ANGELA N. SPRANGER

WHY PEOPLE STAY

HELPING YOUR EMPLOYEES FEEL SEEN, SAFE, AND VALUED

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Why People Stay is the result of a doctoral study that revealed participants' sense of commitment (to the organization, to the team, to the mission, or to something else). This was in spite of numerous experiences of antisocial workplace behavior, or AWB, reported by each participant. Yet they all stayed in their workplace. Why? And what does this suggest about employee engagement, in toxic workplaces or work groups?

This book explores these questions, and more, and sounds an alarm to executives and culture monitors that the root cause of your human capital losses is that your people do not feel seen, safe, and valued and you can change that. It looks at organizational commitment and organizational engagement in an environment where it can be difficult to remain authentically committed in the presence of AWB. The participants in this study were queried as to just why they stayed under such conditions. The aim of this book is to share their surprising results.

This positive book about negative experiences is essential reading for executives, HR and organizational development professionals, as well as students at both postgraduate and undergraduate levels.

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WHY PEOPLE STAY

Helping Your Employees Feel
Seen, Safe, and Valued

Angela N. Spranger

I dedicate this book to the memory of my mother, Donna M. DeLowell, with deepest gratitude to my wonderful husband Keith Spranger. Without the two of them, and the support and guidance of so many others, this project would never have happened.

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PART I

Introduction

Welcome to *Why People Stay.* This is a business book aimed at executives, organizational leaders, and HR professionals… a book that can also be used in educational settings. That said, I'd like to make the business case for investigating why people stay in organizations. I had to lay out this case in order to gain approval to do the underlying study, and I am prepared to make this case for corporate clients at any time.

First, it's been said that **the best leaders are the best readers** – I believe I first heard this from management and leadership guru Marshall Goldsmith in a webinar sometime around 2009, but a quick internet search shows that President Harry S. Truman said it first, and leadership authors and creators of The Leadership Challenge®, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner, said it too. It's not a new concept: we need to read.

So here is the business case for why it's important that we engage in this dialogue about why people stay. Usually, a business case would provide "the why, what, how and who" (Mallory, 2016) needed to make a Go/No-Go decision on whether to accept a project proposal. Here I've made the case for investing in your own professional development, with the potential result of increasing your influence over your workplace culture.

To improve your leadership skills, to get more out of your team's performance and productivity, you have to invest an hour a day in reading and reflecting on how you are leading, managing, and influencing others. In this book I am inviting you to read (knowing that for some, reading is a pleasure; for others, a trial) and consider, and perhaps make a change in, the way you lead and influence others. Implicitly we are changed as we read and consider new and different ideas, but I am explicitly stating that this book will challenge you to consider the culture of your organization, to look closely and intentionally at the conditions that encourage employee commitment and engagement, and to critically analyze the degree to which you are fostering those conditions as a leader.

Read. Consider. Make small changes.

"Integrity has no need of rules."
                                        – *Albert Camus, French philosopher (Roberts, 2016)*

WHO: Who is this book written for?

You should read this book if you are responsible for influencing the behavior of other people, through whom you work to achieve shared goals and objectives – or what you believe are shared goals and objectives. This means you, if you are a supervisor, team leader, coordinator, manager, director, executive, or entrepreneur. That's not a cop-out to say that everyone should read this book. It's only relevant for you if you are an influencer. If you are seeking to develop, ratify, and accomplish shared goals through the labor of other people in concert with your own efforts, this book is for you. Welcome.

This is only relevant for you if you are an influencer.

WHAT: What is this, just another book about leadership?

It's **not** just another book about leadership. It's a guidebook for getting to the positive outcome by going through the difficult and challenging experiences and picking out the lessons to be learned from each.

This is a guidebook for getting to the positive outcome by going through the difficult and challenging experiences and picking out the lessons to be learned from each.

