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# EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT EMPLOYEE ACTION GUIDE

Suggested Actions for Improving Your Work Experience

## Suggested Actions by Survey Topic

This best practice guide is organized by engagement survey topic. Review survey results to identify 1-3 key areas of focus and reference this guide for suggestions on how to take action. Suggestions in this guide are tailored to what **employees can do to improve their work experience**.

### Table of Contents

- 4 **Adequate Resources**  
*I am given the resources I need to do my best work.*
- 5 **Autonomy**  
*I have input in making decisions that affect my work.*
- 6 **Clear Expectations**  
*I know what is expected of me on the job.*
- 7 **Communicating Change**  
*My manager takes time to explain how changes at this organization will affect me.*
- 8 **Communicating an Inspiring Vision**  
*Senior Leaders have communicated a motivating and inspiring vision for the future.*
- 9 **Confidence in Career**  
*I am confident I can achieve my career goals at this organization.*
- 10 **Constructive Feedback**  
*My manager regularly provides me with constructive feedback to improve my job performance*
- 11 **Contribute to the Mission**  
*I understand how the work I do contributes to the goals of this organization.*
- 12 **Cross Functional Collaboration**  
*People in our company support one another and collaborate across the organization to meet our goals.*
- 13 **Cross Functional Communication**  
*There is good communication between groups/departments within this company*
- 14 **Demonstrating Respect**  
*My manager treats me with respect.*
- 15 **Encouraging Ideas**  
*I feel encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things.*
- 16 **Recognition**  
*I receive recognition when I do excellent work.*
- 17 **Sharing Information**  
*I have enough information to effectively do my job.*

**18 Skill Development**

*I am given a real opportunity to develop my skills at this organization.*

**19 Team Goal**

*Within my work group, we work together to achieve a common goal.*

**20 Team Trust**

*I trust the members of my work group to complete their work on time and to quality standards.*

**21 Transparent Communication**

*Communication from Senior Leaders is consistent and transparent.*

**22 Work-Life Balance**

*I am able to maintain a healthy balance between my work life and my home life.*

## ADEQUATE RESOURCES

The demands of our jobs (e.g., deadlines, emotional labor, workload, role conflict) are often what leads to burnout. Having resources, on the other hand, is essential for feeling motivated and engaged, and can even help combat burnout during the most demanding and stressful times at work. When we have the resources they need to be successful, feel supported, and perform at their best, the difficult parts of our jobs don't seem so taxing.

When asked about resources, everyone may think of something slightly different and may have differing needs. For example, when you think resources are you thinking equipment, staff, money, time, support, or something else altogether? Check that what comes to mind for you is aligned with what your team has in mind. Don't overlook something important that may seem small to you, but can make a large difference in someone else's work.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > I am given the resources I need to do my best work.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

No one knows your work better than you. Others may not understand what is needed to get your job done in a quality way, so make sure to speak up when you don't have what you need to be successful. And, don't forget to show appreciation when someone helps get you what you need; this will reinforce the support and the importance of that resource.

Sometimes we can't do more with less, but sometimes we can. See if you can find creative ways to stretch the resources you have. Look for ways to be more efficient. If your attempts don't work, you've built a strong case to advocate to your manager and team that additional resources are necessary.

## AUTONOMY

Having autonomy is a fundamental human need, so it's no surprise that it is a key to being engaged at work. People are more likely to be motivated when they have discretion in how they do their work, ownership in what they do, involvement in decisions, and opportunities to voice suggestions or feedback.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > I have input in making decisions that affect my work.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Don't take it personally when your supervisor or team decides to go a different route than you suggested. What's important is that your ideas and concerns were heard and considered. Find opportunities to voice your opinions and also keep an open mind to others' viewpoints.

When you offer a suggestion or idea, make sure to explain your rationale. Let your manager and team in on your thinking — why is your idea a good one; what has been successful and/or failed in the past; how does this idea benefit everyone involved?

Sometimes we're ready to take on more than our supervisor/manager may think we are ready for. Start small and ask to take on increasingly larger responsibilities or decisions. Build credibility by demonstrating follow-through and that your ideas can be successful. As you build trust with your manager and teammates, they'll happily enable you to take on more.

## CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Setting expectations is pretty straightforward, but also easily overlooked. We make assumptions. Others make assumptions. And before you know it, expectations are misaligned and conflict or poor performance bubbles to the surface. This item is an easy one to cross off the list, so take the time, make it a priority, and create a norm where others help you establish good expectations too.

Setting clear expectations is not a one-time deal. Because change is ongoing, revisit expectations on a regular basis. Every time the team grows or shrinks, individuals alter their goals, systems and processes shift, or organizational priorities change, be sure to check in to reestablish and/or align expectations.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > I know what is expected of me on the job.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

When talking with your manager or peers, check that your understanding of roles and responsibilities is the same as theirs. For example, sometimes big-picture expectations are verbalized by your supervisor, but he/she may forget to discuss the smaller, more informal parts of the job. Try using phrases like, "When a situation like \_\_\_\_\_ arises, my understanding is that I should \_\_\_\_\_," or, "Given \_\_\_\_\_, I would expect to do \_\_\_\_\_ and can count on you to do \_\_\_\_\_."

Our managers are very busy people, which doesn't make your questions or needs unimportant, but may make it difficult to get quick or thorough answers. Try prioritizing your requests of leaders; before going to your supervisor or other leaders, see if you can find an answer to your question elsewhere. Is the information already available in online or shared resources/materials? Can a peer help you? Once you know you need your manager's input, make sure to ask, "'Is now is a good time for a question?'" so you have undivided attention.

Create SMART goals to document and ensure clear understanding of expectations (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-framed).

## COMMUNICATING CHANGE

It's no secret that dealing with change is difficult. But, by thoughtfully managing change initiatives your chances of success improve tremendously. To help employees navigate change be sure to: 1) help people understand the reason for the change – what's in it for them? 2) involve people in decision making to earn their buy-in 3) communicate, communicate, communicate, and 4) ensure processes and procedures support the change so it actually sticks.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > My manager takes time to explain how changes at this organization will affect me.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Keep an open mind and actively think through change in terms of the positive and negative: 1) how might this change improve your work or benefit you, and 2) what challenges may the change cause for you? Outlining both views can help you deal with the change, plan for potential challenges, and keep a positive mindset as you integrate changes in your work.

When you feel uncertain about change, ask for some time with your manager to talk through it. Get a feel for the short and long-term effects of the change. Brainstorm what you need to effectively deal with the change and what your team may need from you.

When talking with your manager or peers, check that your understanding of roles and responsibilities is the same as theirs. For example, sometimes big-picture expectations are verbalized by your supervisor, but he/she can forget to discuss the smaller details that impact your work.

## COMMUNICATING AN INSPIRING VISION

When people feel a sense of purpose, belonging, and part of something greater than themselves, they derive a sense of meaning from work. Meaningfulness is related to a host of positive outcomes, like motivation, commitment, helping behaviors on the job, lower turnover intentions, and personal well-being. Having an inspiring vision helps people create meaningfulness in their work.

Having a vision or mission statement isn't enough. To be inspired, people need to know what the vision is and hear about it on a regular basis. Beyond knowing the vision, people at all levels need opportunities to live values in their daily work. They also need to see managers and senior leaders acting in ways that uphold and embody the values. Inconsistent policies, systems, and actions deteriorate commitment to the organization's purpose. Communicating an inspiring vision is through not only words but more importantly, through action.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > Senior Leaders have communicated a motivating and inspiring vision for the future.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Ask yourself, do you know the organization's vision? Do you understand the vision and values, and why they are important? Do you understand how the work you do connects to that vision?

When developing your goals, tie them specifically to the vision and/or values. Identify how your personal priorities also help move the organization closer to accomplishing its mission.

## CONFIDENCE IN CAREER

To achieve their career goals, two things are necessary: 1) employees must know what their goals are, and 2) managers must be aware of employees' goals. Everyone wants something different – some want to climb the ladder, some are focused on learning, some want stability, others are relationship-focused – it's a matter of knowing an individual, creating the right environment and opportunities, and empowering them to do the hard work to progress.

