



## 12: The Elements of Great Managing

### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

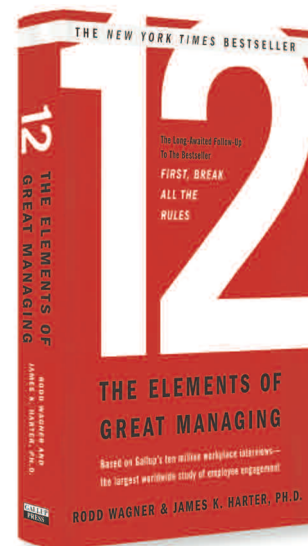
How do great managers inspire their employees to achieve top performance? In *12: The Elements of Great Managing*, authors Rodd Wagner and James K. Harter, Ph.D., challenge conventional ideas about managing for corporate success and delve deep into the motivating factors behind a worker's productivity. Using data collected and analyzed by The Gallup Organization, the authors are able to show how employee responses to 12 simple statements about work life directly correlate to the most important aspects of a company's success.

Wagner and Harter convincingly demonstrate that to effectively manage a company's "human resources" requires more than hiring talented people to "do a job." Written for managers and employees of companies large and small, *12* explains what every company needs to know about creating and sustaining employee engagement. Ultimately, it is only through great management that a company can see measurable results in its productivity, profit, attrition rates, customer satisfaction, work-related absence and on-the-job accident rates.

More than a decade ago, The Gallup Organization combed through its database of more than 1 million employee and manager interviews to identify the elements most important in sustaining workplace excellence. These elements were revealed in the 1999 bestseller *First, Break All the Rules*. This summary covers the long-awaited sequel.

### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- What the 12 Elements of Great Managing are and how they relate to profitability.
- How having a friend at work can be extremely beneficial to corporate productivity.
- Why it's not just about having the right materials for the job but also about having a choice.
- Why it's crucial for employees to feel that someone cares about them.
- How productivity and financial success are correlated to employee engagement.
- What it takes to be a great manager.



by Rodd Wagner and  
James K. Harter, Ph.D.

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: 12: THE ELEMENTS OF GREAT MANAGING

by Rodd Wagner and James K. Harter, Ph. D.

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*12: The Elements of Great Managing* by Rodd Wagner and James K. Harter, Ph. D. Copyright © 2006 by The Gallup Organization, Washington, D.C. Summarized with permission of the publisher, Gallup Press, 203 pages. \$25.95. ISBN 978-1-59562-998-2.

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## The History of 12

More than a decade ago, The Gallup Organization assembled a select group of social scientists to examine the 1 million employee interviews in its database, the hundreds of questions that had been asked over the preceding decades, and every variable on business-unit performance that organizations had supplied with their employee rosters. This data was analyzed to find which survey questions — and therefore which aspects of work — were most powerful in explaining workers' productive motivations on the job.

Ultimately, 12 elements of work life emerged as the core of the unwritten social contract between employee and employer. Through their answers to the dozen most important questions and their daily actions that affected performance, the million workers were saying, "If you do these things for us, we will do what the company needs of us." These "things" are represented in the 12 Elements of Great Managing and are directly correlated to employee performance and company health. ●

## The First Element: Knowing What's Expected

Because so much of an enterprise's efficiency depends on the seamless combination of personal responsibilities, the First Element of great managing is job clarity.

When Gallup researchers went in search of ("agree or disagree") statements most predictive of performance, one of the most straightforward turned out to be one of the most powerful: "I know what is expected of me at work." Groups that have high scores on this item are more productive, more profitable and even more cre-

ative. Substantial gains on the First Element alone often correlate with productivity gains of 5 percent to 10 percent, thousands more happy customers and 10 percent to 20 percent fewer on-the-job accidents.

"Knowing what's expected" is more than a job description. It's a detailed understanding of how what one person is supposed to do fits in with what everyone else is supposed to do, and how those expectations change when circumstances change. A good team, some say, is a lot like a great jazz band in which each player listens to the other instruments while playing their own. The better they pay attention to the rest of the band and work their way into the music, the better the result.

### It's More Than Talent

Superior performance is dependent on more than individual talent and knowledge of the job alone, it is dependent on teamwork. Consider what can be learned from professional basketball: Viewed through a business statistician's eyes, the National Basketball Association (NBA) is a perfect laboratory to study not just teamwork in basketball, but teamwork itself.

