

Employee Engagement and the Important Role of Managers

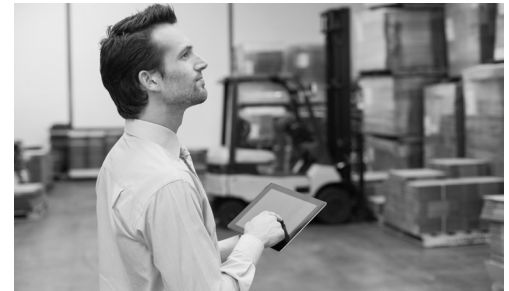


HR professionals, senior managers, and members of boards have been investing time and money in employee engagement for years. In many cases, the results of these efforts have not yielded the desired outcomes. What is employee engagement? Why is employee engagement important? What role do managers have in getting employees engaged?

There are many variations of the definition of employee engagement. Simply stated, it is the extent to which employees are committed to their jobs and to working harder and smarter rather than just showing up and doing as little as possible. In other words, engaged employees contribute discretionary effort in accomplishing their objectives.

These employee engagement survey statements have the *highest correlations to engagement*:

- My job is personally satisfying. People are more likely to be engaged in their jobs when their jobs provide variety and make good use of their knowledge and skill.
- This organization's values are consistent with my own. People want to work for an organization they can be proud of, that is a good fit with their own beliefs, and represents what they consider to be important.
- This organization makes me feel my contribution is important. Most of us want to know that we are more than just a "cog in the wheel." We want to know our contribution is appreciated and considered important to the success of the organization.
- Management is fair and honest. The recent wave of corporate scandals has negatively impacted the credibility of upper management. Employees want to be assured that their management can always be taken at its word.
- This organization is supportive of staff at work and outside of work during times of personal change. Employees look for management to be understanding and flexible when issues outside work create workplace stress.
- Management effectively responds to employee needs. Employees want to know that their needs and welfare are taken into account in management decisions.



What does an engaged employee look like?

MRA's research and experience yields this *composite picture of an engaged employee*. The employee is:

- Constantly seeking out challenges.
- Working on a professional development plan that is tied to strengths, career interests, values, passions.
- Mentally challenged by day-to-day activities.
- Giving extra time to completing important tasks.
- Providing creative value-added solutions to solving problems.
- Going the extra mile to satisfy customers.
- Willingly providing assistance to team members.
- Recommending friends for employment.

- I am interested in the future of this organization. When employees have an active interest in their company's future, they are more willing to give extra effort to meet the needs of their department, company, and customers.
- This organization provides employees with opportunities to develop their skills.
- Employees want to be able to grow in their job, taking on new challenges and learning new skills that will help them in their current and possibly future jobs.
- This organization implements practices that support work/life balance. The issue of work/life balance has grown in importance. Employees want to work for companies that recognize and act on the need for work/life programs and services.
- Management is open to new ideas and ways of doing things. When employees know that their ideas will be asked for and considered, they will feel more ownership of their work and will be more likely to take part in process improvement, lean, and other initiatives that will improve productivity, profitability, and customer service.

The recent focus of many leaders and researchers has been identifying the high leverage drivers that directly impact employee engagement. There are many. Some of the more prominent drivers include work that aligns with the employee's interest and skills, opportunity for growth, degree of pride and belief in the organization, trust and integrity in leadership, recognition for good work, work/life balance, and the employee's manager. All these drivers are important and must be considered with any comprehensive approach to employee engagement. But, the driver with significant immediate influence is the employee's direct manager.

The direct manager has daily contact with the employee. The manager translates organizational objectives into employee work goals. The manager is in the best position to understand employee career interests. The manager "controls" the feedback to the employee. In essence, the manager is the organization's "face" to the employee.


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What can a manager do to promote engagement?

The first step is to put employee engagement on the radar screen. Managers need to change the way they think about managing their work units. Managers tend to place more energy into production rather than the people side. Leaders need to apply the same time, energy, critical thinking, and resources to employee engagement as they do to production, quality, expense ratios, and sales results. Managers need to believe they have some control over the engagement drivers. Once the frame of reference is re-oriented, employee engagement issues and strategies can be identified and implemented. Without this change in thinking, no progress will be made in engaging employees.

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