In this book, I'm sharing with you the experiences of a sample of individuals and what those experiences mean, according to established theory. We'll make the theory–into–practice connection so that you can make incremental changes, or significant ones, to deepen the organizational commitment and engagement (I'll differentiate between the two) in your organization. Imagine your organizational culture and climate to be radio dials on your organizational dashboard, built into your Balanced ScoreCard layout. (See insert for a description of the Balanced ScoreCard, if you're not already using it.)

The Balanced ScoreCard (BSC) approach is a system or toolset that facilitates intentional, strategy-focused dialogue within an organization. It is a highly visible means of measuring what matters (you've heard that, right? You measure what matters. If you don't measure it, it doesn't matter.). Kaplan and Norton (Kaplan & Norton, 2007) designed the BSC to connect mission (the what and who of your organization), vision (the why and how), and values (our rails, or parameters) with functional strategies and links those to the daily tactical tasks and processes.

The BSC, simplified, allows organizations to identify and assess performance to goals. Specifically, those would be Financial goals, Customer goals, Process goals, and People goals (or Learning and Growth goals). The goals may be viewed as "perspectives" for strategic planning purposes, and you can consult with the executives of each area to ensure that the Perspective (Financial, Customer, Learning and Growth, or Internal Processes) aligns with the overall mission, vision, and values of the organization. All of these are aspirational; for example, Kaplan and Norton suggested that a company's Financial perspective asks, "in order for us to succeed financially, how should we appear to our shareholders?" How do we show up to the people or other organizations we want to buy from us? The Internal Business Process perspective asks, "to satisfy our shareholders and customers, what business processes must we excel at?" Under the Customer perspective, we should be asking, "to achieve our vision, how should we appear to our customers?" That is, what do they need from us, in order to feel comfortable buying our product or service? And, finally, the Learning and Growth or People perspective asks, "to achieve our vision, how will we sustain our ability to change and improve?" These are huge, vague questions that require some detailed strategic planning of objectives, design of initiatives to achieve those objectives, definition of metrics and measures, and targets that are both low-hanging fruit for easy celebration and confidence-building, as well as challenging and aspirational for significant development, growth, and organizational evolution.

The Financial and Customer perspectives have goals and metrics that indicate what the organization gets, what we receive, as the fruit of our efforts. The People (L & G) perspective and the Internal Process perspective both indicate what we do, what we offer, to our target market. After identifying the objectives under each area, and the means or metrics by which success is measured for each objective, of course you want to set targets for those objectives, and design initiatives to help achieve them.

Remember, these are the "radio dials" that you can manipulate through minimal but significant investments in your organization's culture. Those incremental changes can yield significant long-term benefits, the kind that the 10×'ers, companies that outperformed their markets by TEN TIMES over the review period in Collins and Hansen's *Great by Choice*, reaped.

WHY: Why do I need to read this book; what's different about it?

Why take up this challenge? Aren't things going along well enough? Why bother to focus in on why people stay in workplaces… as long as they're there, right? Warm bodies, mildly engaged, get the work done… right? Wrong! The proposal

on the table is whether or not to devote some of your time to reading a book (this book) about why people stay in organizations. The book includes ideas for how to ensure that the people in *your* organization feel seen, safe, and valued, so that they'll stay and contribute their best. That would be a positive outcome, wouldn't it? But to get there, you need to read the book.

This book is unique. The study on which it is based was unique. And while small in scale, it is huge in significance. You see, there's been no other qualitative research in which the study participants are actually just *asked* why they've chosen to stay, despite having experienced behaviors that can be called "antisocial." We'll get into *antisocial workplace behaviors*, and explain what they are and why they happen. But you'll also get a peek into the mindset of employees who power through (or endure) those instances and choose to stay and contribute to the workplace. And at its root, it's still a business book. So we're exploring social psychology and communication, leadership and management, and ethics… in the business context.

HOW: How should we go about achieving this "positive outcome"? How is this book going to help?

