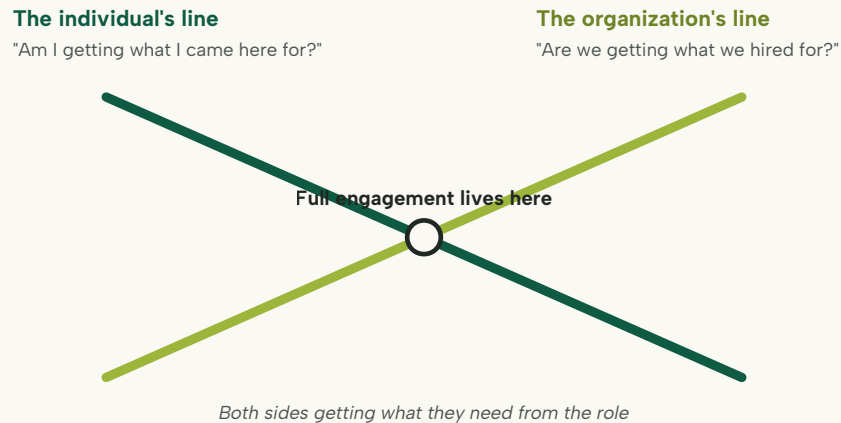




Unspoken Expectations

The X-Model of engagement — and why both sides of it are carrying invisible expectations

Every working relationship is two deals at once. The organization has a line: *maximum contribution* — we need this person delivering on what we hired them for. The individual has a line: *maximum satisfaction* — I need this job to give me what I came here for. Engagement is what happens where those two lines cross: both sides getting what they need from the role.



Where people actually live on the X

The state	What it looks like
Fully engaged	High contribution, high satisfaction. Doing their best work and getting what matters to them. Fewer people live here than you'd hope.
High contribution, low satisfaction	Delivering hard for the organization while quietly running on empty. These are your next resignations — and they look like your best people right up until they leave.
High satisfaction, low contribution	Happy, comfortable, and coasting. The job serves them; the organization isn't getting its side of the deal.
Low on both	Disengaged. Usually the end state of a deal that broke somewhere with no conversation about it.

The part that gets missed

Both lines run on expectations that were never written down. The organization's real expectations go beyond the job description — be flexible, absorb the extra, read the room. And the individual's real expectations were never in the offer letter — growth, recognition, a schedule that lets them have a life, work that means something. **Nobody's hiding these on purpose. They're invisible to both sides — until one of them goes unmet.**

That's why disengagement so rarely announces itself. The deal breaks silently, one unspoken expectation at a time, and the exit interview is where you finally hear the terms.

Three moves that keep the deal visible

- **Ask, don't assume.** "What does this job need to give you this year for it to be working?" is a question rarely gets asked. Everyone has an answer to it.
- **Name your side out loud.** If the real expectation is beyond the job description, say it — an expectation someone doesn't know about is one they can only fail.
- **Check both lines, not one.** Performance conversations audit their line. Put the other line on the agenda too — satisfaction is a leading indicator; contribution problems are usually the lagging one.

The X-Model of Employee Engagement was developed by BlessingWhite (now part of GP Strategies), whose research on the intersection of individual satisfaction and organizational contribution underpins this overview. What's here is my applied summary for working leaders — the full model and research are theirs, and worth reading.

Want this as a session for your team or conference? This guide pairs with Heather's signature keynote, "The Invisible Job Description" — the expectations nobody writes down but every employee carries, and what leaders do about them before people walk out the door. heatherlambert.speaker@gmail.com · 615.434.5180