THE ABCs OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

BUILDING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN YOUR COMPANY
The ABCs of Employee Engagement

INTRODUCTION

The difference between a company’s success and its failure almost always lies in one place: the hands of its employees. Engaged and committed companies are the single variable that makes a company resilient, innovative and powerful enough to achieve organizational excellence.

But even though engagement is one of those ideals that we all aspire to, disengagement is still a rampant problem in today’s workplaces. So how can we cultivate engagement in our companies?

This collection of some of our most popular blog posts will spell out some simple tips and actionable advice to help you grow engagement in your company.

THE ARTICLES

3 // 5 Famously Disengaged Employees And The Lessons They Can Teach Us

A lighthearted look at some serious problems that can cause even the best employees to disengage.

6 // 9 Foolproof Ways To Guarantee Employee Engagement

Tips to boost employee engagement today.

9 // How To Encourage Passionate Employees

Are your employees victims of “presenteeism”? Here are some ways to reignite their enthusiasm.

10 // How to Build a Habit of Engagement

Being thanked inspires a feedback loop that can lead you directly to a habit of engagement.
5 FAMOUSLY DISENGAGED EMPLOYEES AND THE LESSONS THEY CAN TEACH US

By Darcy Jacobsen

It’s been said that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Let’s consider then a lighthearted look at five famous disengaged employees from history and what their stories might teach us. In retrospect, good practices around recognition, culture management and talent management would have made a big difference for these employees. What about yours?

In retrospect, good practices around recognition, culture management and talent management would have made a big difference for these employees.

BENEDICT ARNOLD

Who: War hero and infamous traitor

Former Employer: Continental Congress

Status: Defected

Employer’s Failure: Though Arnold was one of their best leaders and soldier, his superiors failed to recognize or credit him for his successes, and instead unjustly demoted him.

Employer’s Big Loss: West Point (nearly) and the cities later sacked and burned by this angry ex-soldier.

Lesson: Recognize and reward employee contributions.

Details: Arnold, whose name is now synonymous with traitor, was a decorated and respected officer for the Revolutionary cause. Repeatedly overlooked and unrewarded, he was so harassed by his superiors that he demanded (and got) a court-martial to clear his name. Exonerated, but bitter and disillusioned, the brilliant general conspired with the British and then joined their side in the war.

WALT DISNEY

Who: Visionary and entertainment tycoon

Former Employer: Kansas City Star

Status: Fired

Employer’s Failure: The editor of the Kansas City Star newspaper failed to notice the talent he had working for him. He fired Disney as an illustrator because he “lacked imagination and had no good ideas.”

Employer’s Big Loss: Mickey Mouse

Lesson: Discover who your true talent are and cultivate them.

Details: Disney was fired from his job at the paper for... wait for it.... lack of creativity! Clearly, his bosses there failed to inspire him, and that lack of engagement with his work led to lackluster performance. Ironically, years later—after Disney had become wealthy and successful from his ideas— The Walt Disney Company would buy ABC, which owned The Kansas City Star.

continued >
**MARCUS JUNIUS BRUTUS**

**Who:** Roman politician and betrayer

**Former Employer:** Julius Caesar

**Status:** Died in Exile

**Employer’s Failure:** Boss Caesar failed to create a talent management plan that made his employees feel secure in their jobs. So Brutus and pals figured out a way to fire their boss — by way of a pointy dagger.

**Employer’s Big Loss:** His life

**Lesson:** Manage talent wisely and be smart about succession planning.

**Details:** When the idealistic Brutus and his ambitious fellow senators thought Julius Caesar was gathering too much dictatorial power and not being as inclusive as he should be, they started sneaking around behind his back, and in the end stabbed him in it. *Et tu Brute?*

---

**MARTIN LUTHER**

**Who:** Theological whistle-blower and instigator of Reformation

**Former Employer:** Catholic Church

**Status:** Excommunicated

**Employer’s Failure:** Instead of recognizing and supporting Luther for his contributions and reforms, the Church ignored and then retaliated against him.

**Employer’s Big Loss:** A monopoly on Western Christianity. More than 1/3 of Christians today are Protestant, thanks to Luther.

**Lesson:** Listen to and recognize employees for their ideas.

**Details:** Luther was a monk who wanted to reform, not leave the Catholic Church. But his superiors met his ideas with hostility. Luther responded by leading an exodus from the Church, a protest so profound that it spawned a new branch of the Christian religion, Protestantism. The Church later went on to initiate the Counter-Reformation, which addressed most of the issues Luther had raised—but it was too late.

continued >
NIKOLA TESLA

Who: Brilliant inventor, and the real genius behind electricity

Former Employer: Thomas Edison

Status: Resigned to literally take a job digging ditches

Employer’s Failure: Edison promised a bonus if Tesla was successful on a project. After Tesla's completion of the project, Edison reneged. Tesla resigned bitterly.

