The Definitive Guide to Understanding and Achieving Employee Engagement
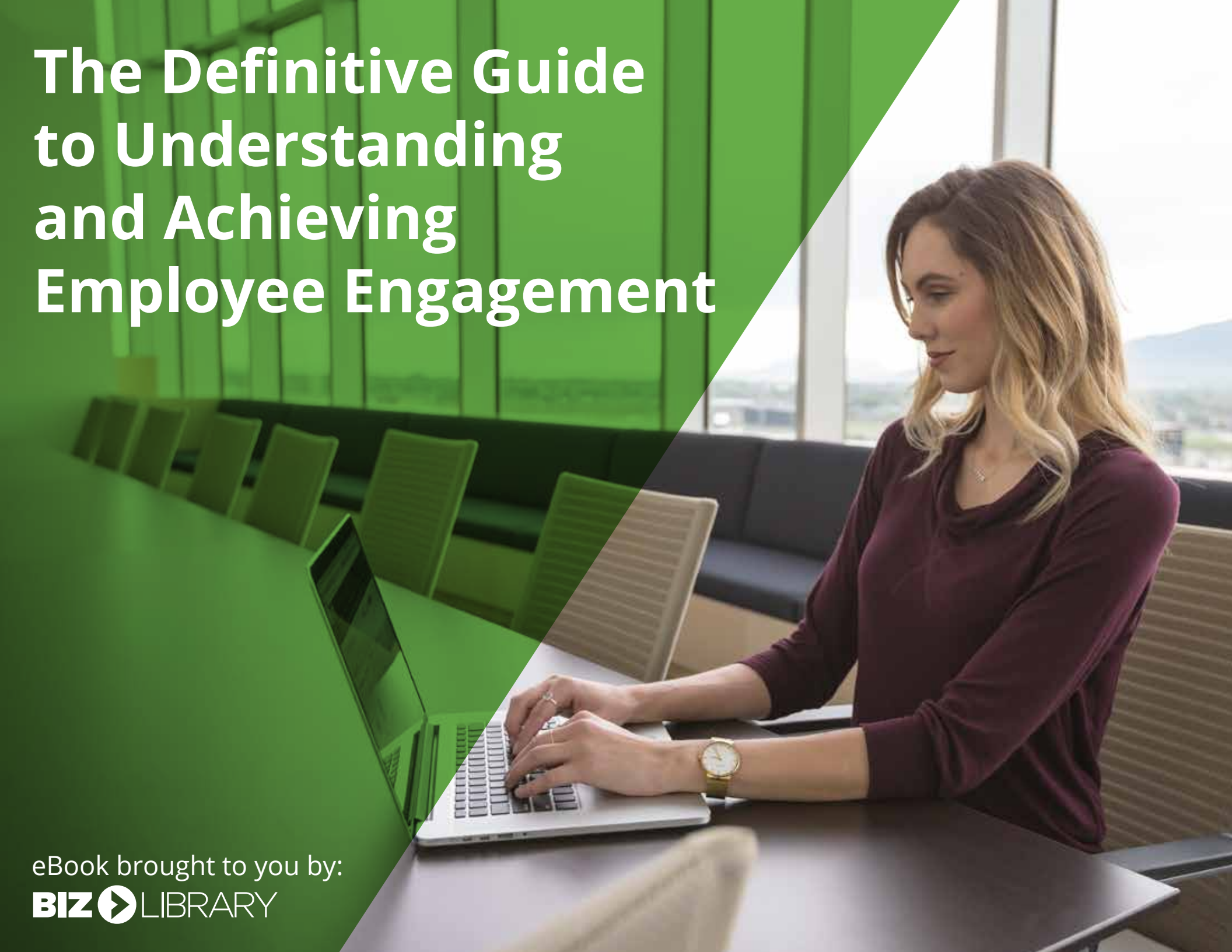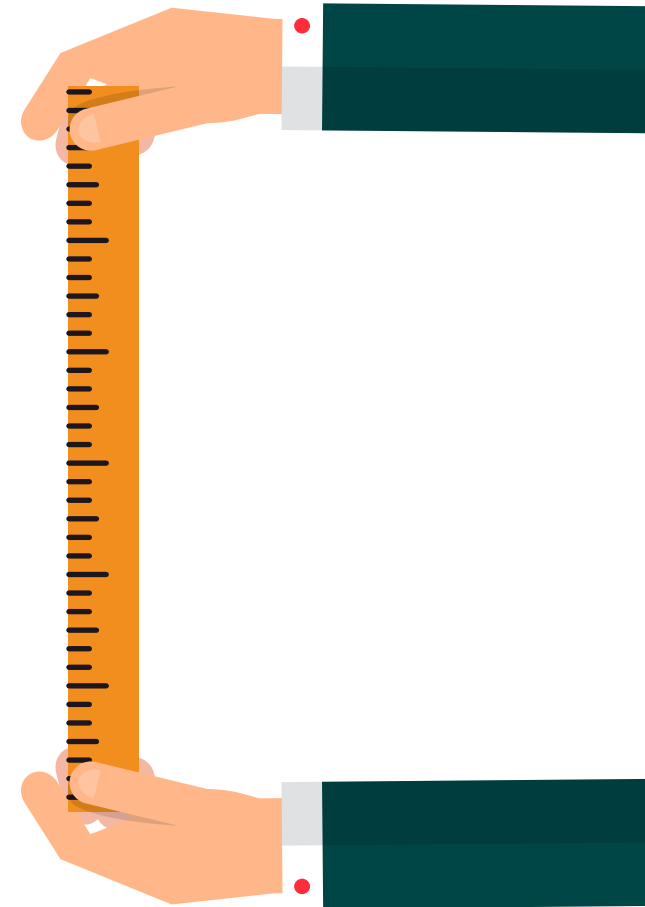
Employee Engagement Defined