Each chapter will end with "key points" that you can flip to right from the start, or just pick up along the way. These key points will provide you with the takeaways from the chapter so that you can identify how strongly you identify with that chapter's issues and literally "take away" the results of the research or the concepts from the literature, and apply them to your specific workplace. This book is designed not only to share theoretical research material, or the results of the initial study, but also – and more importantly – to give you practical tools to add to your leadership toolkit. Additionally, at the end of the book there are resources listed to support any change initiatives you launch as a result of reading this book. The last few chapters will address the Exit Interview, Intentional Mentoring Programs, and Stay Interviews. Each of these is defined and their value described in those chapters. Even if you're already doing all of these, as institutionalized and cultural components in your organization, you're still guaranteed a positive outcome as a result of just reading the narratives shared in this book and understanding the different types of organizational commitment, what they sound like, how to feed them, or seeing how certain cultural artifacts can starve them.

Structure of the book

At the beginning of each section or chapter, there will be an Executive Summary. At the end of each chapter there will be a review of the key points / takeaways / action steps and recommendations in the chapter. There are also insightful quotes from sources and business leaders throughout.

Part I of this book is this introduction, in which I laid out the "business case" for even reading about *Why People Stay*. Here I explained the personal and professional assumptions that underlie the study on which this book is

based. Please don't accept the simple, snap response to the idea of asking *Why People Stay* – "because they need money!" It's deeper than that, and worth your consideration.

Part II: The Concept is broken down into General Concepts and Practical Application sections, to quickly provide you with the WIIFM – what's in it for me, or "Why should I read this?" You may be wondering why you were given, or encouraged to buy, a copy of *Why People Stay: Helping Your Employees Feel Seen, Safe, and Valued*. Actually, the vision setters and culture monitors of any organization should quickly grasp the value of such a book – you want to retain the knowledge capital in your existing employee base, and to prevent the turnover of valuable employees who become disillusioned and leave the company because of how they are treated by peers or superiors. This turnover phenomenon leads to reduced psychological safety (why people leave – they feel unsafe), and creates a climate of fear and low motivation (why people disengage – they feel undervalued). Possibly the worst consequence happens when people feel invisible – they may miss opportunities to learn from mistakes, withhold suggestions, and behave in counterproductive ways. This section covers the general concepts of antisocial workplace behavior (AWB), organizational commitment, and organizational engagement – and their practical applications in any company.

Part III provides the details of the Theoretical Background and Rationale for the Study. Built from a cross-disciplinary body of knowledge including management, leadership, communication, and industrial and organizational psychology, the study allowed participants to make sense of why they do what they do, why they commit and engage in organizations and groups, and (most importantly) why they tolerate, or constrain, or ignore, uncivil behavior from their superiors, subordinates, or peers in the workplace. The section ends with a discussion of the Related Constructs, offering a history of research and definition of terms.

Part IV offers some Composite Themes – the takeaways from the study and the supporting research. In Part IV, we'll make sense of what we've seen, and then identify the next steps for executives and HR professionals to take if you identify familiar issues from your own workplace culture reflected here… or if you want to prevent them.

> "There are no second chances for those who violate the ethical code."
> – *Robert Slater, author (Roberts, 2016)*

Welcome… let's get started.

PART II

The concept – executive summary

"You will get all you want in life if you help enough other people get what they want."

– Zig Ziglar, motivational speaker (Roberts, 2016)

"Why should I read this?" asks the busy executive or HR manager, wondering why he or she has been handed or sent a copy of *Why People Stay: Helping Your Employees Feel Seen, Safe, and Valued*. Actually, the vision setters and culture monitors of any organization will quickly grasp the value of such a book – they want to retain the knowledge capital that resides in their existing employee base, and they want to prevent the turnover of valuable employees who become disillusioned and leave the company because of how they are treated by peers or superiors. The simple truth is that when employees don't feel that you see them, that they are safe with you (you care for them), and that you value them, their organizational commitment changes and their engagement drops.

> Employees need to feel seen, safe, and valued.

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