

SMALLTALK

about big ideas

Engagement is More than a Buzz Word

By Jennifer Boykin

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For me, engagement is more than a business buzz word. It's a culture based on a collective state of mind that, if achieved, is the difference between a company with employees that lead the way forward and a company that falls behind. Many of you have heard me describe an engaged environment as one where we have many more days of feeling excited to go to work than days when we can't hit snooze often enough.

Since my very first town hall as your president, I have committed to running Newport News Shipbuilding in a way that helps you feel part of it. I want to create an environment that encourages engagement, hears your ideas, and puts your ideas in motion to make a difference.

This week, you will have the opportunity to tell me how we're doing. When the 12-question Gallup survey is sent out on Wednesday, I encourage you to take it seriously and use it as a megaphone for making your voice heard. Are you receiving appropriate feedback and being given opportunities to learn and grow? Do you get to do what you do best every day? Do you see those around you care about the quality and mission of our work?

Earlier this year, NNS Fire Chief Mark McTheny was invited to a meeting with my senior leadership team to discuss his approach to employee engagement. He was invited because, of all the teams working at the shipyard, his team ranked among the highest in Gallup scores.

The Fire Department team works 24-hour shifts. They are always on call — their work is stressful and how they respond to an emergency can mean the difference between life and death —and yet the numbers demonstrate they are clearly engaged.

We wanted to know his secret.

His "secret" revealed that the road to engagement begins and ends with a lesson we all learned in kindergarten—treat others how you want to be treated.

"I try to break it down on a more personal level and just be someone who cares about my employees," he said. "It's not about me. It's about an atmosphere and a culture we have built around caring for one another. We support each other like a family."

When you think about it, Newport News Shipbuilding is a family business. We have third-, fourth- and even fifth-generation shipbuilders working in the shipyard. We have mothers and sons, fathers and daughters, and husbands and wives coming through our gates every day. Every day, we are dependent on each other for our wellbeing.

And together, we build our Navy's warships to help protect all American families.

I would like to think that Chief McTheny and his firefighters aren't in a class all by themselves. But unless employees are open and honest on the Gallup Survey, I won't know.

What I do know is that it is our shipbuilders who make us the best. And we owe it to you to treat you well and provide you with an environment that inspires you to want to come to work every day.

