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 developmental 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 directly communicate 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 **leaders can do to improve the employee experience.**

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ACCESS TO JOB-CRITICAL 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 is effective but employees are telling you otherwise, it may be time to consider new methods for sharing key information. It's important to find ways to communicate that work for your people and environment.

In today's information-rich world, the challenge is not always having enough information, but rather accessing the most relevant and useful information. Share the right amount of information, leveraging the right channels. Confirm who will share the information and how it will be shared, especially when information must be cascaded down through the organization.

SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

> I have enough information to effectively do my job.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Empower managers to keep teams informed. Equip managers with the information and resources they need to effectively communicate with their teams. Senior leaders should regularly brief managers, so they can relay clear, up-to-date, and actionable information to their employees.

Do a gap analysis. Determine what type of information employees are missing and respond accordingly.

Understand people may have different preferences for methods of communication. Don't assume employees will engage with every communication you share simply because it is coming from you. Often messages get lost as they are repeated throughout the organization so craft them in a way that will encourage employee readership. Use the appropriate tone and length for your chosen communication channel. Regardless of the medium you use, ensure the critical parts of the message are included in every communication you share.

Be thoughtful about the how/when/who when sharing information. People become frustrated or feel devalued when they discover that other people received information or updates before they did. Safeguard against this by determining what and when specific messages need to be shared so information is disseminated thoroughly and consistently.

ADEQUATE RESOURCES

The demands of our jobs (e.g., deadlines, emotional labor, workload, role conflict) are often what lead to burnout. Having resources, on the other hand, is essential for feeling motivated and engaged, and even helps 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 about resources are you thinking equipment, staff, money, time, support, or something else altogether? Take the initiative to learn what comes to mind when your people are thinking about resources. Don't overlook something important that may seem small to you but can make a large difference in your employees' work.

SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Work to understand current needs. This is a topic where an additional conversation is typically needed to fully assess the issue. If this item is low scoring, check with your people if the current tools, technology, and materials meet their needs. Ask for feedback to identify gaps. This is worth a conversation.

Advocate for necessary resources. Be a champion for your people by advocating for the budget, tools, or personnel they need to be successful.

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

Set clear priorities. Help employees focus on what's most important by setting clear goals and priorities, which can prevent the misuse of time and resources.

AUTONOMY

Having autonomy is a fundamental human need, so it's no surprise that it is a key factor 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:

Communicate the decision-making process. Companies often solicit employee feedback, but then employees don't get to witness the decision-making 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.

Delegate decisions appropriately. 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 most closely involved in the work.

Empower your leaders so you can focus on strategic work. Consider how you spend 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?

BELONGING

Feeling connected to others at work is one of the most powerful predictors of employee engagement across our clients. 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. Fostering a sense of belonging among your workforce not only improves the employee experience, but it also offers valuable benefits to the business which contribute to long-term success.

SURVEY ITEMS

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Consider if you are creating the opportunity for everyone to contribute equitably. If the answer is no, how can you invite more voices to the conversation?

Create community through professional dialogue. 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.

Try to avoid favoritism. It can be easy to visit local work sites or provide growth opportunities to high performing employees or employees who share things in common with you. Be intentional about making yourself visible and accessible to all employees. Provide every employee on your team with opportunities to gain experience and thrive.

Communicate a shared purpose. Regularly communicate the organization's mission, values, and goals, and show how each employee's role contributes to the bigger picture. When employees feel connected to the company's purpose, they're more likely to feel a sense of belonging.

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Setting clear expectations is straightforward but can also be easily overlooked. When you or others make assumptions about expectations, it can lead to misaligned expectations, resulting in conflict or poor performance. This is easy to avoid if you take the time to make it a priority and create a norm where others help you establish good expectations too.

Setting clear expectations is not a one-time ordeal. Change is constant so revisit expectations on a regular basis. Every time your leadership 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.

Formally document rules, expectations, and cultural norms. 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 clear job descriptions for all positions within the organization. Job descriptions provide employees and managers with a clear set of roles and responsibilities to which the employee is accountable. Hire and develop your talent based on the outlined expectations. Successful companies also use competency models to demonstrate how knowledge, skills, and expectations are similar and different across various roles in the organization.

Develop systems, practices, and procedures that align rewards with expectations. Your organization's practices should reward the right kinds of behaviors and discourage undesirable or unintended behaviors.