Three management professors dove into NBA statistics to see whether, above and beyond individual talent, playing together improved a team's performance. When they analyzed the data from 23 NBA teams from 1980-1994 they found that the greater the stability of a team's roster — fewer trades moving players on and off the team — the better they played.

More than each player knowing his or her job in isolation, a better team record also depends on the players learning hundreds of nuances and patterns in their teammates' play. This "tactic knowledge," wrote the professors, is a keen awareness of each others' styles and "must be learned



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through experience,” and “It is only through actually playing together that each member of the team accumulates the stock of tactic knowledge about the game play of other members of the team that enables such synchronicity.” ●

### The Second Element: Materials and Equipment

The importance of the Second Element of great managing, ensuring employees have the materials and equipment they need to do their work well, is best illustrated by its converse. When employees lack the means to do their work well, frustration with their inability quickly follows, as does anger with the company for placing them in such a difficult spot. From a purely functional perspective, having the right tools makes a job safer, easier and more productive. Equally important, the employees’ perception that the company backs them up with the equipment they want and need serves as a powerful psychological motivator.

Workgroups for which materials and equipment are managed most effectively average higher customer engagement and higher productivity than their peers. They also have significantly better safety records and their employees are less likely to flee to other organizations. Those managers with bottom quartile Second Element scores average 20 percent to 40 percent higher employee attrition than top quartile managers, representing millions of dollars in direct and indirect turnover costs.

#### It’s Not Just About the Materials

In the database, less than one-third of employees strongly agree that they have the materials and equipment they need to do their work well. There is a wide range on this item: the most engaged workgroups are nearly unanimous in their positive responses to the question, while the least engaged have no one who feels well equipped for the job. The most peculiar wrinkle in the data is that even in highly legislated environments where nearly identical workgroups are given the same machines, cash registers, office supplies and tools, the opinions of the employees vary.

The secret lies in the involvement, judgment and action of front-line managers. Less-engaged workgroups typically say that they were supplied with the standard toolkit in a standardized fashion: “Here’s what you get. Make the best of it.” The most engaged employees say their manager made what turned out to be relatively minor accommodations, aggressively petitioned for more expensive tools when the business case was strong and

was generally vigilant in looking for new ways to make the team more effective.

#### Solving Second Element Issues

It’s not unusual for a workgroup to have one or more Second Element issues that can be fixed only with the authority or money from corporate headquarters. In other circumstances, managers are able to manage Second Element concerns by making individual accommodations to employees. This allows employees to pick from a variety of choices: the cell phone that works best for them, for example; or a modification of the standard software in a laptop to meet an employee’s working style, talents or work demands. ●

### The Third Element: The Opportunity to Do What I Do Best

Matching a person to the right job, or a job to the right person, is one of the most complicated responsibilities any manager will face.

The Third Element emerged from the ability of a straightforward statement to predict the performance of a given worker and entire teams: “At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.”

When employees talk about what they do best, they rarely frame the discussion in terms of a job description. Certainly people can form attachments to their professions to the point that being a salesperson, professor or nurse becomes part of their self-image. Their talents, however, being more an instinctive part of them than any specific job, are transferable from one position to another, even across industries.

Commonly, two people in ostensibly identical roles who, by virtue of “doing what they do best,” perform in quite different fashions — one a banker who loves the business because he gets to work closely with people in his town; another a natural capitalist who can’t imagine not being involved in the constant movement of stocks, interest rates and precious metals prices.

#### Maximizing Employee Talent

To get the most from a team, a manager must help each employee mold the job around the way he or she works most naturally, maximizing the frequency of optimal experiences in which the worker loses him- or herself in the work, is internally motivated and is naturally gifted. The manager must also realize that as long as the employee accomplishes the goals for which he or she is responsible, without any harm along the way, how it gets done does not matter. Acknowledging one’s greatest

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natural talents and weaknesses does not mean accepting a narrow set of career possibilities. Rather, it means each employee will succeed in a relatively unique way, applying his or her own style to the accomplishment.

