AEB

Employee Engagement Strategies

How to Engage, Develop, and Retain Your Workforce

You did it! Your organization has sourced, recruited, and assembled a team of incredibly talented individuals all capable of helping your business progress and grow to the next level. But don't stop now. The next step is to effectively manage and lead your team, which means implementing effective employee engagement strategies to engage, develop, and retain your workforce.

This guide can help! Since your employees are likely one of your largest business investments, it is important to focus on how to gain the most value from them. Employee engagement is about fostering a relationship with your employees and creating a workplace environment that is mutually beneficial to their career advancement and your business growth.

However, it is necessary to understand that employee engagement is not a measurement of job satisfaction; and while a contributing factor, isn't an assessment of employee feelings toward their role, management, or company. Rather, employee engagement is the level of motivation, involvement, and commitment employees have toward an organization and their willingness to put discretionary effort into their work.

Keep reading as we uncover the three essential components of an effective employee engagement strategy:

- Whether your team is working remotely or physically located in your office, learn how to engage with your employees by leveraging your employee value proposition and maintaining positive employee morale.

- Employee development is an important part of employee engagement. See how that begins with a solid onboarding process and continues with leadership that manages with inclusion and empathy.

- Discover how to retain your employees with proactive ways to reduce turnover, minimize your exposure to employee poaching, and visibly show your employees their value to you.

Strategies to Engage with Your Employees

The relationship between employers and employees has changed dramatically over the years. Some of this evolved naturally based on how we live our daily lives, other changes were pushed due to regulatory changes or workforce demands. Regardless of the how and when, interactions are much less transactional and more relational.

Employee engagement starts with organizations interacting and connecting with their employees, and developing a strategy to do this means:

- Clarifying and enforcing why talented individuals join your organization and why current employees stay

- Supporting a healthy mindset with intentional and authentic relationships

- Understanding managing employees is not a one-size-fits-all process. A top-down, segregated employer-employee approach no longer works

Go back to your employee value proposition (EVP)

An employee value proposition can encompass quite a bit, but at its core it conveys the value employees gain from working at your organization over anywhere else, specifically your competition. Think beyond employee perks and reworded mission statements to a means of establishing credibility with top talent in your industry and the fundamentals that remind current employees of what makes you unique.

An employee value proposition defines the ebb and flow relationship between employees and employers. It starts by explaining why someone joins a company and then reminds them why they stay.

The purpose is to enforce the reasons that make your employees proud to work for you. When you do that, the results are higher levels of employee engagement, satisfaction, and commitment. Committed employees are more productive and take greater pride in their work output, which directly translates into higher profitability for your company.

Make your EVP the guidepost for alignment between what is communicated to your employees and their daily reality.

- Gather feedback from performance reviews to measure your EVP against company culture.
- Take pulse surveys and watch for changing values that could signal shifts in employee perceptions.
- Conduct exit interviews to understand changing perspectives and areas to address.

An employee value proposition is a living statement that puts your brand's reputation and trust on the line. Invest the time and effort to craft your EVP thoughtfully, and then the ongoing energy to live that out daily.

[Visit this blog to learn how to craft your EVP, use it effectively, and gauge when it may be time to update it.](#)

Focus on maintaining healthy employee morale

Now that the stage has been set for creating and maintaining a positive, engaging company culture, the next area of focus is the morale of your employees. Not every employee is going to come to work every day with overflowing excitement and zeal. However, employees whose enthusiasm has waned can negatively affect colleagues, your brand image, and customers if gone unchecked.

The key to maintaining healthy employee engagement and morale starts by knowing the warning signs that a problem may exist. This means that managers and leaders must know their employees well enough to notice when behaviors and attitudes are outside of normal.

Watch for these indicators that closer attention is needed:

- Poor or inconsistent **attendance**
- Declining **engagement** or ambition
- Becoming withdrawn or intentional **avoidance**
- Waning productivity and **performance levels**
- Apathetic or negative **attitudes**

Also, be mindful of your company's turnover rate. While employees will leave your organization for a host of valid reasons over time, a sudden increase in the number or frequency of employees leaving should set off some alarms.

