

## HAVE YOU GIVEN YOUR TEAM PERMISSION TO ENGAGE?

*By Marilyn Thiet*

Last week I had the privilege of attending the 2014 Women's Leadership Conference and hear Vernice "Fly Girl" Armour as the keynote speaker. Vernice was America's first African American female Marine combat pilot. In her highly energizing talk, Vernice walked us through a military combat mission and the concept of receiving a command from superiors to engage in combat. In the business world we don't need someone's permission to engage, we give ourselves that permission for every task and project we tackle. Vernice's message is that we all HAVE permission to engage.

Yet, employee engagement is at an all time low. According to the 2013 Gallup Worldwide poll, only 13% of the workforce is actively engaged. According to Gallup "The bulk of employees worldwide -- 63% -- are "not engaged"; they lack motivation and are less likely to invest in organizational goals or outcomes. Twenty-four percent are "actively disengaged"; they are unhappy, unproductive, and liable to spread negativity" While I wholeheartedly agree with Vernice Armour that no one needs to give us permission to engage, the leadership we experience in our jobs will highly impact our decision whether or not we choose to engage.

In order for people to engage fully, they need several factors to be in place. One of the most critical factors is connection. Employees need to feel a connection to the company, their manager, and the company and team's mission and vision. They need to feel appreciated for their contributions. They need to work in an environment in which trust and respect are the cornerstones and in which conflict and underperformance are addressed, not swept under the carpet. It is the leaders role to make sure these things are in place. This is the way in which leaders give their employees "permission to engage".

Is your team engaged? Not just showing up for work, but fully engaged in providing the best they can each and every day. Research has shown that engaged employees are more productive and will stay at a company longer. As a leader what deliberate steps are you taking to make sure your team feels connected to your company? They cannot feel connection to the company or team's mission or vision if it has not been communicated clearly to them. They cannot feel appreciated if they have not been told so. They cannot be in an environment of trust and accountability if the leader has not created this environment. How are you engaging? As a leader, your engagement will enable your team's engagement.

*"How you engage at every moment is a conscious choice".*

~ Vernice Armour