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# EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT MANAGER 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 managers can do to improve the employee experience.

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## ADEQUATE RESOURCES

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Ensure employees know that it is acceptable to speak up when adequate resources are not available and the proper channels to do so.

When you have to make tough decisions or are unable to meet all employees' requests, get your team involved in conversations, set expectations for when needs can be met, and talk others through your decision process. Explain the rationale behind decisions and emphasize how allocated resources support team goals and priorities.

## AUTONOMY

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Create a culture of empowerment by setting parameters for performance. Then, get out of the way and let employees accomplish their work how they best see fit.

Review decisions that are made on a regular basis. Who makes those decisions? Is there an opportunity to shift the decision-making as close as possible to where the work happens?

Identify who needs to be involved in what kind of decisions and then give as much autonomy to employees for all other topics.

Begin building decision-making skills by presenting scenarios to employees and ask them how they would respond. What factors would the employee consider? Use the dialog as an opportunity to provide coaching.

When making key decisions, it is important to include employees with a variety of perspectives, backgrounds, and skills if possible. Consider who you could include in the conversation that you aren't currently and ensure input comes from diverse viewpoints.

## BELONGING

- > I feel a sense of community and belonging at work

Feeling connected to others at work is one of the most powerful predictors of employee engagement. Those who feel isolated physically, emotionally, and/or professionally are much more likely to leave than those who feel included. Research also suggests that those who feel a sense of belonging also have higher performance develop and advance their careers more quickly, and even take fewer sick days.

Many instances of workplace exclusion are not intentional, but that doesn't make them any less painful or difficult for employees. Consider your own interactions with employees. Do you pay attention to the "little things" and make time to check in on a personal level? Do you address people by name? How do you respond to employee ideas--even if the idea can't be implemented, do you respond with appreciation for their contribution?

### ACTION TIPS:

Consider if you are creating the opportunity for everyone to contribute equitably. If not, how can you invite more voices to the conversation?

Mentorship and professional relationships can make or break a career. Help someone by sharing your own journey and listening to theirs. You'll get a chance to share your successes and failures and you'll hear another person's diversity of experience.

## CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

After discussing an employee's roles or responsibilities (i.e., with new hires or for ongoing work tasks), try asking, "Based on what we've talked about, what's your understanding of what you'll be taking care of, and what you can count on me to do?" Check for understanding about timing, resources, etc. Having someone verbalize expectations back to you ensures you're all on the same page.

Be sure to document rules, policies, and norms that span across your team, department, or company and ensure employees know how to access that document. Revisit these documents periodically so people remember where to find them and keep them updated.

When an employee fails to meet your expectations, give him/her the benefit of the doubt and explore whether your expectations matched his/hers. Maybe there was a misunderstanding about the task, timing, or roles. Use the situation as a learning opportunity to clarify expectations going forward and encourage the employee to solicit feedback.

Check-in as priorities shift to make sure expectations are clear.

## COACHING

- > My manager effectively coaches me to improve my performance.

If employees don't understand their blind spots, it is very difficult for them to improve. Additionally, feeling like your manager is actively invested in your growth and performance is highly motivating.

### ACTION TIPS:

Begin building decision-making skills by presenting scenarios to employees and ask them how they would respond. What factors would the employee consider? Use the dialog as an opportunity to provide coaching

While you don't want to overwhelm employees, motivating your team to get out of their comfort zone can help them grow and perform at their highest potential. Giving employees "stretch assignments" and coaching them through the more difficult aspects builds empowerment and fuels growth.

## COMMUNICATING CHANGE

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Spend time explaining the reason behind why decisions are made. Help employees understand how the changes support the broader goals of the organization.

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.

Fostering a collaborative climate with open communication is especially important when going through change. Set aside extra time to answer questions or concerns.

If you don't know the answer or a decision has not been made, say so. Communicate when you expect to know more and then be sure to follow-up.

## COMMUNICATING AN INSPIRING VISION

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Get intimately familiar with your mission and values and use the language consistent with your team. During team meetings, in email communications, during planning and strategy sessions, and when goal setting with individual team members, connect ideas and priorities back to the company mission and values.

Ensure you have a solid understanding of where the company is headed and how your team contributes to that vision so that you can effectively create meaning and purpose for your employees.

When communicating vision, help employees understand "what's in it for them" so they can find personal meaning in working hard to achieve strategic goals.

Check-in with your team on a regular basis to communicate the vision for the future of the organization and how your team plays a role in this vision. Invite your team to ask questions, brainstorm how each team member directly or indirectly supports the overall mission and identify ways to correct any misalignment with the mission.