COACHING

It is important for senior leaders to make time for coaching their leaders because it strengthens their own leadership capabilities and ensures strategic alignment across levels of leadership. Coaching is a critical tool to developing leaders in ways which align with the organization's future growth and succession plan.

If leaders don't understand their blind spots, it is difficult for them to improve. Coaching not only helps them grow, but the active investment in their growth and performance can be highly motivating and contributes to overall organizational success.

SURVEY ITEMS

> My manager effectively coaches me to improve my performance.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Provide quick training opportunities for leaders. Begin building decision-making skills by presenting scenarios to your leaders and ask them how they would respond. What factors would they consider? What factors should they consider? Use the dialog as an opportunity to provide coaching.

Push leaders to facilitate growth. Help your direct reports get out of their comfort zone to help them grow and perform at their highest potential. Give them "stretch assignments" and coach them through the more difficult aspects. This builds empowerment and fuels growth.

Remember to coach behaviors, not people. Constructive feedback should reinforce or correct specific behaviors employees display, not their personality traits.

Give leaders opportunities to gain additional insight. Invite your leaders to skip-level and/or executive level meetings to gain exposure to the work and strategic perspectives of senior leadership.

COMMUNICATING CHANGE

Change is hard, but strategic change management increases your chances of successful adoption. To help employees navigate change be sure to: 1) help people understand the reason for the change 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 is sustained.

Just because a message is communicated doesn't mean it was heard. People need to hear things multiple times. Your communication strategy should plan for increased communication from leadership, leveraging multiple communication channels. Don't forget the role of managers when developing a communication strategy. Managers are often employees' best resource to understand 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:

Align on the "Why" behind the change. Make sure managers understand the strategic reasons behind the change, including how it supports the organization's long-term goals. This allows them to explain not just *what* is changing, but *why* the change is important and how it will benefit the team and the company going forward.

Proactively communicate changes. Use multiple channels to share information about organizational changes with employees (e.g., blogs, newsletters, team meetings, town halls) to ensure it reaches all parts of the organization. Consider developing resources to support managers and employees during the transition. For example, make a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) document available to managers and employees.

Provide ongoing support. Let managers know that leadership is available to support them throughout the change process. Whether through additional training, resources, or direct involvement, senior leaders should reinforce that managers aren't navigating the change alone, making it easier for them to guide their teams.

COMMUNICATING AN INSPIRING VISION

Communicating an inspiring vision for the future means painting a clear and compelling picture of where the organization is headed and why it matters. It's about giving employees something bigger to strive for, aligning their day-to-day efforts with a meaningful goal that resonates with them. When leadership shares a vision that excites people, it ignites passion, motivates teams, and drives engagement. It's important because it builds trust, fosters a sense of purpose, and helps employees see the role they play in achieving long-term success. An inspiring vision gives everyone a reason to push through challenges and stay committed to the organization's growth and transformation.

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 groups are working together to achieve the vision. Brainstorm examples of when collaboration was critical for accomplishing the vision and ask leaders to share them out with their teams.

Seize every opportunity to weave the vision and values into regular communication channels. Look for opportunities to share stories of the values in action to communicate how work is contributing to the broader vision.

CONFIDENCE IN CAREER

For employees to feel they can achieve their career goals, it means they see clear opportunities for growth and development within the organization. They need to feel supported with the right resources, mentorship, and a path forward, whether through promotions, skill-building, or new challenges. This sense of possibility is critical because when employees believe they can advance their careers with us, they're more engaged, motivated, and loyal. It reduces turnover and fosters a culture of continuous improvement, where people are invested not just in their own success, but in the success of the company. Helping employees reach their career goals is a win-win for individuals and the organization.

Employees don't always draw connections between learning or growth opportunities and career progression. Career advancement is not only achieved through 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 your managers see how experiences like these are critical for their career progression and supporting their teams in 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. Take time to share your own goals to learn, develop new skills, form new relationships, or expand your understanding of other 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.

Be intentional about succession planning. 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 to an executive position. Prioritize career planning throughout the organization.

CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Constructive feedback is critical to the development of your employees and the health of the business. You can model healthy feedback behaviors for your team by instating regular feedback loops, keeping the lines of communication open and encouraging a culture of continuous improvement. Constructive feedback empowers your managers to make better decisions and feel supported in their efforts. Meaningful feedback can also support the business by increasing performance, aligning organizational goals as they cascade down the business, and aiding in succession planning.

"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 managers 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:

Set a strong example around feedback behaviors. Model the behaviors of asking for feedback to encourage others to do the same. For example, after a project or meeting, check-in with 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?

