EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
LEADERSHIP ACTION GUIDE

Suggested Actions for Improving the Employee Experience

Tips for Successful Survey Follow-up

> Improving engagement and organizational effectiveness is not the responsibility of management alone. Involve employees in identifying solutions. Doing so will demonstrate that you value their ideas.

> Incorporate updates and action taken from your survey into regular operational reviews and goal setting. For example, share progress on the action plan during regular update meetings or include it as a goal on a performance review. By treating engagement as you would any other goal, you will increase the likelihood that action will be taken.

> Connect the dots. Continuously remind employees that you heard their feedback and what actions were taken as a result.

> Seek best practices. Talk to other leaders to understand what they have done to drive success on your engagement drivers.

> Share success stories. Let employees and other leaders know what action has been taken and the results. Doing so can be a source of recognition for your team and provide other leaders with ideas for improvement.

> Create one-on-one dialogue. Engagement happens at the individual level. Talk to employees about what they personally need to feel valued and effective.

> Focus on your top performers. Talk to your top performers about their level of engagement and ask for their ideas to make improvements.

> Link employee engagement results to other business metrics such as turnover, productivity, or customer/patient ratings. Doing so will allow you to see what engagement drivers have the biggest impact on business outcomes.

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 **leadership can do to improve the employee experience.**

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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 even help combat burnout during the most demanding and stressful times at work. When people have the resources they need to be successful, feel supported, and perform at their best, the difficult parts of their 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.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

From a system perspective, ensure that resources are allocated in ways that align with your mission and strategic priorities. Draw these connections for others too by explaining why and how decisions about resources are made.

Don't forget that your time and attention is a valuable resource. Find ways to carve out 15 or 20 minutes for groups to share their work with you, explain how they're contributing to the organization's goals, and check-in about necessary resources. Where are there needs and where might there be surplus resources?

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.

Only solicit input for decisions for which you are willing and able to incorporate the feedback. Your employees are smart; they know when you've created a false sense of input. Rather than create the illusion of opportunity for "voice" when you know the input will not be considered, find genuine ways to give employees autonomy and control over their work.

SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Companies often solicit employee feedback, but then employees don't get to witness the decision process so they don't understand what happens with their input. Communicate with employees to assure people that suggestions were received, describe what options you considered, and explain why you went with the final decision.

Many companies struggle to make decisions at the right level of the organization. Decisions should be made as close to the work as possible. Even for strategic, system-wide decisions, consider who you can talk with to gather information, learn about key pain points, and understand perspectives of those actually involved in the work.

Take a look at how you're spending your time and energy. Are you micromanaging in places where someone else is equipped and ready to take on the work? Are there projects, tasks, or initiatives that you can empower others to own?

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.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Ensure that strategic priorities are clear, focused, and well-communicated. Encourage mid-level leaders to align their goals with the goals of the organization.

For rules, policies, and norms that span across your organization, make sure to have a documented resource that employees can reference. Revisit these documents periodically so people remember where to find them and to assess when revisions/updates are necessary.

Require that positions have clear job descriptions. Successful companies also use competency models to demonstrate how knowledge, skills, and expectations are similar and different across various roles in the organization. Hire and develop your talent based on the outlined expectations.

Develop systems, practices, and procedures that align rewards with expectations. What evidence do you have that your practices are rewarding the right kinds of behaviors and are not rewarding wrong or unintended behaviors?

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.

Just because a message is communicated doesn't mean it has been heard. Managers are often employees' best link to understanding what's going on in the organization. When there is a breakdown in communication from manager to employee, it can rapidly produce feelings of uncertainty, skepticism, and confusion for employees. It is critical that managers build trust, communicate frequently, draw connections between change and employees' specific work, and what outstanding questions are weighing on people's minds.

SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Be proactive in communicating changes from multiple channels (e.g., blogs, newsletters, team meetings, town halls). Within your message, communicate "what's in it for employees" and other key stakeholders (customers, etc.).

Ensure that important messages are delivered consistently to all members of the organization (rather than a select few). Check-in with your direct reports and their employees to make sure they heard the message and heard it accurately.

Help employees understand that changes are happening not because the way things were done before was inferior, but because the business is evolving and changes are necessary to keep up with the new environment.

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.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Check that leaders are on the same page about the vision and values. Do leaders across groups/departments share consistent messages? Invite leaders to share examples of how and when the vision has motivated their groups.