Fortunately, there are proactive measures businesses can take to maintain and boost healthy employee and overall team morale.

- **Assess the situation by analyzing, asking, and seeking answers.** Take notice of any warning signs and possible causes. Confirm your observations and conclusions by talking directly to your employees. Seek feedback and encourage open dialogue.

- **Intentionally work at connecting with your employees.** Let employees know you care about all aspects of their lives, not just what you can actively observe during business hours.

- **Be transparent and proactively communicate.** Share good news freely and bad news honestly.

- **Resolve conflicts or issues quickly and consistently.** Knowing leadership is supportive and cares can provide a huge boost to employee morale.

- **Recognize employee accomplishments.** Not every situation or event needs to be acknowledged, but do make the effort to recognize and applaud the ones that matter.

- **Be realistic.** Pay attention to what is going on in your community and the world and how that may be impacting your employees. This also means monitoring workloads and time demands.

- **Encouraging employees to be lifelong learners.** Create, share, and encourage career development and personal growth. Knowledge and learning should never be confined to a specific time frame in life.

- **Encourage time away from work.** Employees need to have dedicated time to relax, unwind, and recharge guilt-free. Lead by example and take your own allocated vacations and make sure your employees do the same.

- **Foster a fun environment.** Yes, there is a time to be laser-focused on the tasks in front of you, but there also needs to be time at work to have a little fun.

The most effective ways to boost morale for employees involve simple acts with an intent to connect on a real and personal level. Let your employees know they matter — because they do — and they will reward you with a business you can all be proud of.
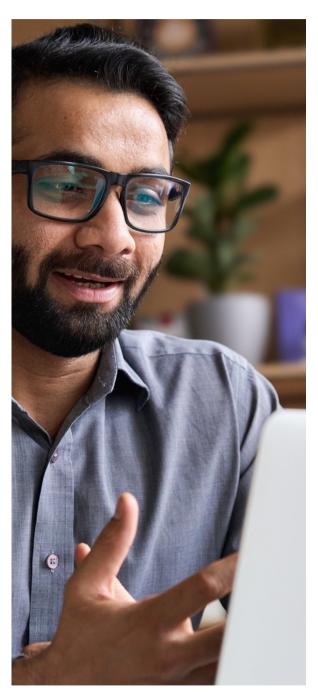
[Get more insight on the causes of low employee morale and the benefits of an inspired workforce here.](#)

Manage with intent

How we work continues to change. Where we work is no longer defined by a physical address. Yet what remains is that all employees crave engagement with leadership and colleagues. What's more, the fundamentals of leading a team of employees are essentially the same regardless of where your team members perform their work.

Inspired employees have higher levels of morale and productivity. Organizations with engaged employees have lower turnover rates and stronger company culture. Intentional management means adapting to the styles and needs of employees and being deliberate with how leadership interacts with their employees.

What does this look like?

- **Set clear expectations and realistic goals.** Communicate clear guidelines for employees on when and how they are to work and assist with establishing short and long-term personal and professional goals. Make sure both are regularly reviewed and supported.

- **Engage with your employees by proactively communicating.** On the receiving end, this means listening to what employees are telling you, asking questions to gain clarification, and seeking input when feedback has slowed. When sharing information, ensure vital details are shared promptly and resources are easily accessed and centrally located.

- **Create a supportive and empowering work environment.** Pay attention to your employees' mental health as much as their physical well-being and maintain an "open door" policy that encourages support and guidance at all levels of your organization.

- **Lead by example.** Your employees are watching you. Take time to focus on family, use vacation allowances, and maintain a balance between your professional and personal life.

Fostering an engaging workplace and effectively leading your workforce — remote or onsite — is not only good for corporate culture but your bottom line as well.