Employees don't always draw connections between learning or growth opportunities and career progression. Career advancement is not only via formal promotions, pay increases, or title changes, but also by gaining new skills, taking on larger responsibilities, and collaborating with different functions. You may need to help employees see how experiences like these are critical for their career progression and achieving personal career goals.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > I am confident I can achieve my career goals at this organization.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Do some self-reflection – do you know what your career goals are? Once you identify a few short-term and longer-term goals, strategize ways to work towards them with your manager.

It can be scary to talk about career goals, for fear of conveying disinterest in your current role. Even so, it's best to be honest with your manager. Express commitment to your current role, while also emphasizing that you want to grow in ways that fit your and the organization's needs.

We don't always know where we want to go. Rather than position, promotion, or compensation goals, think of your career more broadly. Develop some goals based on new experiences, mastering skills, utilizing strengths, or pursuing interests.

Work on building your network both within the organization and via professional organizations. Having strong relationships can ensure that people think of you when opportunities arise.

Dedicate a week to reflecting on the work you do. Write down the things that you love about your work and things you don't like. Look for trends and patterns to help crystallize the things that you enjoy the most and consider how you can do more of those things as you develop in your career.

## CONTRIBUTE TO THE MISSION

Aligning your work to the priorities of the organization enables you to contribute in meaningful ways. This practice ensures your efforts are effective, impactful, and efficient as you add value where it matters most.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > I understand how the work I do contributes to the goals of this organization.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

If you don't understand how your work fits in with the big picture, ask your supervisor.

Identify one or two important stakeholders who rely on the work you do (e.g., customers, leaders, frontline service providers). Ask these stakeholders what they think is going well and what could be improved. You'll likely learn that your contributions are more impactful than you thought, and you may get some good feedback in the process.

Take a minute and remind yourself of the organization's goals. Then identify 3-5 responsibilities that take up most of your time. If they don't align with the organization's priorities, brainstorm ways you can dedicate more energy to tasks that you see as connected with company goals while also minimizing tasks that don't relate to these goals.

## CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Remember that you're giving feedback to a person and the message that is heard is more important than the message that is given. People are more likely to hear feedback when it is specific, focused on behaviors rather than the person, a combination of positive and constructive, and when there is an opportunity to voice their own observations as part of the process. When feedback is actually heard, you're more likely to elicit the behaviors you're looking for.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > My manager regularly provides me with constructive feedback to improve my job performance.
- > My last performance evaluation was useful in helping me improve my work performance.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Be proactive about asking your supervisor for feedback, especially after major events or milestones. Ask your supervisor: what do you think went well? What could I do better/or differently that would help me be more successful?

Feedback conversations don't have to be scary or formal. Rather than wait for a full debrief about a project, find opportunities to informally ask your supervisor for feedback about specific topics. Questions such as, "How do you think that went?" or "Is there anything I could do differently next time?" can be very insightful.

Be prepared going into a feedback conversation with your manager. Think back on a specific timeframe and make concrete notes about your performance. Try to describe examples using STAR: situation, task, action, results. If your manager doesn't solicit your input, ask if you can offer a few examples that demonstrate what's going well and where you'd like to improve. Coming into a performance conversation with your own ideas demonstrates that you take ownership in your development.

## CROSS FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION

We are wired to believe that the work we do is unique – our work is more challenging and difficult compared to the work of other groups. When we become aware of this bias and realize we all have challenges and obstacles to overcome, we can become better collaborators. Take the time to ask other groups about some of the challenges they face and how you can help.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > People in our company support one another and collaborate across the organization to meet our goals.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Ask your manager for opportunities to shadow people in other groups. Find opportunities to observe others doing their work, or arrange a lunch/coffee meeting to ask them about their day-to-day.

When resolving conflict, focus on the “what” rather than the “who.” By focusing on tasks/actions rather than intentions or personality differences, you can learn from mistakes and make a plan for better collaboration going forward.

## CROSS FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION

In our busy, technology-driven, and dispersed work world, it is difficult to find regular opportunities to interact and communicate with other groups. Get creative. It is critical to stay informed about other groups' work, their challenges, successes, and opportunities to make life easier on one another.