## CONFIDENCE IN CAREER

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Identify and communicate clear career paths and open positions.

Establish clear and consistent promotion policies and procedures including when internal jobs will be posted and when they will not be posted.

Meet with employees one-on-one to discuss career goals/interests, developmental opportunities, and opportunities for growth within the organization.

Be proactive in providing learning opportunities, especially for high potential employees.

Look for less formal opportunities for career growth, like expanding responsibilities, increasing variety in one's work, or having the opportunity to teach others.

## CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Consider short, yet frequent check-ins with each direct report (e.g., 20 minutes, once a week) and focus on: 1) what's going well? 2) where are you having challenges? 3) how can I help?

Focus on providing real-time feedback and use questions to help employees process their own performance. Ask questions like: how do you think that went? What do you think you could do differently next time?

In conversations with direct reports, focus on the behavior rather than the person. For example, rather than saying, “You are confrontational,” consider describing a specific behavior such as, “yesterday, when you raised your voice....”

We often avoid providing feedback because we don't want to upset others. However, it is important to remember that being direct and honest is the kind thing to do. Feeling frustrated and not saying anything leads to resentment, conflict, and confusion.

## CONTRIBUTE TO THE MISSION

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Meet one-on-one with employees regularly to discuss priorities and discuss how they connect to what the organization is working to accomplish.

Give employees permission to place projects that are not directly related to organizational goals on the back burner.

Structure shift/staff meetings so that discussions focus on key organizational/department goals and how the work of each person is (or is not) lined up with these goals.

Identify processes/work that used to be valuable but no longer contribute to organizational goals. Remove that work where possible.

## CROSS FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Encourage leaders to discuss their goals/priorities and seek alignment. Leaders should focus their approach to leadership from an “organizational” view vs. a “department or team” view.

Encourage shared ownership and a commitment to the success of the collaboration by asking team members to agree to the objectives (or better yet, help define the objectives) and discuss the benefits to the organization.

It is important for members of the collaboration to understand their role and responsibilities at each stage of the collaboration.

## CROSS FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Keep lines of communication open for individuals to voice frustrations, concerns, needs, and suggestions for improvement.

Facilitate a conversation with another department and ask: 1) How is our customer service? 2) How do we make your lives easier/more difficult? 3) What would you like our department to know about how we work together?

When asking for help/support from another department, be sure to communicate the reason for the request and the impact it will have. When people understand how their contribution will have an impact, they are more often more likely to be open to help.

## DEMONSTRATING RESPECT

- > My manager treats me with 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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Often times simple behaviors make all the difference when it comes to ensuring others feel respected. Take time for simple greetings, ask how people are doing and use common courtesy.

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.

Encourage employees to share ideas, opinions, and concerns (even those who may be less likely to volunteer to share their thoughts). Utilize some of these ideas and be sure to recognize the employee who shared them.

Look for ways to have diversity in meetings and committees, especially when important decisions will be made that impact the larger group.

Implement policies and procedures consistently so employees feel they are being treated fairly. Provide equal opportunities for employees to participate in professional development, committees, and task forces.

## DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- > People on my team are willing to have difficult conversations

Tackling difficult conversations head on is key to staying on top of problems and building a learning culture. Team members should feel safe to bring up any topic of conversation without negative consequences - regardless of the difficulty. When issues get swept under the rug, they can become bigger problems later. Tough talks are difficult, but necessary for a strong business and successful team.

Do you role model strong communication by bringing up difficult topics or do you wait until the last minute? Do you champion others speaking up by thanking them for their contribution? Do you create a space that is psychologically safe for others to speak? Do you develop a plan to have a difficult conversation before you have it?

### ACTION TIPS:

Start creating opportunities for communication surrounding difficult topics. Practice makes perfect! Be the one to break the ice and encourage conversations.

People will hesitate to bring up difficult conversations when they feel nothing will be done about it. Ensure difficult conversations receive follow-up. Closing the loop will help your team feel like their voice matters and they were heard.

Schedule time to discuss hard topics. If people need the space and time to voice concerns or other difficult topics, it can be useful to add it to the agenda in team meetings. Do you have a weekly or monthly team meeting? Add time for employees to bring up these points of conversation.

Consider barriers to psychological safety for your team. Is there a particular individual who shoots down ideas? Are people punished for bringing up uncomfortable topics? Do people make jokes when someone speaks up about a hard topic? Work to create an environment where these barriers are removed for people to give feedback or provide a system to report concerns so they can make it to the team agenda with anonymity.