[Learn more about effective employee engagement strategies for your remote work.](#)

Strategies to Develop Your Workforce

Employee development is the next, but equally important layer in employee engagement strategies. The purpose is twofold: to reinforce your efforts to engage with your employees, and more importantly to strengthen, enhance, and advance the knowledge and skills of your workforce talent.

In this section we'll take a close look at:

- Why employee development is a process that needs to begin on Day 1

- Tools for effectively leading with intent and ways to implement them

- Components of effective employee development plans

Be intentional from the start

Journalist and counterculture icon, Hunter S. Thompson said that "anything worth doing is worth doing well." While some might call his lifestyle into question, Thompson's advice has been appropriately applied at the start of many significant moments. Using it in the context of employee engagement and development is appropriate as well.

If the future performance and engagement of your employees matter (and it is worthwhile) make sure you start with an intentional and focused onboarding process (meaning, do it well).

The onboarding process is very different from the usual and transactional orientation period. This is because of the impacts that your onboarding process has on both the employee and your organization. Successful onboarding:

- Improves the speed at which new employees reach **proficiency**
- Strengthens your **retention** of current employees
- Enhances **company culture**
- Reduces the time for new employees to feel **integrated** into your organization
- Positively impacts how employees **adapt** to change within your business

There are many nuances and styles to onboarding practices. What works successfully at one company may not be the most effective for yours. However, three components define the best processes.

- **Preparation.** Successful onboarding processes are planned with intent and purpose and start before a new employee's first official day.

- **Connection.** Employee engagement needs to be a central part of onboarding to help new members of your team build and maintain meaningful connections with colleagues and leadership.

- **Direction.** Effective onboarding processes define the framework for how employees fit within the organization, helping them seamlessly transition from not just candidate to employee, but from casual observer to influential team member.

[Learn more about the fundamentals of a successful onboarding process.](#)

Lead with integrity

A significant portion of employee engagement levels stems from leadership, and in particular the characteristics of that leadership. Engaged employees not only have a strong connection with colleagues and a sense of purpose in their role, but they also need the right relationship with leadership within the organization.

Beyond the personal traits of being people with strong, positive character, leading with integrity means implementing the essential skills of inclusion and empathy. Inclusive leaders maintain a broad perspective that seeks and encourages a wide range of inputs and diverse thinking.

Empathic leaders work to move beyond accurately observing situations to actively engaging with the professional (and where appropriate) personal lives of their employees.

During the recruitment process, inclusive and empathic leaders seek individuals who are not just equipped for the required responsibilities but can also contribute new ideas and perspectives that will add value to the organization.

When business is moving at an optimal pace, such leaders reinforce the connection and commitment between employee and employer. Perhaps more importantly, while facing a challenge or significant change, inclusive and empathic leaders encourage collaboration while emphasizing the value each individual brings to the team.

In practical terms, leading with integrity means:

- **Being intentional** in all interactions with their employees
- **Remaining transparent** and openly sharing all relevant information
- **Clearly explaining expectations** and setting achievable goals
- **Showing genuine appreciation** in ways that are personal, specific, and meaningful

Get more insight into how inclusive and empathic leaders play a pivotal role in employee engagement.
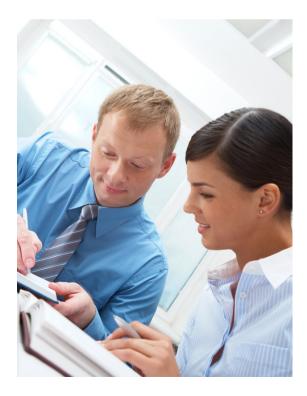
Invest in what you want to keep

Morale is high, employees are feeling connected, and they have trust in their leadership. Yet there is one more vital piece in creating an effective employee engagement strategy: developing your incredible talent. Strong organizations invest time, knowledge, and opportunities to learn in the talent they wish to keep.

Employee development is ongoing learning and training supported or created by the employer with two specific goals. First, to improve the skills and knowledge of their employees. Second, to create opportunities for those gained skills and knowledge to be applied in current and future opportunities within the organization. It's not about helping people move away from your company, but about developing your talent within in a way that benefits the organization as a whole.