Employer’s Big Loss: After parting ways from Edison, Tesla went on to discover: FM radio, remote control, robots, spark plugs, fluorescent lights, laser beams, wireless communications, Tesla's turbines, vertical take-off aircraft and the concepts behind the electric car.

Lesson: Appreciate, support and reward your employees, and then happily reap the benefits of their hard work!

Details: The brilliant Serbian-born inventor Tesla was the real genius who harnessed the power of electricity. But employer Edison underestimated and failed to reward Tesla and then lost him as an employee. Though he went on to make many important discoveries, Tesla died in relative obscurity. Edison lost both the genius of Tesla's inventive mind and ultimately the War of Currents.

The good news is that many disengaged employees are really just potentially engaged employees whose passion for their work has been stifled or curdled. Win those folks’ hearts and minds, and you can turn potential disaster into measurable success for your business.
Employee morale is a critical issue for today's workplaces. But while we are all acutely aware of the importance of not letting employee morale bottom out, we don't always have concrete ideas for how we can actually increase morale and employee engagement.

To that end, here are my 9 foolproof ways guarantee employee engagement:

1. **REWARD MISTAKES**

   Employees know when they mess up or fall short of expectations. But never forget, some of the most useful inventions that have been introduced in recent years (like Post-It Notes) were actually mistakes. And it took 39 mistakes before WD-40 got the formula right. That kind of innovation requires an environment in which employees are encouraged to try and fail, and try again. Sometimes it's as important to recognize the importance what we've learned from our mistakes as we move forward as it is to recognize success itself.

2. **PRAISE IN PUBLIC, CORRECT IN PRIVATE**

   (but only if the employee likes public praise)

   While I generally agree with the truism that employees should not be disciplined or called out for poor behavior in public (trust me, if you do, you're only “making an example” of poor management techniques), it's not always true that you should also always praise in public. Culturally, that's just unheard of in some parts of the world. Personally, many people cringe at the thought of that kind of public spotlight – no matter how positive or well intentioned. Make it a point to know your employees well enough to know their preferences.

Innovation requires an environment in which employees are encouraged to try and fail, and try again.

9 FOOLPROOF WAYS TO GUARANTEE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

By Ben Miele
3  **BE HONEST, ALWAYS**

The greatest gift you can give anyone is your trustworthiness as an honest person. That doesn’t mean you have to be brutally honest. But your employees and team members should always be confident they can count on you for honest feedback—both positive and negative. When you’re liberal with your praise, your employees are more willing to hear your corrective criticism as well.

4  **SET HIGH GOALS, AND RECOGNIZE PROGRESS ALONG THE WAY**

Setting impossible goals is not necessarily a problem in itself. After all, how do we know what we can truly achieve if we don’t stretch ourselves? To achieve the impossible goal, however, employees need encouragement and reinforcement along the way. Recognizing progress is just as important as rewarding results.

5  **MAKE WORK MEANINGFUL**

Some believe the best way to get employees to perform at maximum capacity is to threaten to replace them if they don’t. This only serves to demoralize and demotivate. Instead, help employees see the meaning and value in their work, even for tasks and achievements some would not see as valuable. It’s those unsung heroes who often do the work that make it possible for your stars to shine.
MAKE IT CLEAR WHAT YOU EXPECT

Giving employees clear expectations for the results you want to see is far more motivating than vague instructions and expectations that can never be met. But that’s not the same as micromanaging. Instead you should...

TRUST YOUR EMPLOYEES

You hired them for their skills and abilities. You likely invested in training to make sure they can do the job well. If you’ve given them clear instructions and expectations, get out of their way. Let them do what you hired them to do. Give them room to make mistakes as I mentioned above and you’ll likely see even greater results than you could have hoped for.

RECOGNIZE OFTEN

Praise is free. More importantly, specific, frequent and timely praise clearly communicates to employees exactly what it is you expect and hope to see more of in the future.

MAKE ROOM FOR EMPLOYEES TO GROW

Research discussed in Mark Royal and Tom Agnew’s book *The Enemy of Engagement* shows how employees start out in a new job as highly engaged often become much less so over time simply because they become comfortable in their tasks and are no longer challenged. To keep employees engaged, give them room to grow and stretch their abilities into new areas and experiences.

What are other ways you could help guarantee employee engagement?
HOW TO ENCOURAGE PASSIONATE EMPLOYEES

By Thad Peterson

In a recent blog post, we talked about the dangers of having employees who “quit and stay”, and I posed the question: “How can we ensure that employees sustain their passion for their job and their company?”