### Predicting Profitably

The Third Element is powerful in explaining not only productivity, but also the future profitability of teams within companies. Business units in the top quartile of Gallup's database on the "do what I do best" statement exceed the profits of those in the bottom quartile by an average of 10 percent to 15 percent. A recent analysis of multiple studies reveals that managers whose talents are aligned with their job demands achieve, on average:

- 15 percent more in sales
- 20 percent more in profit
- 24 percent fewer unscheduled absences
- 13 percent lower employee turnover.

But for all the evidence that this approach is good for business, only about one in three employees can strongly agree that they "have the opportunity to do what they do best every day." ●

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### The Fourth Element: Recognition and Praise

To reach their full potential, employees need recognition and praise, the Fourth Element of great managing. Generally, in the perception of employees, praise is painfully absent from most companies and the work-groups within them. Less than one in three employees can give a strongly positive answer to the statement, "In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work."

Employees who do not feel adequately recognized are twice as likely to say they will leave their company in the next year. Those who score the Fourth Element highest are two-and-a-half times more likely to agree that "from my most objective viewpoint, I am paid appropriately for the work I do" than those at the other end of the recognition scale. Variation in the Fourth Element is also responsible for 10 percent to 20 percent differences in productivity and revenue, and the acquisition and retention of thousands of loyal customers to most large organizations.

### Positive Words and Dopamine

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter (a chemical that sends a signal from one part of the brain to another) that creates a feeling of enjoyment and satisfaction. Studies have

implicated that dopamine is part of the mechanism behind enjoying good tastes and smells, receiving money and even seeing a pretty face. "At a purely chemical level," said *Time* magazine, "every experience humans find enjoyable — whether listening to music, embracing a lover or savoring chocolate — amounts to little more than an explosion of dopamine in the nucleus accumbens, as exhilarating and ephemeral as a firecracker."

People who alter their behavior to get those delightful bursts and positive words specifically have been found to activate the regions of the brain related to reward. This chemical release not only makes healthy employees feel good when they get praise, it is also crucial to memory and learning. It creates an internal reward system that makes employees want to repeat needed behaviors, if doing the right things earns recognition. ●

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### The Fifth Element: Someone Cares About Me as a Person

There are limits to how much can be accomplished through directives, financial incentives, fear of discipline and intense scrutiny of people's work. One of the crucial questions for a team leader trying to get the most from the team is whether they form a cohesive, cooperative, self-sacrificing, motivated crew. Such attributes are the essence of the Fifth Element of great managing and are measured by an employee's reaction to the statement, "My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person."

### Social Capital

Team effort depends on the degree to which employees feel like a real part of a group, cohesiveness sometimes called "social capital." Authors Don Cohen and Laurence Prusak wrote, "Social capital bridges the space between people. Its characteristic elements and indicators include high levels of trust, robust personal networks and vibrant communities, shared understandings, and a sense of equitable participation in a joint enterprise — all things that draw individuals together in a group. This kind of connection supports collaboration, commitment, ready access to knowledge and talents, and coherent organizational behavior."

People treat each other differently when they form a personal connection, and they give more effort in a group when they feel that they are more than just a number. One of the best predictors of an employee's trustworthiness is his or her perception of whether the company "cares about my personal well-being." Compared with those who feel their company is looking

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out for them, “a disproportionate number of the workers who view the employer as unfair and uncaring” will cheat when they think they can get away with it.

The correlation between not feeling someone cares about them and resigning has been observed repeatedly in studies of individual companies in the Gallup database and in analyses where data from many organizations are combined. In high-turnover companies, workgroups in the lowest quarter of the “someone at work cares about me” statement average 22 percent higher turnover than their top quartile counterparts. In organizations where resignations are less common, the difference rises to 37 percent. ●

### The Sixth Element: Someone at Work Encourages My Development

The notion of a personal guide is an ancient idea that perpetually re-emerges in forms such as the relationships between master craftsman and apprentice, doctoral candidate and thesis supervisor, and resident physician and intern. There is something about working closely with someone who supervises the less experienced person’s progress that cannot be accomplished as well in any other way. From this fact stems the Sixth Element of great managing, measured by the statement, “There is someone at work who encourages my development.”