Bring leaders together to explore each group's role in accomplishing the vision. Discuss how are groups working together to achieve the vision. Brainstorm examples of when collaboration was critical for accomplishing the vision and ask leaders to share out with their teams.

Exhaust all possibility to weave the vision and values into regular communication channels. Look for opportunities to share stories of the values in action.

CONFIDENCE IN CAREER

Employees definitely won't achieve their career goals unless 1) employees know what their goals are, and 2) managers are 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.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Spread a mindset that career goals aren't just about promotions and pay increases. Share your own goals to learn, develop new skills, form new relationships, or expand your understanding of particular areas of the business.

Support training and professional development initiatives. Opportunities to grow knowledge, master new technologies, or explore new processes/systems allow employees to simultaneously improve their effectiveness and build personal capabilities.

Successful leadership succession doesn't just happen, it requires purposeful effort. Evaluate the methods for succession planning in your organization, including at lower levels. Without a qualified person to fill their shoes, you cannot promote someone into an executive position. Prioritize career planning throughout the organization.

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.

"Sandwiching" feedback — where you sandwich negative feedback between two pieces of positive feedback — is not as effective as some may claim. When feedback feels insincere people are less receptive and may overlook the constructive information you're sharing. Rather than hide critical feedback, be upfront with employees and set the expectation that all feedback conversations should include discussion around positive performance and potential growth opportunities.

SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

> My manager regularly provides me with constructive feedback to improve my job performance.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Role model the behaviors of asking for feedback to encourage others to do the same. For example, after a project or meeting, check-in peers or direct reports and ask: How do you think that went? Do you have any feedback on things I could have done better/differently?

It's all too easy to give critical feedback or point out what needs more work, especially when you're short on time. Don't fall into this trap. Positive feedback is actually more effective and is highly motivating. Make a point to call out the positive.

Be careful of creating a culture that is too "nice" in the sense that people do not give each other feedback. Make continuous learning and improvement a regular part of your day-to-day conversations.

CONTRIBUTE TO THE MISSION

You aren't able to share the goals of the organization if they haven't actually been set or defined. It is essential that all members of the leadership team use organizational goals to set priorities (too many goals and everything becomes a priority) that help to align activity across the organization. At the business unit/department level, leaders should align their goals with the organization and help employees understand their role in success.

Some leaders hesitate to discuss organizational goals, vision or mission because it feels too lofty or warm-and-fuzzy. Find a way to communicate an inspiring vision that feels right given your culture and leadership style. Having a purpose and feeling part of something greater than yourself has shown to be incredibly motivating and fulfilling, so don't deprive your employees of knowing how they fit into the big picture.

SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

As best as possible, try to limit the number of goals for the organization to a critical few. Too many priorities cause lack of alignment and conflict for resources.

Ensure that performance management, incentives, rewards, and recognition programs are aligned with organizational goals. Are you rewarding and motivating employees in the right ways (i.e., in ways that move you closer to achieving organizational goals)? Prompt your leadership teams to demonstrate that system-wide programs are motivating desired behaviors in your workforce.

Find ways to celebrate successes. Do your employees know how far you've come? On a regular basis, find ways to share success stories, give a shout-out to work well-done, and communicate progress towards goals using specific metrics.

CROSS FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION

Lack of collaboration across groups may seem like a team or supervisor issue, but this may not be the case. The culture and tone set for collaboration by senior leaders is critically important. Senior leaders are responsible for creating an environment that is conducive to cross-departmental collaboration, open communication, and cohesion.

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.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Ensure that each department is clear on how they support the vision. Check for alignment (and misalignment) across departments in accomplishing common goals.

Identify what policies, procedures, etc. are working well and where are there opportunities for improvement. Check with department leaders to learn how work can be transferred and shared seamlessly across groups. Seek input from key stakeholders at all levels and from across the organization.

Reflect on the collaboration among your leadership team. Are senior leaders modeling good collaboration, open communication, care and concern for others, and positive relationship building?

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.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

As an Executive Team, agree what specific messages need to be shared and by when so information is disseminated thoroughly and consistently across all groups. Ensure others leaders also feel comfortable sharing key messages with their teams.

Facilitate conversations between department leaders to encourage open and frequent communication. Ask groups to share current priorities, recent successes/milestones, and challenges that are top-of-mind.

Coach managers to have difficult conversations and effectively resolve conflict. Help leaders identify different kinds of conflict — task, interpersonal, and process conflict, so they can direct conversations to the root of the challenges they're facing.

