

Q¹²® ELEMENT: Q02

I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.

When managers ask employees to accomplish a goal but do not provide them with the necessary resources, credibility is lost. Great managers discover the needs of each person in relation to the outcomes they are attempting to achieve and position resources accordingly. One of the strongest predictors of customer engagement, this element also predicts employee retention, safety, and productivity.

Those 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. For example, those managers with bottom-quartile Second Element scores average 20 to 40 percent higher employee attrition than top-quartile managers, representing millions of dollars in direct and indirect turnover costs.

In the database, about four in 10 employees strongly agree they have the materials and equipment they need to do their work well. There is 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 he is 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 widely.

The secret lies in the involvement, judgment and action of frontline managers. Less-engaged workgroups typically say they were supplied 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 his team more effective, without the employees having to harp.

“No one uses pencils anymore, but I use them all the time,” said one editor. “I went to my manager and asked, ‘Could I get a nice electric pencil sharpener?’ And she said, ‘Sure.’ It only cost \$10, but it makes a big difference to me.”

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This summary is a revised excerpt on this Q¹² element from 12: *The Elements of Great Managing*.