## ENCOURAGING NEW IDEAS

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Publicly recognize and reward new ideas, even if they are small incremental changes.

It is important to create an environment where new ideas are welcome, personal risk taking is encouraged, and creativity is valued. Stress the importance of creativity and set aside time for brainstorming in meetings.

When new ideas are being generated, practice giving the additive feedback of “yes, and...” in response to an idea rather than “no, but...” This can unleash positive energy that builds a collaborative climate.

Having fun with colleagues and trying new activities together can help us to look at things in a new way. One great way to spur new ideas is to create a competition for the most innovative approach to solve a particular problem.

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

## EXPRESSING OPINIONS

- > I am comfortable expressing my opinions on issues important to me.

As a manager it is critical to encourage and foster an environment where employees feel safe to voice their ideas and opinions. Teams where employees feel comfortable voicing opinions are likely to experience increased creativity, productivity, and performance.

As a leader/manager you must lead by example. Use your own actions to show your employees the types of open, transparent communication you want to implement. How supportive are your current team interactions in supporting employees to speak freely? How often do you recognize honest dialogue?

### ACTION TIPS:

Give specific feedback on how to progress employee ideas. Start reinforcing your employees for simply providing their ideas - each time they bring an idea, provide them with actionable feedback on how they can further develop those ideas.

Always highlight good ideas that have come to you via a team member to the rest of the team

Make it as easy as possible for employees to share ideas through multiple platforms that accommodate different styles. Different ways to share ideas could be through team or one-on-one meetings, email, or shared documents.

## LEADERSHIP ACTS ON FEEDBACK

- > Senior Leaders at this organization act on employee feedback

You've asked your employees to take the time to share their open and honest feedback. Doing this and responding with inaction or inadequate communication is often worse than never asking in the first place and can be demoralizing to employees who want to see change and improvement.

When you receive feedback, do you spend significant time ruminating on what was shared? Do you get defensive or dismissive? Or do you take a breath, digest it, and think of a small actionable way to improve? As a leader, it's important to respond with intention and clarity when you receive organizational feedback, instead of getting caught in "analysis paralysis" or letting the emotion of what was shared get the better of you.

### ACTION TIPS:

Communicate what you learned and where you'll focus. Tell your employees what you're going to do. There may be some quick wins and changes that can be made immediately, and there may be some that require a longer time. There may also be some feedback that you are unable to act upon. Demonstrate that you have really considered the feedback and explain why you cannot act on that request, or provide an alternative, to show your employees that you are actively listening.

Once you have identified the primary focus of your employee engagement program, it's time to develop specific objectives. To be meaningful these objectives have to be smart: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound. You will have overarching organizational goals that in turn are translated into team and departmental ones. Try to steer away from vague platitudes, and instead create plans with specific goal outcomes and clearly outlined milestones.

## MANAGER CARES

- > My manager cares about me as a person, not just as an employee

The manager relationship is one of the most important relationships we have at work. When employees feel that they are seen as people and not just a cog in the machine, they are much more likely to show up with confidence, authenticity, and commitment at work.

Do you treat all employees with courtesy and politeness? Do you check in about their personal lives while maintaining professionalism? How do you respond to employees who share struggles, difficulties, or crises they may be dealing with, both at and outside of work?

### ACTION TIPS:

Understand what makes each employee unique

Over the next month or two, spend quality time with each of your employees.

Consider doing a personality or strengths assessment with your team and celebrate and explore differences.

## MANAGER LISTENS

- > My manager listens to and responds to my ideas and concerns

Listening to and valuing the ideas and concerns of others is key to demonstrating that you appreciate the thoughts and perspectives of all.

Consider the environment you foster on your team. How often do you ask for the opinion of your employees? How often do you use employee ideas to implement change? In what ways do you demonstrate the employees' ideas are valued? Are you dismissive of employee concerns, or do you practice active listening even if it is not within your direct control to act on those ideas?

### ACTION TIPS:

Keep lines of communication open for individuals to voice frustrations, concerns, needs, and suggestions for improvement. Think through how your behavior, words, and actions will impact others, and be aware of body language, tone of voice, and demeanor in all interactions. Also, focus on listening before responding.

When making decisions that impact your team, work with those affected to ask for input/recommendations and try to incorporate at least one suggestion. Then, follow up with those who have provided input.

Consider committing to a regular five-minute check-in with each teammate, which helps individuals feel valued and leaders learn more about the organization. This can be a daily call, individual email, or virtual meeting to see how they are doing.