Email is often our go-to communication. Email is great for many purposes, especially sharing information and giving updates across a large number of people. Email is not as effective, however, for brainstorming ideas or problem-solving. Cater your method of communication to best serve your purpose, particularly when it involves many people and groups. When in doubt, pick up the phone or talk in-person.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > There is good communication between groups/departments within this company.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Put yourself in others' shoes. What can you expect them to know about your role and what might be difficult to know? Find opportunities to share information about the parts of your work that others may not understand.

Start by asking questions. Rather than jump to conclusions or assumptions about others, engage in some "appreciative inquiry." Learn about where others are coming from before saying what's on your mind.

What are you curious to know about other groups you work with (or that you don't work directly with)? Brainstorm a few questions and ask your manager to connect you with someone on the other team to learn more about them.

## DEMONSTRATING RESPECT

Demonstrating respect is all about the little things. Saying, “please,” “thank you,” and “how are you?” can go a long way. Listening and valuing the ideas of others is key to demonstrating that you appreciate the thoughts and perspectives of all.

Respect isn’t just about being nice and courteous. It’s also about valuing people enough to tell them what they need to hear to thrive and be successful. We often avoid difficult conversations because we don’t want to hurt feelings, yet the respectful thing to do would be to communicate honestly, directly, and with kindness.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > My manager treats me with respect.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Take time to get to know others on a personal level. Ask others (your peers, manager) about their hobbies, loved ones, or what they are focused on at work. Getting to know people in terms of their interests and motivations can go a long way to reduce misunderstandings.

When a misunderstanding or frustration with another employee arises, remind yourself to assume best intentions. Ask questions for understanding before jumping to conclusions.

## ENCOURAGING NEW IDEAS

Employees who are closest to the work are often the ones who have the best ideas for changes, improvements and problem-solving. Asking employees for their input on a regular basis is empowering and sends the message that employee expertise is valued and leveraged.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > I feel encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Sometimes we propose new ideas that are great but not aligned with the priorities of the organization. Other times, the team may not have the bandwidth to take on something new. Check with your manager or team to see where your efforts will be most appreciated – where do others see the greatest need for change? Are there initiatives on the backburner that you can take charge of and own?

You have great ideas and others do too. When you come up with a suggestion, run it by others to see if you can tweak and refine the idea before bringing it to your manager and/or other teams.

Confusion, slow processes, lack of information, or interpersonal conflict may be red flags that you can improve the workflow. When you feel frustrated or stuck, ask others for their ideas. See if you can put your heads together to come up with new or modified approaches.

## RECOGNITION

We often associate recognition with monetary rewards, but there are many ways to recognize great work in cost-effective ways. In fact, when we ask employees, they most often tell us they are simply looking for a “thank you” from managers, peers, or leadership for the small wins that happen on a day-to-day basis. Skill development opportunities or time off are also great ways of offering rewards.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > I receive recognition when I do excellent work.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Thank someone when they recognize your hard efforts! This reinforces your supervisor or peers to continue recognizing you in the ways that are most meaningful.

Avoid comparing yourself to others. Good managers know we are all motivated by different things, so may recognize you differently than your team members. If your manager is missing the mark with how you like to be appreciated (i.e., you hate public attention but would love a personal pat on the back), think of ways you can gently request different forms of recognition.

If you're aiming for a particular reward or benefit (e.g., promotion, award, bonus), have a conversation with your manager to explore what specific performance or results will lead to what potential benefits. This helps clarify expectations and is a great way to set effective goals.

## SHARING INFORMATION

As hard as we try to provide information, people aren't going to consume it if it isn't easy, accessible, or to the point. If you feel like communication at your organization or within your team is good, but employees are telling you otherwise, it may be time to consider new methods for sharing key information. It's important to find ways of communicating that really work for your people and your environment.

People in today's world are flooded with information, so it may be less about having enough information, and more about having enough of the right information. Especially when your plan is to cascade information down the organization, it is important to confirm who will be sharing the information and how to ensure it gets to all intended people.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > I have enough information to effectively do my job.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Your manager or teammates may not know what information is most critical for you. Make a point to share what information you need and in what timeframe.

Other people don't have the deep insights into your work like you do. Consider what information about your roles and responsibilities would be helpful to share with others. When you offer information, this will open the door for others to communicate more frequently/thoroughly with you too.

