

10 Ways to Improve Employee Engagement

An engaged workforce requires participation and effort from both the employee and employer. Leaders must do what they can to provide a platform for engagement and offer the opportunity for employees to participate in moving the company forward. After all, a disengaged employee costs the company money. Data indicates that an actively disengaged employee costs an organization about 34 percent of his or her salary. The following discusses the 10 best practices that, in my experience, keep employees engaged with current business practices and well into the future.

1. Identify brand ambassadors and empower them to connect with employees.

Ambassadors are employees who live and breathe company culture and values. They promote productivity through positive interactions with employees and customers. No matter the company size, most owners would have no problem identifying their brand ambassadors. These employees are loyal and continually deliver stellar job performance.

Once you have identified your ambassadors, let them assist with training new employees during the onboarding process, if they are not already involved. This will make new employees feel at home, give them a friendly face to connect with, and provide a mentor to ask questions of—ensuring quality engagement from the start. Ambassadors can also encourage new employees to get involved with company events right away.

2. Engage with and invest in your employees.

Do you create opportunities for professional betterment? Employee training is more than just a compliance and training standard. It's perceived as an actual benefit by employees. It's rare that an employee

leaves because a company invested too much in them. Give your people opportunities to learn and grow. Allow them to participate in trainings, conferences and webinars. When an employee does attend a training event, ask them to share their experience with the team. This will empower them to continue growing and also make them an additional resource of knowledge for your entire team.

3. Work hard, play hard.

Find reasons to celebrate. Intentional celebrations or even competitions can provide opportunities for employees to bond and bring out team spirit. Any time management can organize office contests, where a group of employees can win bragging rights, it boosts morale and productivity. Some easy-to-implement examples are seasonal door or workspace personalizing, Halloween costume contests or holiday decorating. As a leader, you have the chance to make days remarkable. Happy employees lead to happier customers. Productivity is important, but so is having fun.

4. Introduce a health and wellness program.

The core of every successful wellness program is behavior change. Educating employees on healthy behaviors can lead to a reduction in health risks, which can reduce chronic disease and overall health care costs. Most businesses can't justify hiring a full-time health and wellness coordinator, but there are a lot of little things you can do to promote engagement in wellness, fitness and health. It can be as simple as providing fresh fruit in the break area. You can also reach out to local fitness facilities to see if they would extend your company/employees a membership discount.

5. Help employees find friends at work.

Create opportunities for new connections to form, and existing working relationships to strengthen in a social setting. Organize after-work events where coworkers can gather to paint, line dance or even try their hand at

group trivia. It takes little to no investment to create opportunities like this. Forty-six percent of working professionals believe that work friends are important to their overall happiness. Further, many young employees are quick to connect with their coworkers on social media channels. It's wise to pay attention to employees who are thriving because of their relationships at work.

6. Showcase your stars.

If you want your people to be superstars, you may want to treat them as such. Consider launching an awards program that includes a peer nomination and selection process that honors people who are doing great things. Of course, there are many other ways to shine the light on people. Send a monthly email highlighting employees who deserve a shout out. It is exciting to receive these emails and read about individuals recognized for their hard work. Give employees a special call out during a team meeting—be specific on what win they had and how it impacts the company. Being recognized is pretty fulfilling.

7. Allow plenty of opportunities to get involved.

Workplace involvement increases ownership and commitment, which retains your best employees. Even more, it fosters an environment where people choose to be motivated and to contribute. If you have a project that requires internal buy-in, collaboration and multiple skill sets, then consider employee involvement by way of a project planning committee.

These employee involvement efforts stretch assignments beyond regular work. It's a proven way to get employees involved in planning and decision-making that aligns with your corporate mission and strategy. Plus, these types of projects usually give you a rare close up into new skill sets that you may not have known exist among your people.

8. Adapt to the multigenerational workforce.

Today, four and sometimes five generations are working together in an organization. Run your numbers and adapt. Break down your workforce to figure out which groups you should be engaging. However, it isn't always about adapting to a specific segmented age group. It's always important to put yourself in somebody else's shoes.

While you can't assume that you will know what another person is feeling or thinking, trying to empathize with somebody from a different background or demographic could help you figure out what makes that person tick and what motivates them. You can then adjust your engagement strategy accordingly.

9. Communicate the company strategy at all levels.

Employees want to know what purpose they serve and how they fit into the grand scheme of the company's success. You should always reiterate your corporate strategy to employees through the various mediums used to communicate to employees including email, presentations and company events. When people feel as though they are part of your strategy and mission, they'll give you loyalty and expertise in return.

10. Welcome questions and encourage critical thinking.

It's easy to get caught in the trap of traditional thinking and non-questioning from employees. Always encourage people to ask questions. But, be prepared for any type of question. I can recall a time where I asked a vulnerable question during a meeting. Looking back, I'm certain I was not the only person in the room who didn't know the answer. By feeling comfortable to step out and ask, it benefited everyone involved and also strengthened my confidence and empowered me to become more engaged during meetings. Encourage brainstorming and set the stage for safe question asking.

There's an opportunity for business leaders to raise the bar as it pertains to employee engagement. There is a desire to exhaust every effort to

improve employees. The challenge is to figure out what factors keep staff engaged. By implementing these tactics, leaders can create an environment of loyalty, generate excitement about the future, and develop a sense of ownership toward the business and the community you serve.