Lean into positive feedback. 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 more effective and is highly motivating. Make an intentional effort to call out the positive too.

Emphasize feedback as a mechanism for improvement. 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

When employees feel like the work they do directly contributes to the company's goals, it means they understand how their efforts impact the bigger picture. They're not just completing tasks—they see how their role drives the success of the organization. Ensure your organizational goals are clearly aligned and all levels of leadership can clearly articulate them to employees. When people know their contributions matter, they're more likely to be invested in the company's success, collaborate better, and push toward shared goals. It's about turning individual actions into collective progress, which benefits the entire organization.

SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Enable leaders to connect individual roles to company objectives. Help leaders and managers see the connection. This can be done through one-on-one meetings, team discussions, or performance reviews where leaders explicitly link individual efforts to company success.

Identify and communicate the most critical goals to the organization. Too many priorities often cause lack of alignment and create conflict for resources. Try to limit the number of critical goals for the organization to three at the most, and clearly share these goals through appropriate channels.

Reward efforts appropriately. Align organizational goals to incentives, rewards and recognition programs. Focus recognition and performance feedback on work that supports the organization's goals. Prompt your leadership teams to demonstrate that system-wide programs are motivating desired behaviors in your workforce.

Find formal and informal ways to celebrate successes. Do your employees know how far you've come? Routinely share success stories, give shout-outs to work well-done, and communicate progress towards goals using specific metrics.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COLLABORATION

For people to support one another and collaborate, leaders must foster an environment where teamwork thrives, and individuals actively share knowledge, resources, and encouragement to achieve common goals. It's about breaking down silos and building strong relationships, allowing diverse perspectives to come together to solve problems and innovate. This collaborative spirit is vital because it not only enhances productivity but also creates a culture of trust and unity. When employees feel supported by their colleagues, they're more likely to take risks, share ideas, and engage in creative solutions, ultimately driving the organization toward success. In today's fast-paced environment, collaboration is key to adapting and thriving, making it essential for your growth and resilience as a company.

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 is/isn't working. Review which policies, procedures, etc. are working well and seek out areas in need of 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 the desired collaborative behaviors? Navigate challenges to collaboration as a leadership team by opening lines of communication and demonstrating care and concern for others. Engage in team building exercises to build rapport, trust, and cohesion across the senior leadership team.

CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION

In our modern workplace, it is difficult to find regular opportunities to interact and communicate with other groups, but it is still critically important to get work done. Get creative about how your teams stay informed about other groups' work, their challenges, successes, and opportunities to increase collaboration and effectiveness

Email is often a primary channel for communication. Email is great for many purposes, especially sharing information and mass updates. Email is not as effective, however, for innovating, 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:

Consider the what/when/how. As a leadership team, determine what specific messages need to be shared and by when so information is disseminated thoroughly and consistently across all groups. Ensure other leaders also feel comfortable sharing key messages with their teams.

Facilitate conversations between department leaders. Create opportunities for and 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.

DECISION-MAKING

Most employees likely do not have personal relationships with leaders of your organization, but it's still important that they trust their leaders to make the right decisions for the company. It is critical to explain the rationale behind senior leadership decision-making and highlight its relationship with the work of employees.

SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

> I have confidence in the decisions made by the leaders of my organization.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Ask your workforce how often and through which channels they would like to hear from senior leaders. Leverage their preferred communication channels and pass this information upward for broader adoption and/or channels that are not managed by you.

Explain the reason behind decisions and why certain people were involved in the decision-making process. Be sure to help leaders understand how the decision will impact their work and how it supports their team's goal achievement and the broader organization's goals.

Attend department, site, and team meetings for Q&A sessions. This provides employees with an opportunity to build rapport with senior leaders and ask questions. You can gather and review employee questions in advance so that you can feel prepared for the conversation.

DEMONSTRATING RESPECT

Respect is the foundation of a healthy organizational culture, and most organizations have expectations around respectful treatment in their employee policies.

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:

Lead by example. Demonstrate respect in all interactions, whether with employees, peers, or customers. Senior leaders set the tone for the organization, and when they model respectful behavior—actively listening, showing empathy, and valuing diverse perspectives—it encourages others to do the same.

Recognize and address disrespectful behavior. Make it clear that disrespectful behavior won't be tolerated. Set clear expectations for respectful conduct and promptly address any issues that arise. Holding people accountable reinforces the message that respect is a non-negotiable value.