## RECOGNITION

- > I receive recognition when I do excellent work.

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Offer just-in-time, on the spot recognition. Recognition that is unexpected or outside of “formal” channels can be even more meaningful.

Identify ways for peers to recognize peers and give them the tools to do so on an ongoing basis.

Never underestimate the value of sharing time and building a relationship with your employees. Make time for the employee to run ideas by you, talk about concerns, and just to get to know each other. Doing so will make it more authentic when you provide recognition and more effective when you need to provide constructive feedback.

## SHARING INFORMATION

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

People have different preferences for methods of communication. Consider using more than one form of communication (e.g., email, newsletter, town hall meetings, shift/team meetings, video communication, social media).

Employees can handle "bad" news but struggle with no news. In the absence of information, we fill in the missing pieces, which can lead to inaccurate messages or rumors. Consider this when crafting communications. If you don't know, say so.

Often, communicating the process and reasoning that led to a particular decision is as important as conveying the decision itself. These details foster employee buy-in and understanding for what to expect next. Let your team in on your thinking so people can ask questions, feel in-the-know, and can even help anticipate challenges you didn't identify. Because processing and decision-making happens in our own heads, and because we're often in a hurry, it's easy to forget to let people in on our thinking.

## SKILL DEVELOPMENT

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Emphasize ways to develop that are less formal – opportunities to work on innovative projects, peer-to-peer teaching/mentoring, increase in the variety of work, opportunities to share ideas.

Provide a clear avenue for employees to share their developmental needs and explore ways in which this training can be provided. Determine whether this is an individual need or training that could be provided at the group level.

Have regular one-on-one conversations with employees. What is going well? Where are you having challenges? How can I help?

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.

Ensure that everyone on your team has at least one goal they are actively working towards. Additionally, empower your employees to select a formal or informal development activity that will help move them closer to meeting their goals.

## TEAM GOAL

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

The leaders of effective groups focus energy on articulating clear goals for the team, encouraging change where change is needed, and building on the talents of group members in accomplishing goals.

How critical is teamwork and collaboration to your team's success? Does the nature of your team's work require high levels of collaboration? Even if your team members don't work on the same projects, are there missed opportunities for knowledge-sharing and relationship-building?

### ACTION TIPS:

Review whether roles and responsibilities are clear within the team. Coordination can break down if employees are not clear on where responsibility sits for certain tasks. If responsibilities do lack clarity, create a job sheet of common tasks carried out during a typical project/workflow and allocate tasks to a job role.

Set clear "norms" for behavior that are agreed upon by the team. For example, how do we communicate critical information? What is our response time? How do we address conflict? How do we share feedback? Set expectations for how work will get done and call on the team to hold one another accountable.

Work on creating an environment that fosters relationships and makes it ok to speak up and hold each other accountable. As the leader, demonstrate this value by openly admitting mistakes, sharing that you don't know something or acknowledging that results are better when you work together.

Provide time for group members to share their concerns or ideas about expectations, responsibilities, or outcomes.

## TEAM TRUST

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

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.

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## TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION

- > **Communication from Senior Leaders is consistent and transparent.**

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Communicating the process that led to a decision is as important as conveying the decision itself. These details foster employee buy-in and understanding for what to expect next. Let employees in on Senior Leaders' thinking so people can ask questions, feel in-the-know, and help anticipate challenges.

Be upfront with employees that while they may be raising a great idea, it's just not possible to tackle everything at once. Help the employee understand how ideas are prioritized and responded to.

Pay attention to employees' questions and frustrations around communication. Clear up rumors or misconceptions early. Commit to soliciting more information when you can and deliver on this promise by sharing current events, updates from Senior Leaders, or anticipated timing for more information.

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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

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.

### ACTION TIPS:

Encourage the team to review and eliminate items that no longer add value. For example, there may be a report you run that is no longer used. Can we stop doing that work?

Assume best intentions of employees and offer flexibility when possible. Generally, when leaders offer flexibility to their employee, they are more likely to reciprocate when work is needed outside of typical hours.

Model the best practice of taking care of yourself first. Be in tune with what helps you feel “centered” and prioritize those things even during busy times. For example, regular exercise, eating well, family time or a hobby can help us be our best selves at work and sets the example for others.

Review workloads/projects with employees regularly and be open to putting lower priority projects on the back burner or eliminating them altogether. Ensure employees know it is ok to say, “yes, at a later time” or “yes, and that means something else needs to come off my priority list” in reference to requests.