Whether your process for employee development is formal, regulated, and industry prescribed or casual, self-paced, and personally selected, it provides a meaningful way for you to help employees improve their skills and expertise. However, it also provides a very effective means for businesses to salvage and refocus underperforming employees.

There are three key elements that an employee development plan should include, especially when part of a larger employee engagement strategy.

- **A focus on the bigger picture.** Understand where your organization is headed and what your employees need to know to get there.

- **Defined opportunities.** This means not just outlining opportunities to strengthen the role of employees, but also determining where gaps in critical knowledge exist.

- **A method to measure progress and progression.** Even if your employee development opportunities are informal, track progress and accomplishments to reveal growth, encourage progress, and reward gains.

Discover the benefits of employee development programs and ideas to implement them in your organization.

Strategies to Retain Your Talent

Strong and effective employee engagement strategies also need to pay close consideration to retain the talent you have invested in. Just because this is the last element discussed, certainly should not mean it is the least important.

We have certainly long passed the days where employees remain with companies for the entire duration of their careers and retire with indelible marks of forged relationships and accomplishments upon their remaining colleagues and organization. A 2020 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report calculated that the median number of years employees stayed with their current employers was just slightly over four years.

In this section we will review:

- Causes of employee turnover and how organizations can reduce it before becoming a problem

- Risk factors for employees to be poached by recruiters or competitors and ways to protect your talent investment

- The value of employee appreciation and ways to make it meaningful

Control turnover

It is important to note that we are talking about voluntary turnover here which is employee-initiated for any number of personal reasons. (Involuntary turnover refers to employer-initiated employment terminations generally initiated for performance or business-related reasons.) Yet, regardless of source, the biggest question is why.

The answer can best be summarized in a single word: misalignment. While this mismatched relationship between employees and employers can occur for a variety of reasons, the most common are:

- **Unmet expectations** of their roles and career growth
- **Unresolved differences** in how employees are managed and what they prefer or need
- **Doubt** about business practices and leadership decisions

Are you noticing a common theme? All of these can be resolved through employee engagement practices and particularly improved communication between the two sides.

At the beginning of 2020, Mercer (a workforce data and management consultancy group) reported that U.S. companies had an average turnover rate of 22%. Interestingly they also shared that beyond regular compensation reviews, organizations with a proactive strategy to retain their employees also focused on employee engagement. These proactive organizations didn't just track it, but actively worked to improve the level of motivation, involvement, and commitment employees have toward their organizations.

So what can you do to not just reduce your turnover rate but also improve retention?

- **Provide clear direction and instill confidence in your employees.** Create a clear employee value proposition, develop a comprehensive onboarding process, and focus on preparing your employees for the next level of their careers within your organization.
- **Personalize the management approach for your employees.** Some employees will need direct guidance, others will prefer leadership to be a mentor, and others will look to you to simply remove obstacles that may prevent them from performing at their very best.
- **Create and adhere to processes** that ensure consistency, communicate objectives and business decisions, and provide direction.

Review this deeper dive into the causes and solutions for employee turnover.

Close the gaps

Besides voluntary turnover, the other critical area for organizations to be mindful of is employee poaching. This is a practice of organizations (either on their own or through a recruiter) to persuade an employee to pursue a position at their organization. Regardless of your position on possible ethics, professional courtesies, or non-compete agreements, the question remains about how easily swayed your employees may be to these propositions.

The first aspect to review is the level of risk your organization may be exposed to. The following are key areas to address:

- **Company culture.** Employees stay where they find value and fulfillment.

- **Employee morale.** Know the personal sentiments of your employees toward you as an employer.

- **Promises delivered.** Make sure you are delivering on the benefits and intrinsic values promised to your employees. Your EVP is as much a retention tool as it is for talent acquisition.

