When the dust finally settled, we made a discovery: **Measuring the strength of a workplace can be simplified to twelve questions.** These twelve questions don't capture everything you may want to know about your workplace, but they do capture the most information and the most important information. They measure the core elements needed to attract, focus, and keep the most talented employees.

Here they are:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel like my work is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?
11. In the last six months, have I talked with someone about my progress?
12. At work, have I had opportunities to learn and grow?

These twelve questions are the simplest and most accurate way to measure the strength of a workplace.
RETENTION (OR LESS TURN OVER):

* What about employee retention? Strangely enough, only five of the twelve questions revealed a link to retention (also most influenced by the manager):

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?

2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?

3. Do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?

5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?

7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?

Most people would instinctively agree with the generalization "Engaged employees will stay longer." But our research suggests that the link between employee opinion and employee retention is subtler and more specific than this kind of generalization has allowed.

Even more than the rest, these five questions are most directly influenced by the employee's immediate manager.

What does this tell us?

It tells us that people leave managers, not organizations/companies.

So much money has been thrown at the challenge of keeping good people -- in the form of better pay, better perks, and better training -- when, in the end, turnover is mostly a manager issue. If you have a turnover problem, look first to your managers.
OVERALL MOST POWERFUL:

* Of the twelve, the most powerful questions are those with a combination of the strongest links to the most business outcomes. Armed with this perspective, we now know that the following six are the most powerful questions:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. Do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?

As a manager, if you want to know what you should do to build a strong and productive workplace, securing 5's to these six questions would be an excellent place to start.

MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

Base Camp: "What do I get?"

When you first start a new role, your needs are pretty basic. You want to know what is going to be expected of you. How much are you going to earn? How long will your commute be? Will you have an office, a desk, even a phone? At this stage you are asking, "What do I get?" from this role.

Of the twelve, these two fundamental questions measure Base Camp:

1. Do I know what is expected of me?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?

Camp 1: "What do I give?"

You climb a little higher. Your perspective changes. You start asking different questions. You want to know whether you are any good at the job. Are you in a role where you can excel? Do other people think you are excelling? If not, what do they think about you? Will they help you? At this stage your questions center around "What do I give?" You are focused on your individual contribution and other people's perceptions of it.

These four questions measure Camp 1:

3. Do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
Each of these questions helps you know not only if you feel you are doing well in the role (Q3), but also if other people value your individual performance (Q4), if they value you as a person (Q5), and if they are prepared to invest in your growth (Q6.) These questions all address the issue of your individual self-esteem and worth. As we will see, if these questions remain unanswered, all of your yearnings to belong, to become part of a team, to learn and to innovate, will be undermined.

Camp 2: "Do I belong here?"

You keep climbing. By now you've asked some difficult questions, of yourself and of others, and the answers have, hopefully, given you strength. Your perspective widens. You look around and ask, "Do I belong here?" You may be extremely customer service oriented -- is everyone else as customer driven as you? Or perhaps you define yourself by your creativity -- are you surrounded by people who push the envelope, as you do? Whatever your basic value system happens to be, at this stage of the climb you really want to know if you fit.

These four questions measure Camp 2:

7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission of my company make me feel my job is important?
9. Are my co-workers committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?

Camp 3: "How can we all grow?"

This is the most advanced stage of the climb. At this stage you are impatient for everyone to improve, asking, "How can we all grow?" You want to make things better, to learn, to grow, to innovate. This stage tells us that only after you have climbed up and through the earlier three stages can you innovate effectively. Why? Because there is a difference between "invention" and "innovation." invention is mere novelty -- like most of us, you might have devised seventeen new ways of doing things a few weeks after starting in your new role. But these ideas didn't carry any weight. By contrast, innovation is novelty that can be applied. And you can innovate, you can apply your new ideas, only if you are focused on the right expectations (Base Camp), if you have confidence in your own expertise (Camp 1), and if you are aware of how your new ideas will be accepted or rejected by the people around you (Camp 2). If you cannot answer positively to all these earlier questions, then you will find it almost impossible to apply all your new ideas.

These two questions measure Camp 3:

11. In the last six months, has someone talked with me about my progress?
12. This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

The Summit

If you can answer positively to all of these twelve questions, then you have reached the summit. Your focus is clear. You feel a recurring sense of achievement, as though the best of you is being called upon and the best of you responds every single day. You look around and see others who also seem to thrill to the challenge of their work. Buoyed by your mutual understanding and your shared purpose, you climbers look out and forward to the challenges marching over the horizon.
It is not easy to remain at the summit for long, with the ground shifting beneath your feet and the strong winds buffeting you this way and that. But while you are there, it is quite a feeling.

