

# ENGAGE YOUR EMPLOYEES FOR BETTER PERFORMANCE

By Jo Smith, CMC

Did you know engaged employees are more productive and stay with their team and organization longer? Engaging employees might seem like more or unnecessary work, but any extra time invested up front is more than made up for by the benefits of higher quality products and services, lower turnover, reduced costs, and increased profit margins. The work of the manager also becomes easier when employees become more engaged.

## What is employee engagement?

The term “employee engagement” has been used for several years, but it’s rarely defined. Simply put, employee engagement can be described as 1) the level of enjoyment employees experience from their work and 2) employees’ level of commitment to their work, team, and organization. Enjoyment and commitment are separate—workers can love their work, but be dissatisfied with their employer or vice versa. Ideally, however, the two are intertwined, resulting in a high level of overall engagement.

## Why does employee engagement matter?

High levels of engagement lead to improved performance, often significantly improved performance. Some of the measurable benefits of employee engagement include:

- **Productivity.** Employees who enjoy their work and are committed to their team work harder and more effectively. Because they care, they not only produce more, but they also produce better quality results. They’re invested in outcomes.
- **Retention.** Employees who are engaged not only produce more and better work, they’re also more likely to remain with their team and their employer longer. They stay by choice, because they care.
- **Profitability.** When employees are more productive and stay longer,

## The top conditions for engagement are...



Opportunities to use skills



Strong relationship with coworkers



Open and honest relationship with supervisor

Source: SHRM Employee Job Satisfaction and Engagement, 2014.

profitability grows. The cost of turnover varies from industry to industry, but it’s consistently high, often costing 1.5 times the employee’s annual pay.

## How can you improve employee engagement within your team and your organization?

You might think engagement is an executive-level responsibility. It’s true that high-level executives can establish policies, including pay, and set examples that lead to higher levels of engagement. But employee engagement is everyone’s job, especially managers. According to Gallup, “70% of the variance in team engagement is determined solely by the manager.” So what can you, as a manager, do to increase engagement?

Consider that today’s employees want to be their authentic selves so they can leverage their unique strengths to achieve their potential. According to Forbes, employees “want to be trusted and given the freedom to explore and learn within the job.” Does this mean they don’t need guidance and supervision? No, but it means managers need to recognize potential and let go of some control. They need to delegate wisely and allow increasing self-direction as their employees’ capabilities develop. Managers must let go of the idea that their way is the only right way. They need to recognize when their employees must follow precise procedures and when they can be given the freedom to do things differently and to innovate.

That's how employees, teams, and organizations grow and improve.

Following are some fundamental ways managers can engage employees, beginning with two powerful leadership styles identified by Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee.

- **Visionary leadership** is the most powerful leadership style identified by Goleman and his colleagues. Many people I work with tell me, "I'm not visionary." You don't have to create a vision in order to be a visionary leader, but you do need to embody the vision of the organization. For example, Steve Jobs had a vision of a computer on every worker's desk. His managers didn't have to create that vision, but they did have to support it in their words and actions. In doing so, they were using visionary leadership.
- **Coaching leadership** is the second most powerful leadership style identified by Goleman and his colleagues. When I became managing consultant of a global human resource firm's Los Angeles office, I asked each of my employees to create a picture of their perfect job: "Include the projects you want to work on, clients you want to work with, skills you want to use, skills you want to develop, hours you want to work, anything you think of to describe your perfect job." Then I met privately with each employee to discuss their ideas. Could I provide everything they wanted? No. But I told them I'd do everything in my power to help them create their perfect jobs, while meeting the needs of our clients and our organization. I then used the information I gathered in our discussions to assign work, match employees with projects and clients, schedule work, and sometimes provide training. Though I wasn't familiar with the term at the time, that is an example of coaching leadership. The result was a fully engaged team, which led to increased client satisfaction ratings and significantly higher profit margins.
- **Masterful delegation** enables employees to develop their talent while getting the necessary work done. Masterful delegators assess the work

and decide what they must do themselves, what they can delegate, and who they can delegate to based on who already has the skills and who wants or needs to develop the skills. They then meet with their chosen employee, describe the project and their employee's role on the project, provide guidance if the employee is new to the work or ask questions like, "How do you propose doing this project?" if the employee has more experience. They clarify expectations, including communication and timelines. They provide feedback, require their employee to make any necessary changes, accept responsibility for problems and give ample credit for successes.

- **Rewards and recognition** are critical tools for engaging your employees individually and collectively. In our busy lives, it's far too easy to forget to celebrate successes—our own and others'—but your team will benefit greatly from recognition. Financial rewards and extra time off are appreciated, when possible, but don't forget the simple thank yous. When you thank people, be specific, from the simple to the significant: "Thank you for staying late yesterday to meet that deadline!" "Thank you for catching that error in our planning draft!" Compliment your employees, again, being specific: "Your organizational skills are excellent!" They'll not only know you appreciate them, but they'll know what you appreciate and why.

Your conscious use of effective leadership styles, delegation, rewards, and recognition will engage your team, individually and collectively, resulting in improved performance, productivity, and profitability. It might require more effort initially, but it will soon make your management easier, increasing your own performance and enjoyment, as well as your team's. *NWPPA*

*Jo Smith is president of Jo Smith Associates, Inc., and a certified management consultant. She is an executive coach and an instructor for NWPPA and Willamette University.*



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