Celebrate diversity and inclusion. Actively promote an inclusive culture where differences are celebrated and respected. Provide training on unconscious bias and encourage teams to embrace diverse viewpoints. When employees feel respected for who they are, it fosters a stronger sense of belonging and collaboration.

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.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Tackling difficult conversations head on is key to staying on top of problems and building a learning culture. Employees should feel safe bringing up any topic of conversation without negative consequences - regardless of the difficulty. When issues are swept under the rug, they can become bigger problems later. While tough conversations can be uncomfortable, they are necessary for a healthy work environment and strong business.

SURVEY ITEMS

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

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

Provide employees with a clear, confidential path to express concerns or feedback. Establish formal systems and procedures that give employees a safe and structured way to have difficult conversations about their manager with a neutral party within the organization. Providing a neutral intermediary can help prevent potential conflicts from escalating and supports a culture of openness and trust.

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 designated time for employees to bring up these points in 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 challenging topic? Work to create an environment where these barriers are removed for people to give feedback or provide a system to report concerns with anonymity.

Demonstrate openness to difficult conversations. As a leader, engage in difficult conversations with employees when they arise. Modeling healthy communication behaviors such as active listening and prioritizing follow-up when needed encourages and empowers your leaders to also demonstrate openness and cultivate a culture where employees are comfortable voicing their opinions.

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, consider existing solutions or work-arounds employees may already be using. When considering 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. It is important to be clear and specific about the areas where you want feedback. This manages the volume of suggestions and ensures that you receive focused and actionable suggestions for business relevant challenges.

Share examples. Share stories of successful innovations and instances where employees may have taken a risk that was unsuccessful. Balancing these stories will help cultivate an innovative environment where employees can offer a perspective, knowing that not every idea has to succeed. Employees are more likely to suggest new ideas when they feel comfortable trying something without fear of making mistakes.

Use social media or enterprise social networks to solicit solutions. Many organizations have existing enterprise social networks or communication platforms that support socialization; leverage your platforms to ask questions about specific topics where you could use employee feedback and ask for solutions. Implore employees to vote on the best idea. Seeking their vote involves them in the decision-making process, gauges general interest in particular ideas, helps you prioritize your efforts and supports successful adoption of the solution.

EXPRESSING OPINIONS

When employees feel comfortable expressing their opinions, it means they trust that their voices will be heard and valued without fear of negative repercussions. As a leader it is critical to cultivate an environment where employees feel safe to speak up. When people know they can share ideas or concerns freely, it encourages diverse perspectives to come to the table and leads to better decision-making. It also helps identify potential issues early and builds a culture of trust.

SURVEY ITEMS

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Give specific feedback on how to progress employee ideas. Start reinforcing your employees to share their ideas with you. Each time they bring up an idea, provide them with actionable feedback on how they can further develop those ideas.

Be specific with employees about where you could use their feedback the most. This helps focus the suggestions on topics that are most critical to your work and can inform relevant decisions.

Make it as easy as possible for employees to share ideas. Think about your employees and solicit thoughts through multiple platforms that accommodate a variety of communication styles. Different ways to share ideas could be through a self-serve system, managers, or town halls.

As a leader, demonstrate openness to employee ideas. Use your own actions to show your employees the types of open, transparent communication you want to implement. Recognize and celebrate honest dialogue to reinforce the behavior. Thank employees for their ideas and suggestions even if they are not utilized. If you decide not to implement the idea, close the loop with employees by explaining why it will not be implemented.

LEADERSHIP ACTS ON 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. Acknowledging and taking action to address feedback allows you to demonstrate your commitment to growth and problem solving.

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.

SURVEY ITEMS

> Senior Leaders at this organization act on employee feedback.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Communicate what you learned and where you'll focus moving forward. Tell your employees what you're going to do. There may be some quick wins and changes that can be made immediately, while others may require a longer time to address.

Acknowledge when feedback is outside your control. There may be feedback that you are unable to act upon. Demonstrate that you have truly considered the feedback by acknowledging it and explaining why you cannot act upon the request, or provide an alternative, to show your employees that you are actively listening.

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

Be sure managers have the necessary skills/tools/resources to take action. If managers will own post-survey action at some level, ensure they are equipped with the resources to do so. If there are skill gaps, provide relevant training to develop and execute SMART action plans. Coach managers on how to process employee feedback, create action plans, and role model change behaviors.