If this is the psychological climb you made (or failed to make) from the moment you began your current role to the moment you felt fully engaged in this role, then where are you?

Camp 1? Camp 3? The summit?

Ask yourself those twelve questions. Your answers can give you a read on where you are on the mountain. Perhaps your company is going through times of change and you find yourself languishing down at Base Camp. Change can do that to a person -- you genuinely want to commit, but the uncertainty keeps pushing you down and down. ("Quit telling me how great the future is going to be. Just tell me what is expected of me today.")

Perhaps you have just been promoted -- you felt as though you were at the summit in your previous role, but now you find yourself right back down at Camp 1, with new expectations and a new manager. ("I wonder what he thinks of me. I wonder how he will define success.") Yes, even when good things happen you can quickly find yourself at the base of a new mountain, with a long climb ahead.

Of course, the climb toward the summit is more complicated than this picture. Not only will people trade one stage off against another, but each individual will also place a slightly different value on each stage of the climb. For example, you might have taken your current role simply because it offered you the chance to learn and grow -- in a sense, you fired straight in to Camp 3. And if these higher-level needs are being met, then you will probably be a little more patient in waiting for your manager to make his expectations crystal clear (Base Camp). Similarly, if you feel very connected to your team members (Camp 2), then you may be prepared to stick this out for a while longer, even though you feel that your role on the team doesn't allow you to use your true talents (Camp 1).

However, these kinds of individual trade-offs don't deny the basic truth of the mountain -- regardless of how positively you answer the questions at Camp 2 or Camp 3, the longer your lower-level needs remain unmet, the more likely it is that you will burn out, become unproductive, and leave.

In fact, if you do find yourself answering positively to Camps 2 and 3, but negatively to the questions lower down, be very careful. You are in an extremely precarious position. On the surface everything seems fine -- you like your team members (Camp 2), you are learning and growing (Camp 3) -- but deep down you are disengaged. Not only are you less productive than you could be, but you would jump ship at the first good offer.

We can give this condition a name: mountain sickness.

In the physical world, mountain sickness is brought on by the lack of oxygen at high altitudes. Starved of oxygen, your heart starts pounding. You feel breathless and disoriented. If you don't climb down to lower altitudes, your lungs will fill with fluid and you will die. There is no way to cheat mountain sickness. There is no vaccine, no antidote. The only way to beat it is to climb down and give your body time to acclimatize.
Inexperienced climbers might suggest that if you have lots of money and not much time, you could helicopter in to Camp 3 and race to the summit. Experienced guides know that you would never make it. Mountain sickness would sap your energy and slow your progress to a crawl. These guides will tell you that to reach the summit you have to pay your dues. During your ascent you have to spend a great deal of time between Base Camp and Camp 1. The more time you spend at these lower reaches, the more stamina you will have in the thin air near the summit.

In the psychological world, their advice still applies. Base Camp and Camp 1 are the foundation. Spend time focusing on these needs, find a manager who can meet these needs, and you will have the strength necessary for the long climb ahead. Ignore these-needs and you are much more likely to psychologically disengage.

AN EPIDEMIC OF MOUNTAIN SICKNESS

Now put your manager's hat back on.

The essence of the findings lie in the 4 Keys of great managers and the 12 Questions that give organizations the information they need to attract, focus, and keep the most talented employees.

The 4 Keys of great managers:

1. Select for talent - the authors define talent as "recurring patterns of behavior" and state that great managers find the match between talents and roles.

2. Define the right outcomes - managers needs to turn talent into performance. This can be done by defining the right outcomes and letting people find their own route toward the outcomes.

3. Focus on strengths - managers need to concentrate on strengths and not on weaknesses.

4. Find the Right Fit - managers need to assign roles to employees that give the employees the greatest chance of success.

Select People Based on Talent

During the Gallup interviews, great managers stated that they selected staff members based on talent, rather than experience, education, or intelligence. Gallup defined “talents” by studying the talents needed to achieve in 150 distinct roles. Talents identified are:

- **striving** - (examples: drive for achievement, need for expertise, drive to put beliefs in action),
- **thinking** – (examples: focus, discipline, personal responsibility), and
- **relating** – (examples: empathy, attentiveness to individual differences, ability to persuade, taking charge).