Employee engagement can be difficult to define and even harder to measure.

Simply defined, **employee engagement** (or the lack thereof) is equal to **employee morale.**

Morale is usually a symptom of the cultural environment at your organization, including both leadership and employees.

An engaged workforce possesses the necessary skills, knowledge and expertise to do their job.

What You'll Learn

The statistics are clear, employee engagement is a major challenge in every industry. In this eBook, we're going to provide data that, while not surprising, will be very enlightening to HR and learning and development professionals.

Employee engagement is important, and disengaged employees cost their employers money. So, how can you work to engage the employees that you work so hard to develop? We'll provide some actionable tips your organization can begin using right away to improve the engagement levels of your employees.

According to the Global Human Capital Trends 2016 Report by Deloitte, Engagement is an aspect of workplace life that can-and indeed, shouldbe continuously monitored in a proactive way. It is about the future of an organization; it is a measure of corporate health and a key window into the potential for future issues and workers' support for change.
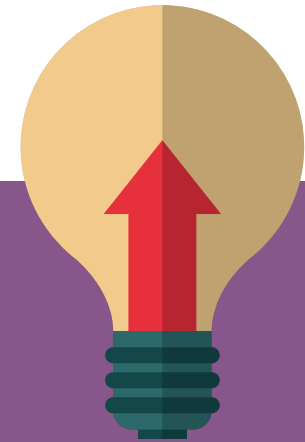
"Employee Engagement is the art and science of engaging people in authentic and recognized connections to strategy, roles, performance, organization, community, relationship, customers, development, energy, and happiness to leverage, sustain, and transform work into results."

-David Zinger, Employee Engagement Speaker

Three Levels of Engagement

In one of the most comprehensive reports ever published on the subject, Gallup estimates that active **employee disengagement costs the U.S. economy $450 billion to $550 billion per year.*** Gallup's data-driven report identified three different levels of engagement:

ENGAGED: Employees exhibit a "profound connection" to their employer. Some commentators view engagement as the level of discretionary effort these employees exert. Gallup goes on to note that these employees "drive innovation and move the organization forward."

NOT ENGAGED: Those employees who are emotionally "checked out."

