

CHAMBERLAIN AMONG THE MUTINEERS

A LEADERSHIP ALLEGORY ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

On May 23, 1863, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain awoke to a huge problem. Promoted to command of the 20th Maine just three days earlier, Chamberlain was told that his unit of 400 men was to be “strengthened” by the addition of 175 disengaged employees – mutineers – from the newly disbanded 2nd Maine. Authorized by his army and corps commander to execute the entire lot if necessary, Chamberlain instead orchestrated perhaps the greatest intervention in the annals of disengaged employees and in so doing saved the mutineers, strengthened his own unit, and became a hinge factor at Gettysburg, the war’s greatest battle. This historical incident perfectly illustrates the findings of cutting-edge research from the Government Accountability Office and Dale Carnegie on the drivers of employee engagement and how supervisors can elicit engagement.

Part one of this module discusses the historical origins of the 2nd Maine mutiny as an entrée into the emotional drivers of employee engagement. Dale Carnegie’s research has identified disinterest, irritation, and discomfort as the three emotional categories that lead to disengagement. The mutineers were **irritated** that their enlistment contract had been broken, were **disinterested** in their organization as it was not producing worthwhile results, and were **uncomfortable** with the army’s response to their mutiny – denial of food, plans to transfer them to a new unit, and the threat of death. Letters these mutineers wrote home illustrate this part of the module, giving participants an opportunity to see first-hand how these men explained their descent into disengagement.

Part two reveals the techniques Chamberlain used to transform these mutineers into engaged employees. After removing the causes of negative emotions, Carnegie’s research shows that eliciting three or more positive emotions unleashes engagement. Chamberlain made clear how much he **valued** the experience these veterans brought to his rookie unit, **empowered** the mutineers with positions of responsibility, and **inspired** them with a reminder of the importance of their work. In so doing Chamberlain built a personal relationship with the men while restoring pride in the organization for which they worked, two other key factors identified by the Government Accountability Office as driving engagement. This component is illustrated by Chamberlain’s letters and accounts and also by a short clip from the 1993 Ron Maxwell movie *Gettysburg*.



The final part covers the Battle of Gettysburg where Chamberlain’s hard work paid off. Substantially outnumbered but holding the critical left flank of the Union army, the regiment would have been unable to maintain their position – thereby ensuring Union victory – had they not been reinforced by the former mutineers of the 2nd Maine. In 1864 many of these former mutineers would *reenlist* in the 20th Maine, showing their evolution from disengaged to enthusiastic and builder employees – the type every organization desires.

As a concluding exercise participants draw upon the day’s insights to create action plans to boost engagement within their own team and the larger organization.