The Sixth Element requires a high degree of personal investment by the counselor in the education of his or her charge. Without a mentor, it is difficult for employees to achieve real engagement (less than 1 percent) with their employer. Conversely, two-thirds of employees who report having someone at work who encourages their development are classified as “engaged,” while one-third are “not engaged” and less than 1 percent are “actively disengaged.”

In its broadest usage, as captured by the Sixth Element, a mentor is anyone who, in the eyes of the employee, ensures he or she successfully navigates the course. The important aspect is not which term this protector goes by — friend, coach advisor, sponsor, counselor, supporter — but whether the employee feels supported inside the business. ●

### The Seventh Element: My Opinions Seem to Count

Although there is always a need for expertly designed systems that help maximize production, nearly every system depends on the motivation of the people who run

### The Twelve Elements of Great Managing

1. I know what is expected of me at work.
2. I have the right materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
7. At work, my opinions seem to count.
8. The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
9. My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.
10. I have a best friend at work.
11. In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

it. That motivation, it turns out, requires workers to strongly agree that “At work, my opinions seem to count.” This is the Seventh Element of great managing.

The mechanism that connects this element with better business performance appears to be a greater sense of responsibility for or psychological ownership of those things over which one has a say. No matter how strong the external incentives, they never seem to measure up to the internal drive of advancing something that is at least partially one’s own idea. Nearly half of employees who say their opinion counts at work also feel their current job brings out their most creative ideas. Among those who are neutral or negative on the Seventh Element, only 8 percent feel their creativity is well employed.

#### Benefits of Improving Scores

Improving the proportion of employees with high Seventh Element scores from one in five to one in three has a substantial impact on customer experience, productivity, employee retention and safety, all of which create, on average, a 6 percent gain in profitability.

Incorporating employee ideas pays back twice. First, the idea itself is often a good one. Second and equally powerful, that the idea comes from the employees themselves makes it much

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more likely that they will be committed to its execution. Welcoming employee opinions also produces greater feelings of inclusion among workers. When the 12 elements are compared against a number of statements to test perceived racial or gender bias, the “opinions count” statement is most highly correlated with feelings that employees are always treated with respect and the company treats its workforce fairly. ●

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### The Eighth Element: A Connection With the Mission of the Company

The Eighth Element of great managing is captured by the statement, “The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.” Business units in the top quartile of Gallup’s engagement database on this element average from 5 percent to 15 percent higher profitability than bottom-quartile units. Mission-driven workgroups suffer 30 percent to 50 percent fewer accidents, and have 15 percent to 30 percent lower turnover. Employees who feel connected to the mission of their company are also more likely to report that humor or laughter plays a positive role in their productivity.

The strange thing about the Eighth Element is how extraneous it is to the job itself and the employee’s material well-being. The absence of many of the other elements — job clarity, the proper equipment, a match with one’s talents, consistent feedback — become real obstacles to actual production. It’s easy to see why they’re required to get the job done. The same cannot be said for the Eighth Element, which is strictly an emotional need, and a higher-level one at that, as if the employee can’t be energized without knowing how his or her job fits into the grand scheme of things.

#### More Than a Job

It’s not uncommon for employees of highly engaged workgroups, from entry level to senior executives, to mention having turned down higher pay to join or remain with a company they believed would provide more meaningful work with a more enjoyable team. No matter how employees make sense of the world and their role in it, if they see a connection substantial enough to consider their work a calling, they get more out of work and the organization gets more out of them.

Because of this connection, workers more strongly identify with the team, have less conflict, trust management more, are more committed, work through things better and put in more time at work, whether

compensated or not. Here, the job doesn’t determine its meaning. For example, “A school teacher who views the work as a job and is simply interested in making a good income does not have a calling, while a garbage collector who sees the work as making the world a cleaner, healthier place could have a calling,” wrote researcher Amy Wrzesniewski.

#### It Starts at the Top

The most highly motivated and productive employees push hard because they feel their work makes a difference to attaining those worthy goals. Despite the high correlation between senior leadership and front-line commitment to the mission, this element loses the most power along the way. While two-thirds of executives in a typical company strongly agree with the mission questions, less than one-third of street-level associates do. ●

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### The Ninth Element: Co-Workers Committed to Doing Quality Work

Phoning it in. Free-riders. Cheaters. Hitchhikers. Deadwood. Slugs. Drones. Asleep at the switch. Cowards. Barnacles. Slackers. Con artists. Deserters. They go by dozens of scornful labels. During a career, everyone encounters at least a few of the people who strive to do the least they can without getting reprimanded. The Ninth Element is measured by the statement: “My associates or fellow employees are committed to doing quality work,” and few factors are more corrosive to teamwork than the employee who skates through life taking advantage of the much harder work of others.

