

Employee Engagement

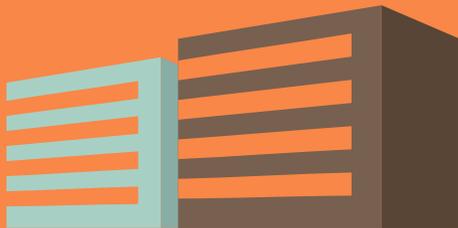
claromentis

Introduction

A reported 85% of company executives cite employee engagement as being “important” in [this year’s Deloitte University Press survey](#).

Not only that, employee engagement is now considered a CEO issue, rather than something that is reviewed once a year by HR. Statistics like these highlight that something profound is happening. Business leaders have begun to notice the connection between employee engagement, productivity, and retention.

Couple this with the report that only 32% of employees are engaged at work, and it’s clear something really needs to be done, and fast.



85% of company executives cite employee engagement as being “important”.

Only 32% of employees are engaged at work.



So why the sudden focus on engagement?

Actually, measuring employee engagement is not new. [Gallup](#) has been reporting on levels of employee engagement since 2000, which has shown a stagnant rate of around 30% each year. But the changing business landscape has potentially brought the subject into the limelight, which may be why we keep hearing about it. Increasing public exposure to a company's culture, via review websites like Glassdoor, and social media platforms, mean that businesses can no longer hide any discrepancies. Furthermore, the continued increase of Millennials in the workplace mean that they bring with them new talent and new expectations. Each generation will have their own set of career priorities, and for Millennials in particular, feeling actively engaged at work is at the top of the list. And if companies are lagging behind engagement-wise, then it's no wonder employee engagement is getting so much bad press.

Since 2000, employee engagement has remained at around 30% each year.



Employee engagement is a high priority for Millennials.

Employee engagement dissected

You may think your company has employee engagement under control. After all, you send out a survey to all staff once a year asking them if they're happy, and input all the results into a spreadsheet. Job done, right? Well, not exactly. What these surveys fail to deliver are actionable results to improve employee engagement. They provide numbers, not solutions.

What's needed is an understanding about what employee engagement is and isn't. And sending annual surveys to tick a box isn't the answer.

Contrary to popular belief, employee engagement isn't directly related to happiness or job satisfaction. It's a little more complicated than that. Research conducted in 2015 by employee wellbeing consultants, [TINYpulse](#), aimed to show which factors contributed to employee engagement rates. The results revealed that workplace culture was a huge driver of engagement, as well as colleague and peer relationships. Reasons for disengagement included feeling unappreciated and undervalued, and a lack of professional development opportunities.

Causes of engagement and disengagement seem obvious when printed in black and white, but the solutions can be difficult to put into effect. Every employee is different, and engagement may not be solvable via a one-size-fits-all approach (so stop sending that survey!) A better tactic might be to assess the needs of staff at different stages of their career. After all, engagement rates will vary between a team member's first day on the job, and a team member who has been with the company for 10 years.

Employee engagement isn't directly related to happiness or job satisfaction.



Reasons for disengagement included feeling unappreciated and undervalued, and a lack of professional development opportunities.

Improving engagement for new starters



Typically, levels of engagement will be high for new starters. Full of enthusiasm, ideas, and hope, new starters' expectations of a company will be high, so make sure they don't fall over any potential disengagement hurdles. The first month in a new job is incredibly important in terms of making a good impression, and this works both ways. A new team member will be working hard to show their commitment, and the company employing them should reciprocate.

Review the onboarding process

Having a new recruit join the team is the perfect opportunity to review the company's onboarding process. If this entails paperwork, PowerPoint presentations, and endless meetings, then this sets an unfavourable precedent for the rest of their employment.

Move beyond a static onboarding process, and focus on providing new recruits with an exciting and proactive starter package. Being held back when you're raring to go can be a frustrating experience for a new starter, especially if it goes beyond the formalities. Instead, offer training opportunities to get them up to speed quickly, so they can get stuck into significant work straight away.



Engagement levels for new starters are high - so ensure you make a good impression with a proactive onboarding process.



Company culture



Integrating new starters into the company culture is a vital part of the onboarding process, and can often be overlooked in particularly large enterprises or corporate companies. Arranging a “welcome lunch” is a great way to break the ice and let new starters get to know the team. Introductions between the new recruit and departmental managers is also a great way to encourage interaction, get to know who’s who, and learn more about how the business operates.

Communication before the start date

Go one step further and provide new starters the opportunity to get to know the company and their role within it before their first day. Communication between the new recruit and their manager doesn’t need to be off limits until they arrive into the office; instead, a relationship can blossom before they’ve even started, putting them on good footing for the rest of the onboarding process.