ACTIVELY DISENGAGED: Employees who aren't just unhappy at work. These are employees who are actually undermining the efforts of those around them.
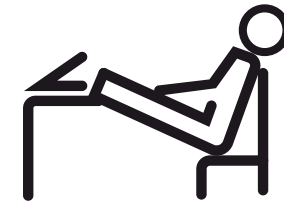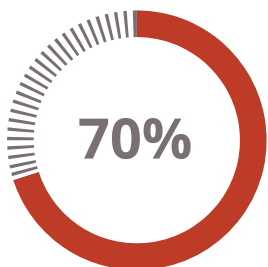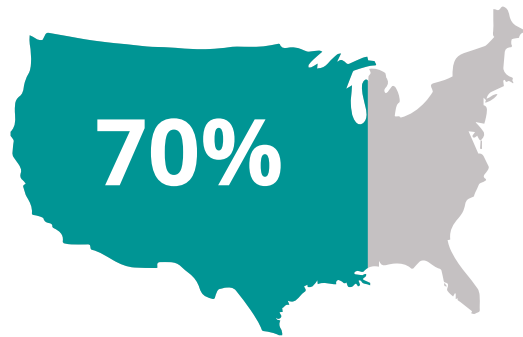
* "State of the American Workplace, Gallup, 2013".

70% of workers are not engaged at work.

ENGAGED

NOT ENGAGED

ACTIVELY DISENGAGED

Employee Engagement by the Numbers

70% of US Workers are NOT engaged at work.
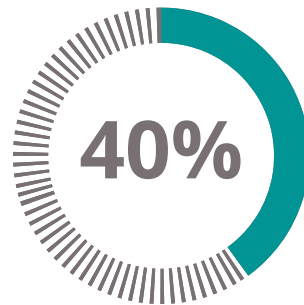
40% of employees say they don't receive regular, clear feedback on their performance from their manager.

33% Nearly 1/3 of employees think their managers fail to effectively communicate goals.

Even companies scoring in the top 10% on employee surveys register only about 38% of their employees as fully engaged.

SOURCE: "Gallup & Kevin Sheriday, Building a Magnetic Culture"

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Engagement by the Generations

With older generations staying in the workforce longer, engagement becomes more complex. Younger generations require different engagement techniques than more tenured ones, but overall, generational engagement looks like this:

Based on these numbers, most companies aren't doing what it takes to engage the younger generations; those who are looking for more flexible hours, desire to work remotely and are striving to find their passion.

ENGAGED

● Traditionalist - **43%**

● Boomers - **26%**

● Gen Xer's - **28%**

● Millennials - **26%**
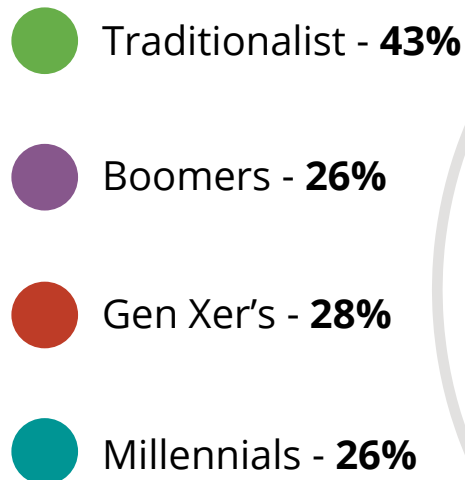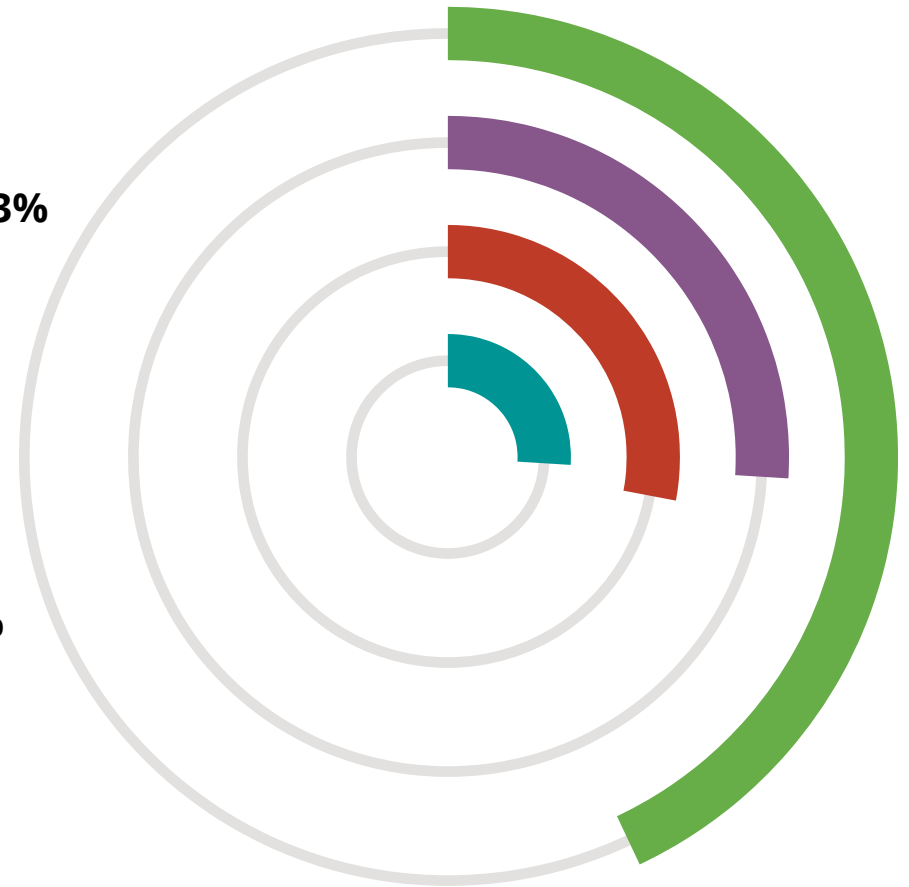
Levels of Engagement