The frustration is evident in a comment of an employee who gave a low score to the associates-committed-to-quality-work statement. “I dislike having to constantly tell people how to do their job. It becomes my job to fix what they neglected to do correctly in the first place.” Another complained about “no one wanting to take responsibility for anything.” If a team lacks a strong work ethic and a sense of responsibility to its members, the group becomes a convenient place to hide a little slothfulness, to push a little work to the other guy, or to point fingers when a project doesn’t hit its deadlines.

In an average team, about one in three employees strongly agrees that her team members are committed to doing quality work. But the Ninth Element is highly sensitive to the presence or absence of one or more slackers. When a team perceives that one of its mem-

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bers is dragging his or her feet, the proportion that rates the Ninth Element high drops to one in five. If a team is free of deadwood, the proportion that strongly agrees with the statement jumps to half of the team, with most of the rest giving positive, although slightly less emphatic responses. The many companies' performance data matched to Ninth Element scores show that people who feel part of a solidly committed team are routinely safer, better with customers, less likely to quit and more productive. ●

### The Tenth Element: A Best Friend at Work

Responses to the Tenth Element, "I have a best friend at work," predict performance. Something about a deep sense of affiliation with the people in a team drives employees to do positive things for the business they otherwise would not do.

Early research revealed a very different social bond among employees in top performing teams. Subsequent large-scale, multi-company analyses confirmed that the Tenth Element is a scientifically salient ingredient in obtaining a number of business-relevant outcomes, including profitability, safety, inventory control and — most notably — the emotional connection and loyalty of customers to the organization serving them. A little less than one-third strongly agree that they have a best friend at work.

#### Friendship and Performance

Numerous qualitative studies of employee engagement suggest customers not only sense the level of camaraderie where they shop, but that it makes a large difference in their experience, if for no reason other than its natural contagiousness. In the service industries, the customer ratings of workgroups with strong Tenth Element levels are 5 percent to 10 percent higher than those of impersonal or acrimonious groups, explaining the difference between success and failure in many organizations.

Other connections between the "best friend" statement and business outcomes are less intuitive, at least at first blush. At one electric utility, friendships among team members proved to be responsible for lower accident rates. When the workers were asked for the reason, they said the answer is simple: People look out for their friends. A team that has two-thirds of its members strongly agreeing they have a best friend at work averages 20 percent fewer accidents than a team with only one in three strong on the Tenth Element.

Friendship is not without hazards for productivity, nor

### Bunglers vs. Slackers

Gallup asked a random sample of U.S. workers which made them more frustrated: a colleague who tries hard but doesn't have much ability (a bungler), or a colleague who has the ability and doesn't try (a slacker). By a margin of six to one, workers are more upset with a slacker than a bungler.

is it effective without the other elements, such as coworkers being committed to doing quality work or clear expectations for each member of a team. Without clear direction, tight-knit teams can lose themselves in socializing and ignore customer or business needs.

#### It's Easier to Work With Friends

Research on workers in various settings has shown that friends are more likely to invite and share candid information, suggestions and opinions, and to accept them without feeling threatened. Friends tolerate disagreements better than those who are not friends. The good feelings friends share make them more likely to cheer each other on. Friends are more committed to the goals of the group and work harder, regardless of the type of task. Group members who identify most closely with the team are more likely to monitor its performance against the goal. ●

### The Eleventh Element: Talking About Progress

For all the complexity of performance appraisals — the balanced scorecards, the 360-degree feedback, the self-evaluations and forced grading systems — the statement that shows the best connection between perceptions of evaluations and actual employee performance is remarkably simple: "In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress." The statement does not specify that the discussion be an official review, but that the employee understands how he or she is doing and where his or her work is leading. In some ways, this statement is a long-term compliment to the Fourth Element of managing, which focuses on more immediate "recognition and praise."