Try engaging with your new starter before they arrive into the office.



Improving engagement for staff moving upwards or sideways



After a team member has become comfortable within the role they were hired to do, they will most likely start to think about their career growth. This can either be upwards into a more senior or managerial role, or sideways into a role with different skills and accountabilities.

During this phase in an employee's career, engagement is vital. If team members want to develop their knowledge or role, and are unsupported, then the risk of turnover is going to be high. The same engagement report from TINYpulse shows that only 25% of employees feel they have professional development opportunities. And a lack of these opportunities is a high contributing factor to why an employee will leave.

Only **25%** of employees feel they have professional development opportunities.



Professional development

Providing your staff with opportunities for developing their knowledge and skills is a proven way to retain talent. And it's a win-win situation; staff feel like they can grow and advance themselves, and employers can benefit from a super talented and agile workforce. It's also worth taking into account the impact that Millennials have on the workforce. 2015 was the first year that Millennials made up the majority of workers, and it's widely reported that professional development is the key to their engagement; even more so than salary. The cost of offering professional development opportunities, via training, conferences, mentoring, or knowledge sharing, is unparalleled in contrast to the cost of losing a talented team member and having to go through the recruitment process.



Personal accountability

Personal accountability was also a key focus for employee engagement in TINYPulse's findings. Staff want ownership of setting their goals and to take initiative, providing a sense of empowerment of their own career path. The results showed that team members want to fulfil their potential and contribute to the success of the workplace, and personal accountability plays a big part in this. And a lack of accountability could lead to a feeling of distrust between management and staff; a huge contributing factor to disengagement.

Regular feedback

Who doesn't want to feel valued and appreciated? In a workplace context, a survey conducted by [15Five](#) showed that employees are 30x more engaged when receiving feedback about their strengths. Providing positive feedback costs nothing, but has a huge effect on employee engagement, and subsequently productivity levels. On the flip side of the coin, 98% of employees are actively disengaged if they receive no feedback at all.

Employees are **30x** more engaged when receiving feedback about their strengths.



98% of employees are actively disengaged if they receive no feedback at all.

Improving engagement for established team members

Established team members are those who have been with the company through thick and thin. They may be part of the senior management team, or they may be an expert in niche areas of the business. Whatever their role, these employees' loyalty should not be overlooked in any circumstances, and reviewing their levels of engagement is just as important.

Colleague relationships

TINY Pulse's survey found that the number one reason employees loved their jobs was down to great colleague relationships. Simply put, team members were more likely to go the extra mile if they felt inspired by their co-workers. The study found that co-workers were a great motivator for engagement levels, encouraging others to learn, grow, and develop. Not only that, fantastic working relationships encourage a culture of knowledge sharing, promoting a productive environment where everyone is passionate about their role within the business.

The amount of importance placed on colleague relationships may be surprising, but think about the alternative. Established employees may have stayed so long in the company because they are used to a certain level of collaborative connections between their peers. If recruitment efforts change, whereby people are hired based on availability rather than suitability, the team dynamic could falter. As a consequence, relationships and communication could start to break down, leading to a risk of disengagement. On a simpler level; we can all provide at least one example of a colleague who drove us mad and drove down motivation!



Great colleague relationships was found to be the number one reason why staff love their job.



Transparency



Research by [Deloitte University Press](#) showed that calls for more transparency are getting louder. Employees want to be trusted to know how the company is doing, and why wouldn't they? Each and every employee invests their time, skills, and knowledge into the business, so understanding the bigger picture is vital to engagement.

This idea is presented as a “culture of sharing” by [15Five](#), and should be embraced. By being open and honest throughout all hierarchies, team members have the freedom to solve problems quickly and efficiently, as they have the information presented to them from the outset. Whether it's good news or bad news, company transparency builds trust and creates opportunities for employees to utilise their skills and respond. The alternative is to leave team members in the dark, and no one ever likes to be a victim of secrecy; especially if the company is in trouble.

Recognition

Team members at this point in their career may be at a crossroads; are they happy where they are, or do they want to explore different roles within the business? It's important to recognise that both are completely valid avenues for exploration, and approaches for improving engagement will differ depending on the outcome. If they are content with the status quo, ensure regular check-ins take place to review any areas of improvement, provide feedback, and communicate any issues. If team members want to try something new, ensure you talk through opportunities for professional development and training.

Summary

In 2016, improving employee engagement is no longer an optional extra; it's absolutely mandatory if employers want to retain their high performing staff and market themselves as a great place to work.

The annual employee engagement survey is dead. Actionable and deliverable results are needed to target the key areas of improvement, and which are appropriate for employees' individual needs and circumstances.