Three out of ten employees are actively engaged

When employees are engaged, they're actively helping the organization meet business goals and are committed to the company and its values. Engaged employees are consistent high performers who are motivated, take initiative, communicate well and help others and do it all with a positive attitude.
These employees are always looking to improve processes and efficiency and use training to improve their skills.

Five out of ten employees are disengaged

You probably know who is already disengaged at your organization, but here are some benchmarks for those you're unsure of.
Disengaged employees do what's required, but they're not going to go the extra mile, their performance is only satisfactory. These employees are satisfied with themselves as-is, so they're willing to put in the hours, but not the energy. They have no initiative or emotional commitment to the task at hand. To them, it's not a job, it's a sentence – nine to five, five to life.

Two out of ten employees are actively disengaged

These are more than just disconnected workers, they're miserable at their jobs. These employees are angry at their employer.
Remember, misery loves company. Water cooler conversation becomes a gripe session and these employees are actively working against the organization and undermining their co-workers. These people are likely to pass around negative rumors and sabotage projects.

What Can We Do to Improve Employee Engagement?

Measure Engagement and Work with Data

Use surveys and tools to create a benchmark for how engaged your employees are now. There are plenty of tools to choose from, including Gallup's Q12, Kenexa's Survey, Accord Management System and HR Solutions' Sweet 16.

## Some alternative direct measures include:

Paying attention to the number of network connections and time spent with people outside of the immediate team or region.

The amount of work that occurs outside of normal working hours.

The percentage of participation in ad-hoc meetings and initiatives vs. recurring meetings and processes.

Time spent collaborating with customers outside of normal scope of work.
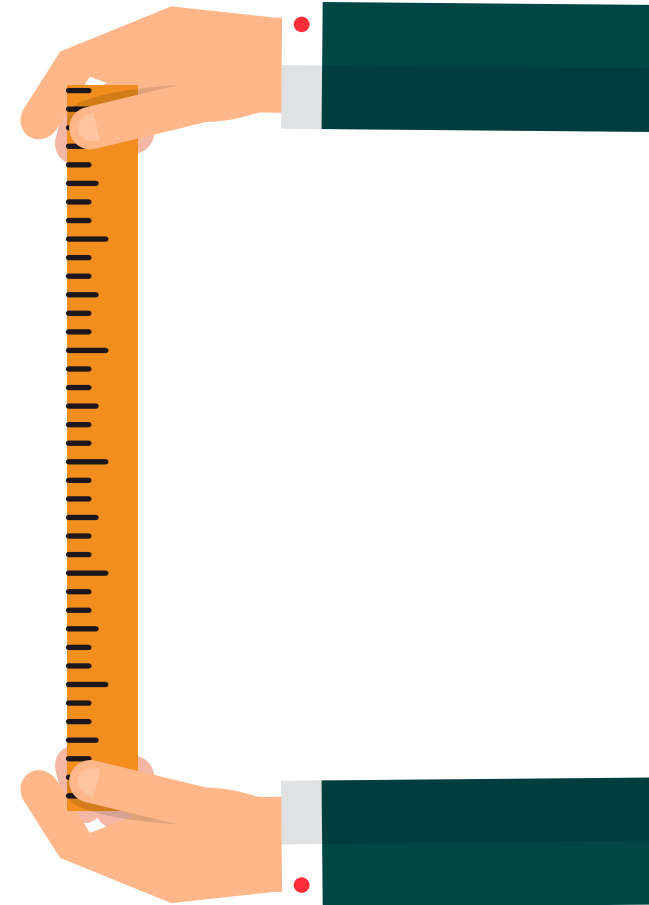
What Employees Need