Where a manager is regularly checking in with an employee, that employee is more likely to consider him- or herself properly compensated for the work, more likely to plan on staying with the company, and more than twice as likely to recommend the company to others as a great place to work. When compared with business results, the Eleventh Element turns out to be partic-

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ularly powerful in driving productivity and safety.

Business units in the top quartile on this element realize 10 percent to 15 percent higher productivity and 20 percent to 40 percent fewer accidents than bottom-quartile business units. Yet less than half of employees in the global database strongly agree that someone talked with them about their progress in the last six months. Even among executives and senior managers, the proportion is only one-half.

### Opinion Always Matters

On a purely functional level, an employee appraisal is quite simple. In practice, a good performance evaluation is a form of interpersonal art that requires managerial talent and careful preparation. A manager must maintain a delicate balance between giving candid, objective feedback and not crushing the employee's spirit and confidence. The research indicates that positive feedback charges up a worker, but negative comments sap the job of some of its intrinsic motivation. Comments from peers or subordinates must be interpreted carefully, and filtered of grudges, jealousy and erroneous observations. And, most of all, the discussion must be tailored to the personality, circumstances and potential of the employee. ●

## The Twelfth Element: Opportunities to Learn and Grow

For many people, it is progress that distinguishes a career from employment that is “just a job.” The Twelfth Element is measured by the response to the statement, “This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.” Employees who have an opportunity to learn and grow at work are twice as likely as those on the other end of the scale to say they will spend their career with their company.

When employees feel that they are learning and growing, they work harder and more efficiently. This element has a particularly strong connection to customer engagement and profitability. On average, business units in the top quartile on the Twelfth Element surpass their bottom-quartile counterparts by 9 percent on customer engagement and loyalty measures, and by 10 percent on profitability. These superior customer relationships and profits may occur because employees who are learning and are genuinely interested in their work have better ideas — which is another demonstrated correlation to the Twelfth Element.

### Employees are Naturally Drawn to Progress

“Despite the fact that humans are liberally endowed

with intrinsic motivational tendencies,” wrote University of Rochester professors, “the evidence is now clear that the maintenance and enhancement of this inherent propensity requires supportive conditions, as it can be fairly readily disrupted by various nonsupportive conditions.”

That's exactly what happens to many employees. Raised through a childhood in which each new year brought novel opportunities, playing at ever more difficult levels of sports, growing physically, educated in a system of cleanly delineated grades, many employees find themselves several years into their career wondering what happened to the momentum they used to enjoy.

Sitting in the same cubicle, doing the same job in much the same way without any meaningful new challenges causes employees to languish personally and professionally. A study of more than 3,000 adults between the ages of 25 and 74 found that 12 percent of the population is “languishing” and only 17 percent are “flourishing.” “Languishing is associated with poor emotional health, with high limitations of daily living, and with a high likelihood of a severe number of lost days of work” and, when at work, lower productivity, wrote study author Corey Keyes.

### What Great Managers Need

Some of what makes a great manager perform so well is pure talent — a natural ability to discern an employee's mind-set, a persistent optimism or a strategic acumen difficult to duplicate. Some of it is a deeply held personal mission to change the world for the better. Much of it requires that a front-line supervisor have the same experience with the 12 Elements as those he or she directs. One of the most fundamental needs of a great manager is ... a great manager.

The level of engagement of managers ebbs and flows just as much as it does for anyone else. Moreover, the engagement level of managers correlates strongly with the attitudes of their team and before a person can deliver what they should as a manager, they must first receive what they need as an employee. ●

### RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *12: The Elements of Great Managing*, you'll also like:

1. ***Great Business Teams*** by Howard M. Guttman. Renowned business consultant Guttman offers practical ways to develop high-performance teams in your organization through insight into the dynamics of successful teams.
2. ***Satisfaction*** by Chris Denove and James D. Power IV. This book unlocks a vault of years of closely guarded research data, survey and feedback collected by J.D. Power and Associates on how to satisfy customers.
3. ***The Soul of the Corporation*** by Hamid Bouchikhi and John R. Kimberly. Discover how your firm's identity is related to — and different from — its organizational culture, brand positioning and reputation. Learn how to manage the unconscious shared beliefs that give your organization coherence.