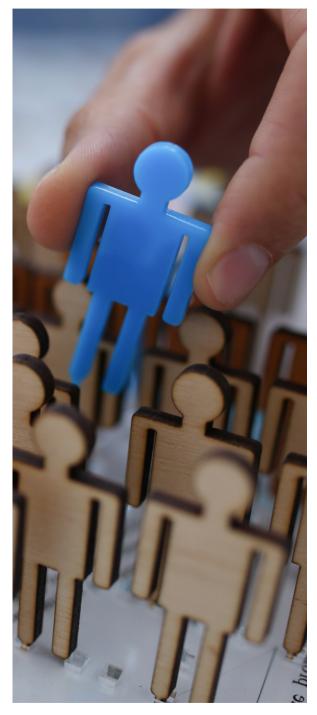- **Employer reputation.** Companies that don't treat their employees well will not retain them for long.

Fortunately, there are steps you can take to reduce the risk of having your employees poached. Start with a thorough review of your potential risks and close any obvious gaps. Review your compensation packages, set realistic expectations, and create opportunities for career growth.

Next, review your blind spots. Know what might persuade employees to leave, be the one to offer that whenever possible.

Then work to make your organization a desirable place for employees to create and advance their careers.

[Get a more in-depth review on the topic of poaching employees and specific ways to protect your talent.](#)

Acknowledge your most valuable assets

A simple, yet sincere 'thank you' goes a long way. We all know this and express it with regularity in a host of ways and times. Unfortunately, we also frequently forget to show appreciation to and for one of the biggest assets within our organizations.

Employee appreciation is an essential part of employee engagement. It affirms the dedication your employees have toward your organization and acknowledges that their efforts matter. Appreciation toward your employees builds a connection between you and your employees that communicates their skills are valuable and their continued efforts are needed.

The key for both you and your employees to gaining the full benefit though is to have the right approach. Employee appreciation needs to be:

- **More than the words expressed.** Yes, your appreciation must be sincere but also be specific about what you appreciate in your employee, express it in a timely manner while the situation is still fresh in both your minds, and communicate your feelings directly to your employee. Save the general and broad statements for reviews or larger events.

- **Openly shared with others.** Not every employee enjoys being the center of attention, but there are ways to make sure that other people inside and outside of your organization know about the incredible talent you have on your team. This will encourage positive behavior in others and promote your positive company culture.

- **A practice that becomes habitual for everyone.** Employee appreciation shouldn't be reserved for just leadership to employees. Peer-to-peer appreciation is equally important and effective for building teams and improving employee engagement.

[Find more employee appreciation ideas and value it provides here.](#)

Implementing Positive Employee Engagement Strategies

Like any solid business strategy, employee engagement isn't something that will be accomplished in a day nor is it a process you can automate. However, when done right, the benefits can be far-reaching for nearly all areas of your business.

Effectively engage with your employees by delivering on the promises that initially attracted your employees to you for they will also remind your employees why they stay. Remain diligent in your efforts to build positive and healthy employee morale since it has a direct impact on your overall company culture. With an intentional mindset, you will find ways to manage your team — remote or in-person — in a personalized way that encourages the best performance from each one.

Successful employee engagement strategies build when you layer proactive development practices on top. Focus on a productive onboarding process that begins before your employees' official first day and continue to help your workforce advance in their careers through meaningful training and learning opportunities. This includes helping management levels to lead with integrity, inclusiveness, and empathy.

Finally, proactively work to retain what you have built. Control turnover by eliminating misalignment with your employees and close the gaps that could expose and sway your team with outside offers of other opportunities. Let your employees know they matter to you and how their efforts are invaluable. In return, they will reward you with increased productivity, profits, and a team that accomplishes so much more together.

Experience to match your needs

AEBetancourt is passionate about the impact that hiring and developing employees has on organizational, individual, and community value. In addition to helping great companies source, recruit, and hire exceptional talent, our consultative services also help organizations develop and cultivate productive teams.

Contact us today to discuss your recruitment process or hiring needs.

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