Appreciation – A job well-done should always be appreciated. Not only is it important for employees to feel that their work matters, but you need to let them know that you personally appreciate their contribution and that you're proud of it.

A Voice – It's important for employees to feel that they're being heard and that their opinion not only matters, but is a valuable asset to the organization. When employees are continually shot down they'll begin using their voice elsewhere, like behind leadership's back.

Contribution – Employees want to know that what they're doing is part of what makes the organization successful. It's important to show your employees that their contributions are, indeed, moving the needle and that you appreciate it.

Feedback – This goes both ways, employees need your feedback so they know where they stand with you, but as a manager, you should be seeking feedback from employees as well. This give-and-take relationship draws in otherwise disengaged employees and makes them feel that they have a stake in the direction of the organization.

What Employees Need

Updates – No one likes to be out of the loop, especially in the workplace. Not sharing company information not only makes employees feel unimportant, but it also leaves them to come to their own conclusions. It's important to share the organization's short-term and long-term goals and explain what that means to their jobs. It's also a good idea to give updates on the financial performance of the organization whenever possible.

Encouragement – Have you told your employees that they're doing a good job lately? Regular encouragement actually inspires better job performance. When an employee feels that they're not doing well, they will be less motivated to work hard, but when their work is noticed and their performance in encouraged, they become engaged and more driven.

Training and Development – When employees feel that you're invested in their personal and professional development and committed to helping them do their job better, they're likely to be more invested at work. The importance of training for both hard and soft skills can't be overstated. When an employee isn't trained properly, it will shape their perception of how much the company values them.

Connection - When an employee feels like they belong at their organization, they're more likely to be engaged. Try including everyone on the team in meetings, not just a select few. Also, plug new hires into the community and find ways to give them an emotional connection to the organization.
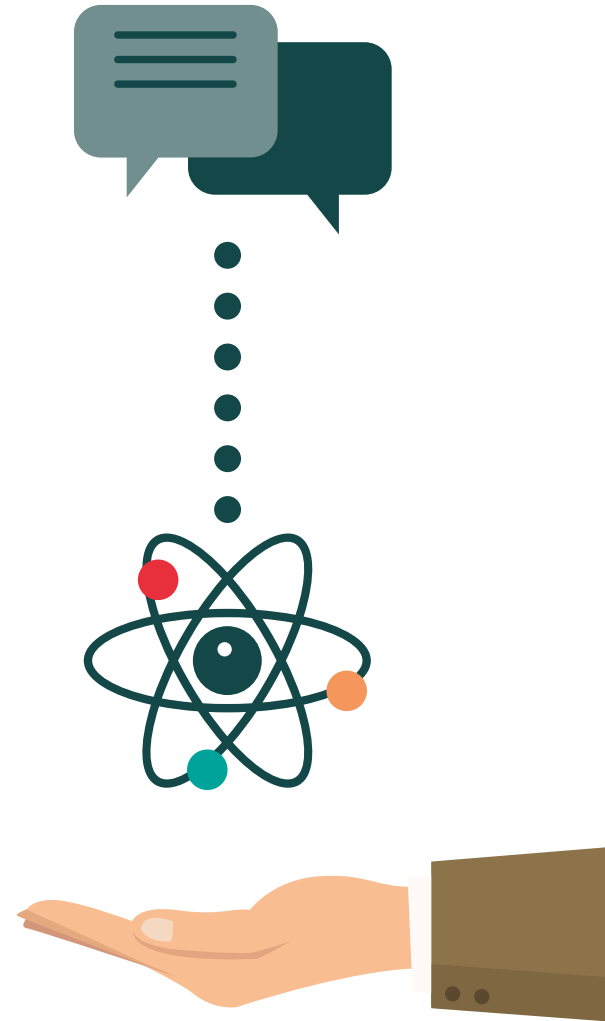
The Next Steps