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.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Demonstrate positive communications by utilizing effective listening skills, thinking through how words and actions will impact others, and being aware of body language, tone of voice, and demeanor in all interactions.

As much as possible, address people by their names. Try to remember and talk about details from previous interactions with people (or ask them questions to prompt your memory). This may seem like a small gesture, but it makes people feel known and recognized by you.

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.

Change is necessary, but reinventing the wheel isn't. Before jumping into a big change or deciding to move forward with a new idea, challenge yourself and others to think through the pros and cons. Consider the anticipated and unanticipated impact. Identify who else the change may affect and invite them into the conversation. Welcome and encourage all new ideas and be thoughtful about taking action.

SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Set the tone for what employees should be innovating around. Is it the customer experience, products, process improvement?

Share stories of not only successful innovations, but also situations where employees may have taken a risk that failed. Employees are more likely to try out new ideas when they feel comfortable that it is ok to try something and potentially fail.

Use social media as a way of posing questions and ask for solutions. Ask employees to vote on the best idea.

Provide the resources needed to implement the ideas worth acting upon and recognize those responsible for generating the idea.

RECOGNITION

Recognizing people in a meaningful way depends on the individual. Rather than trying one-size fits all approach, be sure to customize how you recognize employees based on their personal preferences.

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.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Never underestimate the value of sharing time and building a relationship with your employees. Make time to be accessible — ask employees to share what they like about their work and what could be going better for them.

Model the importance of recognition by finding meaningful ways to recognize and celebrate the people who report to you. Modeling this practice will encourage your teams to also recognize, appreciate, and celebrate their own direct reports.

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.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Often messages get lost as they are repeated throughout the organization: for critical messages, consider using short and concise written communication or providing talking points to leaders as a reference for when they talk to their teams.

People become frustrated or feel devalued when they get word that other people received information or updates before they did. To hedge this, agree what specific messages need to be shared and by when so information is disseminated thoroughly and consistently.

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.

It is easy to assume that employees know about the full range of training, learning, and development opportunities at your organization and that they feel encouraged to take advantage of them. Unfortunately, this often is not the case. Employees may be unaware of programs. People may be unsure how to apply, get funding, or meet the needed requirements. They may receive mixed messages about being encouraged to "grow as a professional" but job demands do not allow time for doing so. It takes a certain culture to offer and encourage employee growth opportunities.

SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

When you come across something that peaks your own interest – a blog, a podcast, a good book — share it with your team. And encourage that they do the same.

On a regular basis, ask members of your team to share what they are currently doing to develop themselves. Emphasizing the importance of continual learning will encourage your leaders to make time for their own development and nurture growth in their teams.

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.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Coach managers to set good operating standards for their teams. Check-in with leaders about ways to set expectations for communication, decision-making, conflict, and sharing feedback.

Model and practice empathy. No one understands our work and responsibilities quite like we do, especially when we're under time pressure and high demands. Rather than jump to conclusions about how others are spending their time, inspire your employees to first ask questions, check for understanding and confirm expectations.

Encourage others to hold you accountable. Ask people to check-in for progress updates, offer feedback, and communicate how your work/process impacts their responsibilities.

TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION

Communication from Senior Leadership is more than just the information shared directly from those at the top of the organization — people can easily attribute poor communication from their managers as lack of communication from the top. 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.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Be intentional about explaining the reasons behind the change. Ensure that other leaders are able to explain reasons to their staff.

Review communication practices. Are they consistent and transparent? Does information cascade to all levels of the organization? Use a variety of communication channels and repeat, repeat, repeat. Keep others informed about big picture goals and the plan for success.

100 calls, 100 days. The executives of one of our clients pledged to each call 100 employees in 100 days. Five-minute casual conversations to check in and see how things were going contributed to the employee feeling valued and leaders learned a tremendous amount about the organization.

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. However, if work-life balance is an engagement driver for your team, it could be a sign that your employees are approaching burnout.

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. Check in with employees to understand pain points that get in the way of efficiency.

SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Help identify clear priorities (meaning 2-3 key areas of focus). Avoid the trap of everything is a priority, so nothing is a priority.

Acknowledge expectations regarding work hours. For example, you may explain, "I send emails on nights or weekends because that works for my schedule, but I do not expect you to respond immediately."

Implementing flexible work arrangements can greatly increase employee satisfaction and retention by fostering better work-life balance. Flexible work schedules can take many forms (flextime, compressed workweek, job-sharing, telecommuting, and permanent part-time arrangements).