

# 5 Strategies To Dramatically Enhance Workforce Engagement Right Now

## Introduction:

**Employee engagement is not as simple as job satisfaction.** It is more like a sum of its parts. Employee engagement is the rational and emotional connection employees feel that contributes to a willingness to give their discretionary effort at work.

**Employee engagement in the U.S. workplace is at an all-time low.** The annual costs of this troublesome situation are estimated in the hundreds of billions. This state of the American workforce puts a drag on businesses and the economy at large, especially as we attempt to recover from this financial crisis.

**My experience has been** that developing workforce engagement is one of the few, easy to reach areas of profitability that is within a company's immediate control. The ROI of this effort is immediate.

**Engaged employees bring their hearts and minds to work, they:**

- Drive productivity and profits.
- Drive innovation and creativity.
- Create an exceptional customer experience.

**An engaged workforce does not build itself.** Leaders and managers must work tenaciously to make their company competitive *and* profitable.

**It is the ironclad law of business** to compete successfully in the marketplace while improving the standard of living for the workforce. It is simply unacceptable for businesses to accede to the idea that a

disengaged workforce is a sign of the times. The ethics of business places the onus of this change on leadership and managers.

**Employee engagement is a real and sustainable competitive advantage** that is not easy duplicated. I wrote this paper to help you seize the opportunity to begin to create a *culture* of engagement. I hope you find it useful.

## 1. Manager Influence:

The first strategy is to carefully and strategically select managers to fill positions. Managers are linchpins in a company. They model the behavior that employees follow. A manager is in a unique, high demand position that requires a specific skill set along with natural tendencies to support, engage and empower team members.

**Anyone who has ever had a boss** will know intuitively that attitude and feelings about work are directly related to their supervisor. Managers are embedded within the workforce. Employees watch managers and in a sense imprint their every move.

If a manager is an ambassador for the company, an “evangelist employee,” associates will pick up on this and follow their lead. This daily influence over time will develop employees in the likeness of the manager.

## 2. Create Connection:

All employees must know and understand how they contribute to the goals and overall mission of the company. A manager who shows that they care about an individual employees’ contribution will jump-start a connection. The millions of tiny, seemingly insignificant daily interactions between managers and employees are in fact, wildly significant.

**Engagement begets engagement.** If a manager initiates an “engagement relationship” with the workforce—showing what is expected, providing the tools for the job, recognizing good work, asking for input and opinions, listening and keeping cool when things heat up; the employees will begin to outwardly demonstrate engagement.

### **3. Develop Employees:**

A manager who knows employees' strengths and creates projects and assignments to use and enhance those strengths is rewarded by employee engagement. Caring holds more significance than cost with this strategy. If an employee feels that someone (especially a supervisor) at work encourages his or her development you will see engagement surge. If this kind of employee experience is blanketed over the entire workforce, you will see productivity surge.

### **4. Communicate:**

Keep the direct lines of communication open. Not email! Email is not a substitute for communication. Remember the old "How We Communicate" mantra—7% words, 38% tone, and a whopping 55% non-verbal. This is even more imperative when you are trying to create workforce engagement.

An employee with a problem supported by an approachable; calm, open-minded, available-when-needed manager, is a recipe for engagement. This interaction and "attention experience" will demonstrate to the employee that he/she is important, their contribution is important and the opportunity to do one's best work exists everyday.

### **5. Initiate and Support From The Top:**

Change occurs on the "floor" with manager and workforce interaction. But this effort must be initiated and continually supported from the top. The "C" suite must keep workforce engagement front and center. Everyone must know it is the priority. Discuss it at meetings; send out newsletters and memos with tips and advice. Celebrate all the mileposts and wins, small and large.

Harness employee engagement to performance measures of managers. Empower both managers and employees to identify areas of needed change and work to create a difference in each department.

If you begin to deliberately initiate this process, employees will take notice. As your efforts gradually and incrementally progress, word will spread like the message "free doughnuts in the break room," soon everyone will know. Employees will begin telling stories of their experiences. These stories will be shared, repeated and echoed. The

stories will create new feelings among employees and they will relate to new experiences.

The new feelings, experiences and stories will cultivate a new culture, one that you initiated, a culture of employee engagement.

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