Hire the right managers, then develop the key competencies and skills needed to promote emotional intelligence, coaching skills, accountability and communication.

According to a report from Bersin by Deloitte, the top missing skills in mid-level leaders include:
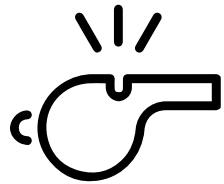
COACHING
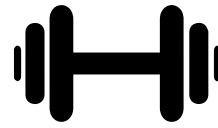
PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

DEVELOPING OTHERS

MANAGING CHANGE

COMMUNICATION

BUSINESS ACUMEN

Organizations with senior leaders who coach effectively and frequently improve business results by 21%

How Managers Develop Engagement

Direct managers are extremely important when it comes to driving employee engagement. Because these managers have the most "face-time" with employees, they tend to set the tone of the workplace and that has a huge effect on engagement.

Coaching and Performance Appraisal – It's important to give feedback that's both high-quality and informal and to be sure that you're evaluating performance in an accurate way. Do your homework, engagement is sure to drop if you're evaluating an employee based on assumptions or hearsay. Be sure to outline organizational goals and to help your employee to create their own goals based on that. It's also important for the employee to completely understand their work plan and the time-frame in which they're to do it. Be transparent so there are no surprises.

Developing Others – It can be easy to get wrapped up in the day to day "must-do's" of management and not think about the professional development of your subordinates. Creating a development plan for your employees and really following through shows that not only are you invested in them, but you really care about whether or not they succeed.

Managing Change – A hot topic in today's corporate environment is Change Management. In a time where change happens fast and frequent, managers have to be equally quick at managing this change in a way that keeps employees from getting "scared off." A great way to start is by asking these questions:

- What will this look like to employees and how will it impact them?

- How will we communicate this change and ensure all individuals impacted receive this communication?

- How will we make sure everyone is fully trained and has the help they need?

How Managers Develop Engagement

Communication – We all know in our heads that communication is important, but do our actions reflect that? Employees who feel that they're not being communicated with, whether by accident or purposefully WILL check out. Not only do they begin to feel that their manager doesn't think it's important for them to know what's going on, but they'll also feel that their feedback is not valued. Be open, and ask for feedback about how employees want to receive communication from you.

Business Acumen - Organizations need a strategic effort to boost the level of business acumen among employees. Increasing knowledge, financial acumen and market awareness cannot happen in a void or a vacuum. Organizations must be actively engaged in this effort by fostering a culture where continuous improvement is the norm, and learning is an everyday part of the culture. When employees feel that you've invested in them in this way, they're more likely to be engaged.

COMPETENCY GUIDE

For a more in-depth look at competency tips and tricks to further yourself and your employees, check out our FREE How-To Competency Guides.

10 Reasons to Invest in Manager Training

Victor Lipman wrote a great article for the Leadership section of Forbes Online Magazine in Sept 2012, titled 10 Reasons to Invest in Manager Training. We'll paraphrase his top 10 as follows:

1. The employee/manager relationship is the most important single factor in driving employee engagement.

2. Employee engagement leads directly to higher productivity and profitability, and disengaged employees are disruptive.

3. Managers don't become managers and automatically "know" how to manage. They have to learn.

4. Sound management practices are not complicated and can be taught.

5. It's important to develop the next generation of leaders from within.

6. Investments in front-line manager training are likely to yield a better return on investment and be more needed than any other type of leadership development and training.

7. Good management training can help develop a better level of consistent manager performance throughout your organization.