MANAGER CARES

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 to work with confidence, authenticity, and commitment. This is also true for senior leaders and their direct reports — demonstrating care for your leaders motivates them to be their best selves at work which in turn, benefits their teams and the business as a whole.

SURVEY ITEMS

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Explore personal connections with employees. Over the next month or two, spend quality time with each of your employees. Understand what makes each employee unique. Be genuinely curious about getting to know your employees personally and professionally. You may uncover traits or behaviors that are very valuable to your team, but underutilized.

Consider doing a personality or strengths assessment with your team and celebrate and explore differences. Leverage individual strengths and differences to improve team dynamics and tailor your management style to your team's needs individually and collectively.

Check in on their personal lives while maintaining professionalism. Offer to help employees when they share struggles, difficulties, or crises they may be dealing with, both at and outside of work. If you aren't sure how to best support an employee through a particular situation, ask them what you can do to help.

MANAGER LISTENS

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 employee 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?

SURVEY ITEMS

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Keep lines of communication open. Provide regular opportunities 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.

Include appropriate parties in the decision-making process. 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. Consistent check-ins help individuals feel valued and senior leaders learn more about the organization. This can be a daily call, individual email, or virtual meeting to see how they are doing.

RECOGNITION

Recognizing people in a meaningful way depends on the individual. Rather than trying a 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 opportunities 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. Whenever you visit a site or department, make time to be accessible— ask employees to share what they like about their work and what could be going better for them.

Don't wait for the annual performance review to call out achievements. 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.

Provide your teams with the resources to recognize each other in meaningful ways. Recognition is fundamental to feeling valued and seen, but it is often deprioritized or not considered when dispersing resources. People like to be recognized in different ways; invest in resources that support a diversified approach to recognition. Resources do not equate to financial budgets. Resources can also include your time, leveraging surplus materials, training managers, policies and procedures, etc.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Opportunities for growth and development are often a main driver of employee engagement. Rich development opportunities attract strong talent, keeping them motivated and equipped to perform their job well.

Don't 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. Leaders often underestimate how aware employees are of learning and development offerings. If they are aware, some employees may be unsure how to apply, get funding, or meet stated requirements. They may also receive mixed messages about being encouraged to "grow as a professional" and allocating their time to satisfy job demands. It takes an intentional learning 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:

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

Encourage "stretch assignments" and cross-department collaboration. Provide opportunities for employees to take on "stretch assignments" or work on cross-functional projects to promote their professional growth.

Prioritize professional development for your employees. 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.

Model support for learning and development. No matter how busy work gets, give your teams permission to participate in growth and development activities during work hours. Help your employees prioritize their work in a way that focuses on the most important work and declutters tasks that may no longer be business relevant, so they are free to repurpose the time for development.

TEAM GOAL

Teamwork and collaboration are critical to success, driving effective outcomes and fostering a cohesive work environment. 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.

Not only should teams understand how their work contributes to the goals of the organization, but also how their work impacts other business units within the organization. Even when team members aren't working on the same projects, there can be valuable opportunities for knowledge-sharing and relationship-building that should not be overlooked.

SURVEY ITEMS

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

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Review the clarity of roles and responsibilities within your team. Coordination may falter if employees are unclear about task ownership. To address this, consider developing a workflow system that outlines how work gets done and how ownership is determined. Decision-making is an important yet often overlooked aspect of workflow management. Decision-making should happen as close to the work as possible, and these roles should be clearly indicated within workflows.

Set clear "norms" for behavior that are agreed upon by the leadership team. Set expectations for how work will get done and call on the team to hold one another accountable.

Establish psychological safety. Create 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.

Recognize and address issues early. If quality or timeliness issues arise, address them promptly and constructively. Senior leaders should ensure there's a process for resolving these issues quickly, so teams can maintain trust and continue to rely on one another without lingering concerns.

TEAM TRUST

Trust is the cornerstone of a healthy team dynamic, shaping how team members support and engage with one another. When someone trusts us, our reliability and commitment increase because we don't want to let them down. Trust empowers teams to assume goodwill and approach challenges with an open and supportive mindset. Teams with high trust are less likely to tolerate poor performance and they naturally build a culture of collaboration.

Conflicts within teams can erode trust, especially when they involve interpersonal relationships or team processes. Promote trust and minimize the impact of conflicts on team dynamics by addressing norms of behavior before issues arise. Proactively equip teams for navigating challenges related to *interpersonal conflicts* by discussing positive ways to deal with interpersonal differences and differences in opinions. Proactively equip teams for navigating challenges related to *processes* by establishing clear work procedures and the associated roles and responsibilities.

