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## a warehouse of engagement

### How UBC's journey toward efficiency led them to engagement

by Alex Wray

In 2004, the UBC Bookstore warehouse embarked on an initiative to improve efficiency and address issues raised by key users. Over the course of a year, a committee comprising management, end users, and an industrial engineer worked closely with the unionized warehouse staff. Together, they increased efficiency by 75% and saved over \$45,000.

However, the impact of this initiative did not stop at the bottom line; the warehouse culture saw a dramatic shift. Employee engagement reached an all-time high, resulting in a more positive workplace experience and further intangible benefits. One union member made a particularly remarkable turnaround. Before, he had no aspirations to be a manager. Now, the warehouse manager is actively grooming him to take her place when she retires.

At the core of the initiative's success was employee involvement. Senior management understood that the employees knew their own struggles and successes best, and that the success of the warehouse was ultimately in the hands of its frontline staff.

#### How did they do it?

A poll of key warehouse users revealed several areas that required attention. Stock turnaround time was lagging. Priority items were lost in the shuffle. Employees were not cross-trained. The warehouse floor and the buyers weren't communicating. All of these issues cost significant money and time. Before management made any changes, an industrial engineer documented the existing state of the warehouse in a detailed process map.

The industrial engineer then turned her attention to a new physical layout. She consulted with floor staff and incorporated their feedback into a new recommended layout. After more feedback and a revision, they implemented the new layout. Where the workflow had been staggered and segregated, it was now a continuous flow.

Employees then sat down with management one-on-one to discuss what they liked, what they found difficult, and what they truly "hated" about their work. Management prioritized all of this feedback, and immediately eliminated as many of the "hated" tasks as possible.

Management also knew that employees weren't using the warehouse's operating system to its full potential, and that this was at the root of many of the employees' frustrations. They gave the employees the opportunity to experiment with the system offline. The employees quickly discovered many solutions and efficiencies on their own. They only needed IT support to resolve a few issues.

The final stage of the initiative was to document all of the changes in a revised process map. The industrial engineer worked with the employees to map the new system. Before the project, many employees had very similar tasks, but they did not know exactly how to help each other. Now, anyone can walk into the warehouse, consult the process map, and successfully complete any task.

**Living Engagement: Help! I'm in a Meeting and I Can't Get Out!**  
by Alex Wray

To measure the impact, the industrial engineer quantified each process that changed, counting time or keystrokes, as appropriate. In the end, the entire initiative resulted in a 75% gain in efficiency. One task that used to require 300 keystrokes now took just seven, saving time worth \$15,000 per year. Revised procedures for security tagging saved \$7,000 per year. In all, the project saved over \$45,000 per year in time and costs.

The success of the initiative was due in great part to the high involvement of the warehouse employees. Without that level of involvement and consultation, getting buy-in from the unionized staff would have been a struggle at best. With high involvement and careful consultation, the warehouse achieved both new highs in efficiency and record levels of engagement.

### **How can I do it?**

Senior management can often underestimate the power of involving employees at all levels. The Wray Performance Window™ is a unique engagement tool that makes it easy for managers to keep their employees involved.

The Wray Performance Window™ takes decades of engagement research by the Gallup Organization and adds an additional layer. Marcus Buckingham identified one Q12 item that most highly correlates with employee engagement: I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day. The Wray Performance Window™ identifies not only what an employee does best, but also what he or she enjoys most.

When employees can focus on tasks where they are both highly skilled and highly motivated, engagement emerges naturally.

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Alex Wray is the co-founder and principal of the Wray Group, an international management development and consulting firm located in Vancouver, Canada. Wray Group specializes in developing leadership capacity in *People Management*. Since 1993, we have helped leaders align and focus the power of their people. Our workshops and programs address the key drivers of engagement: situational leadership, coaching, leading and facilitating groups, and team building.

To learn more about our programs, please visit our website at [www.wraygroup.com](http://www.wraygroup.com), or contact Rafael Grossling at 604-990-1321, or email [rafael@wraygroup.com](mailto:rafael@wraygroup.com).

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