

The Australian workforce is not engaged, research reveals

New research reveals that only one in 12 Australians are mentally and emotionally engaged with their work, while at work, with women playing closer to their strengths than men.

An international survey company, IPSOS an expert in employee engagement and productivity, Marcus Buckingham have released some thought-provoking statistics about how little Australians play to their strengths at work. Over 600 employees across 32 industry categories sat the Strengths Engagement Track (SET), a work performance test that measures to what extent people play to their strengths.

The research calls for a new movement in workforce engagement – The Strengths Revolution. According to Buckingham, it is time to step up and challenge social theory in the workplace, focus less on weaknesses and more on strengths development.

"A strengths revolution is not about making people happier at work with free gym memberships, more money and in house yoga classes that was the theory in the 90s. It is now the era to cultivate people's strongest skills and engage them in their favourite tasks, This is the missing link to the efficiency, competency, and success for which many companies constantly strive," Buckingham said.

Research highlights of the Australian workforce include:

- 8% play to their strengths most of the time (working to their maximum potential), with 12% of these women and 3% men.
- 14% feel positive about going to work every day.
- 20% whine at work every day (Gen Xers whine more than Gen Ys).
- 41% feel an emotional high from work on a weekly basis, with Gen Ys feeling it more frequently than Gen Xers.
- 35% get so involved in what they are doing at work they lose track of time.
- 40% left their previous job to do a job that provided greater opportunity to do what they wanted to do, while only 28% left for better pay.
- 53% believe they are the best judge of their own strengths.
- 53% believe they have the freedom to carve out a job position that plays to their strengths.
- 63% believe their ideal job is what they are doing or a subset of what they are doing right now.

Buckingham believes that the principle reason why employees do not play to their strengths is that they spend too much time trying to improve their weaknesses because that is what society expects. In fact, the survey revealed that 74% of Australians think it is more important to spend time finding and fixing their weaknesses with or without the help of their managers over improving their strengths.

These results should serve as a wake up call to businesses across Australia, Buckingham believes.

"At a time when organisations are trying to do more with fewer people, it's critical to engage the people you have and play to their strengths and ensure they perform to their greatest ability. The single best predictor of a consistently high-performing employee is one that plays to their strengths. This theory isn't new, but unfortunately given the results of the survey. It is clearly being ignored.