# Seven ways to increase employee engagement

In an effort to increase employee engagement, employers should provide training, opportunities for personal and professional development, mentoring and recognition programs, and fulfilling work. Increasingly, many employees want their companies to demonstrate corporate social responsibility and support the environment, the community and other meaningful causes.



Perhaps the most effective tools in an organization's set of engagement strategies are smart managers who show they value their employees' skills and contributions. No matter how many programs and benefits companies establish to retain top talent, employees won't care, or will even leave, if they do not have a good relationship with their boss. To enhance engagement within your team, consider doing the following:

1. **Support career goals.** Make career planning part of the performance appraisal process. Provide challenging and meaningful work that allows people to learn new skills and acquire the experience to reach the next step in their professional journey. Good leaders challenge employees and instil confidence that those challenges can be achieved. Give your team members the tools and resources they need, encourage them to seek training and development opportunities (many of which can be on the job, not always in a classroom), and mentor younger workers so they can successfully navigate their way through the business world.

2. **Communicate with clarity.** Engaged employees are emotionally invested in their job and their organization. They want to be part of moving the company forward. Therefore, it's important to communicate what senior management is contemplating or doing. People don't need to know highly confidential information, but they do need to know any change of direction planned by the company, its short- and long-term plans, corporate successes and failures and so forth. They need to know context; hear the message several times, from different people, and have time to ask questions and understand what this means for them and for their role. Communicate often, with intention, and follow through. Managers should also let their teams know of plans for the department or unit. Communication should be clear, honest and timely. It's hard for people to be fully engaged if they feel disconnected from what the organization hopes to achieve and how goals can best be reached.

3. **Offer positive feedback.** Surveys repeatedly show that employees feel that they receive immediate feedback when they make an error or if they're performing below expectations, but less often praise or recognition when they do well. Engaged employees feel they're making a positive contribution so managers need to take time to praise, encourage and, when needed, coach and mentor employees. As a manager, you know your team best and what each individual employee needs. A pat on the back will be the ticket for some, while others will relish a more public recognition of their efforts.

4. **Give people control.** People like to have control of their job and leaders can create opportunities for this to happen. Are you flexible and attuned to the needs of your employees as well as the organization? Do you involve employees in decision-making, particularly when they will be directly affected by the decision? Do employees have a say in setting important goals? Are employees able to voice their ideas in a safe and open environment?

5. **Foster relationships.** Studies show that when employees work in teams and have the trust and co-operation of their team members, they outperform teams which lack good relationships. Great leaders are team builders; they create an environment that fosters trust and collaboration. Being cared about by colleagues is a strong predictor of employee engagement.

6. **Show appreciation.** Plaques and certificates are nice, but usually end up in the individual's desk drawers. Show appreciation and recognition year-round. For example, take your team out to lunch as a thank you for reaching an important goal, give them the rest of the day off, or host a team-building session at your home**.** Mixing in the occasional opportunity for families to gather and enjoy a company-sponsored event can also be meaningful – a party for children during the holidays or a family fun day are great examples.

7. **Demonstrate corporate responsibility.** Engaged employees are proud of the company for whom they work. A company that is actively involved in its community, helps the less fortunate, or makes improving the lives of others or the environment part of its mission will be especially appreciated by younger workers. As a double engagement bonus, offer employees a role in how Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs are run, so they feel their contributions are valued in more ways other than their work.

It is important to remember that the ways to increase engagement vary by group and by your team's individual needs. Perhaps some of the tips above may be useful, while others may be less applicable, depending on the demographics and unique needs of your employees. Depending on the generational breakdown of your team, some of these tips may not sway engagement results as much as you'd like; perhaps your unique mix requires a blend of these options. If you need assistance with employee engagement for your team, consider contacting your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) for a manager consultation. Experts in the field can help tailor your engagement strategies based on the challenges and demands of your team.

Finally, remember that employee engagement is a direct reflection of how employees feel about their team and company. They also want their managers and their senior leaders to walk the talk when they proclaim that "our employees are our most valuable asset." Have you done an employee engagement survey recently? How did *you* measure up?