

Categories of Employees

A question was posed on an employee engagement list asking about how employees might be segmented based on their attitude toward work. My initial response consisted of the first nine items listed below. I have since added to the list.

1. “Hired Hands.” They are there to do as asked in return for a paycheck. They go home and leave the work behind.
2. “Lifers.” Money matters but they live for work. Their work goes with them wherever they go. They are often the very best at what they do.
3. “Gamers.” They view organizations as playgrounds for adults and so they play; they play others; they play the system; and they play themselves. Work, too, is a game and they're often quite good at it. They use money (salary) and position as a means of keeping score.
4. “Careerists.” Life and work are intertwined but not as severely as is the case with “Lifers.” Careerists take the long view and always act in their own best interests, balancing long-term and short-term considerations in relation to their careers.
5. “Cynics.” Work is a necessary evil and bosses are evil, too. They do what they have to but rarely any more than that.
6. “Abusers.” Their main objective is to lord it over other people and they find a hierarchical system of authority much to their liking. They are rarely if ever exceedingly competent at anything except making themselves look good to their own bosses. They are experts at avoiding responsibility and shifting the blame to others.
7. “Observers.” They are fascinated by life and work in organizations and they're typically quite good at what they do. Money doesn't really matter all that much and they spend a lot of time watching what goes on about them.
8. “Mutineers.” Nothing could make them happy and they find fault with just about everything. They regularly rail against management and resist just about every initiative that comes down the pike. Fortunately, they don't last long.
9. “Lemmings.” Will happily do whatever they're asked to the best of their ability. They question nothing.
10. “Citizens.” They take themselves, their work and their company seriously. They are extremely responsible individuals and generally try to act in the best interests of some larger good. They are supportive of most initiatives – unless the initiative challenges their notion of what is right.
11. “Thieves.” Always on the lookout for a good idea and they will happily steal it because they have never had an original idea of their own.
12. “Politicians.” Intensely political and always attuned to the politics of a situation. Focused on what is acceptable and doable within existing restraints and constraints. Rarely rocks the boat.
13. “Pros.” Calm, cool and methodical. Unflappable and unstoppable in most situations; keenly analytical; able to come quickly to the heart of a matter; usually called on when there are tough nuts to crack.
14. “Missionaries.” They are extremely dedicated to their work, which they view as having great significance, and they adopt a highly proprietary attitude toward it, resisting any external attempts to control or shape it or how they do it. (Thanks to R John Howe for this example.)