8. Respected, high-performing managers boost engagement, productivity and retention – all of which improve the bottom-line.

9. Well-trained managers help mitigate risk and avoid litigation – which is expensive and disruptive.

10. Repeat #1 – it's just that important! We know employee engagement is important and it has a direct impact on the bottom line.

The research proves that by employing some simple, common sense management best practices, we can radically shift the playing field so that our employees are far more likely to be engaged. How do we do that? We train our managers, and we teach them to play to the strengths of their employees. It really can be that simple.

So – what do you plan to do about it?

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You've Got to Start Somewhere

All of this may seem overwhelming, but it's not too late to start working towards creating an engaged workforce. Here is a brief breakdown of some steps to take to kick off your Employee Engagement Program:

Listen – Talk to employees around the office about what they like and dislike about the organization. Discover pain points affecting both managers and subordinates and find out what they would like to do to solve them. Take a survey asking key questions about culture and leadership.

Problem Solve – Come up with some ideas to help increase engagement, based on your findings. You don't need to have everything figured out, but a loose action plan will be extremely helpful.

Gain Leadership Buy In– You'll need to present your findings to leadership and get their buy-in. It's important to have leadership on your side for any endeavor, but especially something as important as the engagement of your workforce.
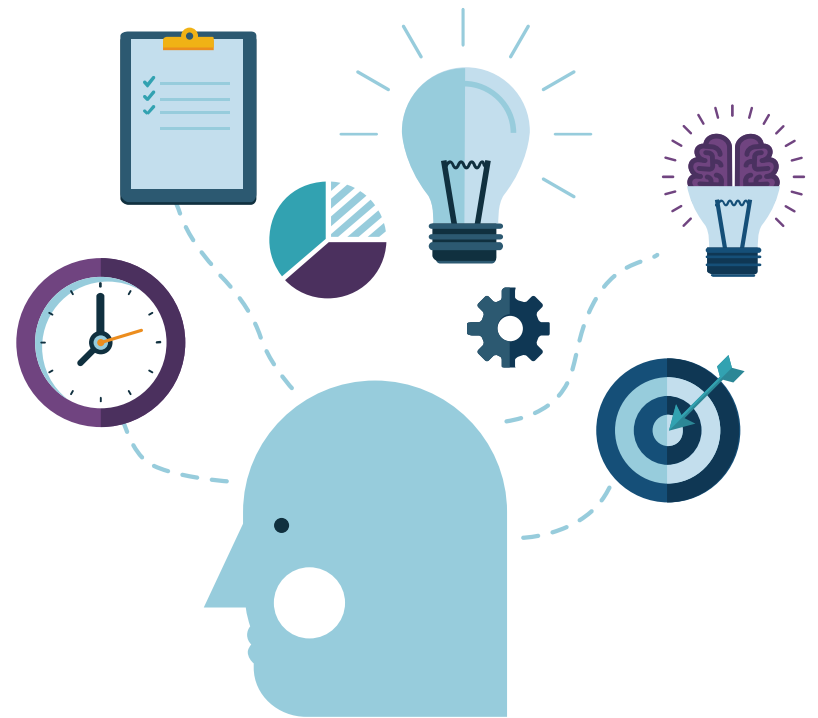
You've Got to Start Somewhere

Enable – Here's a great way to engage...create an employee engagement task force; a small group of people consisting of employees from every level in the company and representing different departments. This group will help brainstorm and implement ideas to foster employee engagement and advocate for them to their teams. And hey...you've already engaged a few people!

Implement – Follow-through is vitally important, use the information you've collected and the people you've assembled to carry out your plan, communicating every step of the way.

Be Persistent – Engagement probably won't happen overnight. You'll need to be persistent, listen to feedback and take surveys at key intervals to measure your success. It takes time for a workforce to adopt a new program. The longer you work at it, the more trust you build, the more likely it is to start changing the culture of your workplace and engaging your workforce.

Suggested Resource from the BizLibrary Collection

This seven-part course discusses what passes for employee engagement at many organizations, how to measure employee engagement, and how you can improve employee engagement. It also covers how having a positive attitude and outlook can benefit not just yourself, but your organization as a whole.

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