniform that they could put on only when they were having a really bad day. This uniform would be a signal that they needed extra support this particular day. It would mean that they needed extra patience from their team and they especially needed care and concern from others. Instead of running the other way when people saw them, their teams would embrace them and help them get through their personal crisis and move on to a white uniform day. The approach would likely reengage most team members. Alienation, however, moves employees toward active disengagement.

Seeing unusual behavior as a sign of distress is a first step in helping employees through their crises and bringing them back to the team as a fully contributing member. But, whatever we imagine may be causing this behavior, all we really know for sure is that the behavior we are observing is unusual.

We must focus our discussions on the observed behavior, not our attitudes about what we believe may be at the root of the problem. In reaching out to engage a team member who may be in some kind of distress, highlight the behavior in question in a concerned and caring way and ask for her opinion. Your efforts will be returned with renewed loyalty and commitment to the team's work.

**Action:** Get your team together to discuss the inevitable bad day each member may encounter at some point. How would team members like to be treated on these days? Some may want "their space" while others may want encouragement. Discuss ways that team members can provide a signal to the others on the team so the team can spring into action.

## About the Author



**Susan Stamm** is the president of The TEAM Approach®, a team development firm dedicated to helping people play nicer at work for the mutual benefit and profit of all. She believes that relationships are the key ingredient to happiness and success, personally, professionally, and globally. As host of the monthly “Bookends” teleconference and podcast, Stamm interviews authors of great books written for leaders, and HRD professionals, to discover their implications for today’s workplace.

Stamm claims she has been a student of human behavior ever since her high school psychology course and is fascinated with how people transfer learning into consistent performance on the job. Susan is a co-creator of the “Team Leader Café,”

a radical approach to team leader development, which guarantees permanent measurable performance improvements for supervisors and team leaders. Susan enjoys classroom facilitation, and speaking or writing about workplace performance issues. She is especially motivated to help people put what they learn into action and feels training that does not support a transfer back to the job is a waste of everyone's time and resources.

Susan has an Associate of Applied Science's degree in Human Services from Delaware Technical and Community College and a Bachelor of Science degree in Management and Organizational Development from Eastern Mennonite University where she earned an Outstanding Achievement Award. She was a contributing author to the book: "10: The Top Tens of Employee Engagement" edited by David Zinger. Additionally, Susan serves on the advisory boards for Vital Learning Corporation and Performance Support Systems. A member of American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) National, and the Central Pennsylvania Chapter of ASTD, she also cohosts the monthly Red Rose Learning Community gatherings in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Susan is married to her best friend, Rick Stamm, and has three children: Rachel, Adam, and Sarah, and three grandchildren: Bryan, Dylan, and Anna.

### **Getting “42 Rules of Employee Engagement”**

(<http://www.happyabout.info/42rules/employee-engagement.php>)

“42 Rules of Employee Engagement” can be purchased as an eBook for \$14.95 or tradebook for \$19.95 at <http://www.happyabout.info/42rules/employee-engagement.php> or at other online and physical book stores.

Please contact us for quantity discounts [sales@superstarpress.com](mailto:sales@superstarpress.com) or to be informed about upcoming titles [bookupdate@superstarpress.com](mailto:bookupdate@superstarpress.com) or phone (408-257-3000).

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