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. Encourage each manager to develop a working charter with their team that holds each team member accountable to their team norms. Check-in with leaders about ways to set expectations for communication, decision-making, conflict, and sharing feedback. Provide training for managers who have skills gaps related to cultivating healthy team dynamics or conflict resolution.

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. Senior leaders often receive little to no feedback because there are fewer layers above the role, if any, and employees may not feel comfortable sharing feedback with their most senior leaders. Seek feedback from trusted and diversified sources. Ask people to offer feedback on your performance and communicate how your process and decisions impact 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. Ensure all levels of leadership understand their role in communicating key messages, what information needs to be conveyed and by when.

SURVEY ITEMS

Items measuring this topic include:

> Communication from Senior Leaders is consistent and transparent.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Explain the reason behind organizational changes. Help employees understand the rationale behind a decision and why key stakeholders were involved, and how the change aligns with the organization's mission and strategic priorities. Clear communication of the reason behind change builds trust, engagement, and eases adoption of the change initiative.

Review the effectiveness of existing communication practices. Are they consistent and transparent? Does information cascade to all levels of the organization? Leverage communication channels to cultivate your organization's desired communication culture. Assess the usage frequency and purpose for each communication channel available to your employees. Clarify the channels senior leaders will use for their communications. Use a variety of communication channels and repeat the message multiple times to keep employees informed about big picture goals and the plan for success.

Try making 100 calls in 100 days. The executives of one of our clients pledged to each call 100 employees in 100 days. These 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.

WELL-BEING

When employees feel like the company truly cares about their wellbeing, it means they see that leadership is invested in their physical, mental, and emotional health—not just their productivity. It's about offering support beyond the work itself, through things like wellness programs, flexible work arrangements, and a healthy work-life balance.

This is important because when employees feel cared for, they're more engaged, loyal, and motivated. They're less likely to burn out and more likely to stay with the company long term. Ultimately, showing genuine concern for employee wellbeing helps build a positive, productive culture where people can do their best work.

SURVEY ITEMS

> This company cares about the personal well-being of its employees.

LEADERSHIP CAN:

Lead by example: 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 physical activity, eating well, family time, or a hobby can help us be our best selves at work and set an example for others. As a senior leader, it's essential not only to take action but also to clearly communicate those actions to your team. By doing so, you can effectively model the behaviors you wish to encourage and ensure they are visible to your employees.

Encourage taking time to unplug. Ensure that employees feel supported in utilizing their PTO and time off, even during busy periods. It is important to foster a culture where taking time off is encouraged and respected.

Be mindful of how intentions are translated. Well-being is both globally applicable and deeply personal. Because of this, it is important for leaders to think about how intentions can translate to their audience. What may come from a place of problem solving and caring, could come across as judgmental. For example, messages like "Maybe you should get up earlier before work" or "Have you tried working out more?" are unlikely to be perceived with kindness. In comparison, "Tell me about what 'taking care of yourself' looks like for you" invites your employee to take agency in their well-being and drive the conversation.

Routinely review policies, tools, and workflows for inefficiencies. Identify and address inefficiencies and gaps in workflows. Eliminate tasks that are not aligned with the organization's mission and goals. This practice can mitigate burnout and optimize the use of your organization's workforce while also supporting their work-life balance.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

It is 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 organization, it could be a sign that your employees are approaching burnout.

It is 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 and use the right resources to address these barriers.

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:

Lead by example: 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 physical activity, eating well, family time, or a hobby can help us be our best selves at work and set a positive example for others.

Avoid the trap of everything is a priority, so nothing is a priority. Identify 2-3 clear priorities for the organization and empower your leaders to identify 1-2 key areas of focus for their teams. Every part of the business should understand how (1) they contribute to organization-wide priorities and (2) their team-level priorities support the goals of the organizational priorities.

Acknowledge norms. For example, you may explain, "I send emails on nights or weekends because that works within my schedule, but I do not expect you to respond immediately." Reinforce healthy work behaviors by giving employees permission to set boundaries around their work schedules. If possible, refrain from sending emails outside of common work hours altogether, or, if you must send the email after work hours, consider scheduling your message to be delivered during work hours.

Promote time off and rest. Encourage employees to take their vacation days and mental health breaks. Actively support and celebrate time off as a necessary part of maintaining energy and focus.

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