One answer is a formula from the Ken Blanchard Companies—a renowned coaching and leadership development firm. The formula consists of the “12 Employee Work Passion Factors.”

The 12 factors that drive passion break down into three buckets:

**JOB FACTORS**

- **Autonomy** – Empowering people to make decisions about their work.
- **Meaningful Work** – Making sure employees know that their work matters.
- **Feedback** – Offering timely, relevant, and specific information about performance.
- **Workload Balance** – Having enough time to do tasks well.
- **Task Variety** – Giving people the variety of work that motivates them (which differs wildly from one person to the next).

**ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS**

- **Collaboration** – Fostering cooperation between coworkers.
- **Performance Expectations** – Being explicit about what is expected of people in terms of both quality and quantity.
- **Growth** – Fostering opportunities for career and job growth.
- **Procedural Justice** (Fairness) – Making decisions—and applying rules—fairly and equitably.
- **Distributive Justice** (Rewards) – Distributing compensation and rewards in a fair manner that correlates with people’s achievements and contributions.

**RELATIONSHIP FACTORS**

- **Connectedness with Colleagues** – Creating an environment where people have strong interpersonal relationships with their coworkers.
- **Connectedness with Leader** – Having strong relationships between employees and managers.

In reviewing the list, it’s immediately clear that having a true culture of recognition can play a significant role in enhancing the majority of these factors—and at least two factors in each major bucket.

Will recognition on its own solve the passion problem in every organization? No. Can it be one of the major pillars of ensuring your employees stayed engaged and enthused about their jobs? Absolutely.
How to Build a Habit of Engagement

By Darcy Jacobsen

We have a summer book club here in the office, and one book we read recently was *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*, by Charles Duhigg. You should check it out.

In the book, Duhigg describes what he calls “habit loops” that dictate much of what we do. The pattern is Cue > Routine > Reward, and it drives our behavior in ways we are sometimes not even aware of. By subtly adjusting cues and routines, and linking them with satisfying rewards, Duhigg argues, we can break ourselves of destructive habits and improve our lives exponentially. We create a craving for constructive, rather than destructive, patterns in our lives.

The same model applies to businesses. Transforming one bad habit, Duhigg notes, usually causes a ripple effect that brings with it a systemic positive change and the creation of a host of constructive habits.

One of the examples Duhigg gives of this is the change that Paul O’Neill created when he became CEO of Alcoa in 1987. O’Neill led the company to record profitability by simply addressing one key bad habit. In this case, adjusting company attitudes toward safety.

“I knew I had to transform Alcoa,” O’Neill told Duhigg. “But you can’t order people to change. That’s not how the brain works. So I decided I was going to start by focusing on one thing. If I could start disrupting the habits around one thing, it would spread throughout the entire company.”

The key habit, or “keystone habits” as Duhigg calls them, are influential habits that act as pacesetters for our lives and businesses. If we can establish good keystone habits, he argues, we can significantly improve our lives and businesses. It is keystone habits, says Duhigg, that “explain how Alcoa became one of the best performing stocks in the Dow Jones index, while also becoming one of the safest places on earth.”
How can you tap into this positive habit loop? By connecting cues and desired behavior with appropriate rewards. This is, in fact, why recognition and reward is such a powerful motivator for organizational change, and such a powerful tool in your arsenal for managing culture. By rewarding engagement, we encourage a habit of engagement. When we are able to create a strong, tangible reward for living company values and helping to achieve organizational goals, we establish a habit loop for our employees. We create a craving for positive feedback and appreciation that leads us to do more to further organizational goals.
By practicing this habit, we enter a recognition/engagement feedback loop that brings with it tangible benefits for both the employee and the organization. Just look at the infographic:
The institutional habits of recognition and appreciation let us reinforce company goals and values, and improve employee well-being and interpersonal relationships. The data that recognition yields offers us the ability to manage talent and culture more effectively.

This all results in improved employee engagement—and I think we’re all very aware of the significant advantage an engaged workplace offers in terms of reduced turnover, improved customer relationships, better productivity and overall increases in profitability and shareholder value.

I think it is safe to say, it’s a habit loop we’d all like to get into.

The data that recognition yields offers us the ability to manage talent and culture more effectively.
Interested in learning more about techniques for increasing engagement in your company?

DOWNLOAD THE WHITE PAPER

5 Ways to Avoid the Engagement Abyss
You Know You Need Engagement. Here’s How to Get It.

Or call us at 1-888-7GForce to learn more about the amazing impact strategic recognition can have on engagement.