Sometimes it's tempting to keep information to yourself because it feels good to be in-the-know. However, this mindset can be toxic and doesn't contribute to a collaborative or open culture. Do your part in offering and sharing information when you can.

## SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Growth and development opportunity is often a main driver of employee engagement. In today's workforce, people tend to stay with an organization longer when there are development opportunities; on the other hand, people are likely to look for employment elsewhere when these opportunities are lacking. Rich development opportunities attract strong talent, keep them motivated and equipped to perform well on the job, and build a culture of continuous improvement.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > I am given a real opportunity to develop my skills at this organization.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Be proactive about your own development. Look for cost-effective training opportunities such as webinars, free training or networking events, book clubs, lunch-and-learns, podcasts, etc. Talk with your supervisor about carving out time to pursue these opportunities.

Your manager may be more willing to support training or learning if he/she knows how it will help you in your current role. Advocate for your own development and be ready to explain how a specific opportunity you're interested in will benefit you and your team.

## TEAM TRUST

Trust doesn't just feel good or make people like each other, it is foundational to the way team members show up for each other. When someone trusts us, we don't want to let them down. Trust allows people to assume the best in others rather than the worst. With trust, team members are more helpful and supportive, higher performing, and more likely to take risks. Teams with high trust are less likely to tolerate poor performance and they naturally build a culture of collaboration.

As you probably expect, conflict can hurt trust among team members, but certain types of conflict may be more damaging than others. Conflict about tasks is less harmful than conflict that arises from relationships or team processes. Set teams up for success by addressing norms of behavior before issues arise. Talk through positive ways to deal with interpersonal differences and differing opinions. Establish clear processes and ways to suggest new ideas.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > I trust the members of my work group to complete their work on time and to quality standards.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Trust on a team is a two-way street. Pause and take a hard look at yourself — are you a teammate that others can trust to do good work and deliver on time? When you run into a roadblock, have an unexpected challenge, or need more time to work on something, make sure you keep others in the loop. Communicate frequently, update others on your progress, and be open about what you and others need to be successful.

Assume the best in others. Avoid micromanaging others and assume that others will deliver what they promise until they give you a reason to think otherwise. If someone does miss a deadline or completes subpar work, strategize with your manager about how to have a productive conversation to set better expectations next time.

Check in with your teammates frequently and take notice when they may need support. Show that you're willing to step in and help. Others will likely do the same for you when you need support.

## TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION

Be sure that all levels of leadership understand their role in communicating key messages, what information needs to be conveyed and a time frame for doing so. Employees can handle bad news but struggle with no news. In the absence of information, we fill in the gaps with assumptions and stories. Proactive communication keeps the rumor mill at bay.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > Communication from Senior Leaders is consistent and transparent.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Assume best intentions. If you don't know, ask.

Information is often available, we just have to know where to find it. Ask your manager where to find the best updated and current information. When information is not available, reach out and see if your manager has other details to share.

There may be a disconnect between what Senior Leaders communicate and what you would like to know. Understand that not all information can be shared exactly when we want it, but also let your manager know what specific information would be most helpful for your role. See if he/she can solicit this information. Or, let you know if the information isn't yet available.

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

It is very common for employees to feel like there is more work to be done than can be accomplished in a day. It can be tempting to conclude that more head count is needed to improve work-life balance, and sometimes that is the answer, however often the solution lies in areas like clearly defining priorities, ensuring people have the resources they need to do their best work, or proactively managing change.

### SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

- > I am able to maintain a healthy balance between my work life and my home life.

### EMPLOYEES CAN:

Have a conversation with your manager about what work-life balance means to you. How can you balance your home life and meet the requirements of the job in a way that works for everyone?

Picture your life as a bucket. Ideally, the bucket is full but not overflowing. Now, make a list of your work and home priorities – daily tasks, professional development, time with kids, working out, etc. Write down what percent of your bucket each of the priorities would ideally comprise; next, write down how much they actually comprise in your life and note other things that are causing your bucket to overflow. Is your bucket ideally 50% home items and 50% work priorities, or a different breakdown? Remember to be realistic. What can you do to balance your bucket to its ideal state?