



# Fostering Employee Engagement in Your Organization

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## Introduction

There are few things more critical in creating an effective, innovative workplace than fostering employee engagement. An engaged employee views his or her position as more than just a means to earn money—they feel a sense of duty to make your organization greater than the sum of its parts. Their actions will motivate their colleagues, like a committed athlete inspiring the other members of the team, or a musician in an orchestra setting the tone for a symphony. Employee engagement elevates the atmosphere of your workplace to one in which every contributor is focused on the long-term success of the enterprise as a whole.

While it may seem obvious that engagement should be a crucial aspect of any business environment, the reality is that fewer than 1 in 3 employees are actively engaged. In fact, a recent survey shows 69% of employees plan to stay at their current job regardless of how engaged they feel.<sup>1</sup> The result can be a lackluster workforce in which a majority of employees, even ones with exceptional competence, talent, and training, may never perform above and beyond the mere obligations of their job descriptions. Taking steps to combat this lack of engagement will lead to real, tangible improvements in every facet of your organization.

## What Is Engagement?

Scarlett Surveys—one of the oldest employee surveying companies in the world—defines engagement in its most basic form as “An individual’s degree of positive or negative emotional attachment to their organization, job and colleagues.”<sup>2</sup> It’s what distinguishes employees who act primarily for their own personal well-being from those who feel a commitment to the organization as a whole, because that organization has encouraged an overwhelmingly positive connection. An engaged employee exhibits a demonstrable shift in perception from the 9-to-5 grind of necessity to a legitimate desire to “get it done,” whatever *it* may be. These employees will think of their positions not as a set of tasks they perform, but as a key part of an ongoing, long-term career.

## Engagement vs. Satisfaction

One very important distinction to draw is between employee engagement and employee satisfaction. If an employee feels as

There is a strong correlation between tenure, role, and engagement—with employees with 7+ years at the same company and those in leadership positions being substantially more engaged.

-Towers Watson Workforce Study

<sup>1</sup> Accenture Survey: <http://www.accenture.com/us-en/company/people/women/Pages/insight-womens-research-2012-path-forward.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Scarlett Surveys International, “Quality Employee Engagement Measurement and Its Effect on Business Success” <http://www.scarlettsurveys.com/papers-and-studies/white-papers/quality-employee-engagement-measurement-and-its-effect-on-ceo-success/2>

though they're receiving fair pay for a decent workload, that individual is probably going to feel satisfied. And let's face it: plenty of employees in this situation would feel *more* satisfied if they were asked to do *less*. Satisfaction is merely the result of being content with the status quo.

For instance, a satisfied employee is not likely to do more than is asked, nor to ask to do more than is necessary. An engaged employee is one who feels a personal desire to seek out more than just satisfaction in the workplace—one who wants to make a difference.

## Why Is Engagement Important?

Increased employee engagement has the potential to positively impact your entire organization. Therefore you'll likely notice higher accountability to performance across the board. For example, rather than diverting blame, an engaged employee will take responsibility for a problem. They'll also willingly volunteer to take ownership of a task or project. This kind of accountability also fosters more open communication and constructive feedback.

Employee engagement is also a key factor in career development. Managers should keep an eye out for team members who are engaged on the job—these employees are far more likely to be effective and charismatic leaders.

Finally, a high level of employee engagement has a significant impact outside the workplace as well. Well-being at work directly correlates to happiness in one's life at home. And of course, this effect is reciprocal: Friends and family who see your employees as motivated and fulfilled at work will encourage further engagement back in the office.

## What Happens When Engagement Is Missing?

Consider this: If every employee at your company is merely content and not engaged, they will have no desire to change for the better. The problems that can arise in a workplace colored by this jaded attitude are obvious. At best, your employees will have no incentive to go above and beyond to try and improve your organization. At worst, employee morale can start to spiral downward; 88% of employees that quit their jobs claim they did so for a reason other than compensation.<sup>3</sup>

Keep in mind that just as one engaged employee can motivate and inspire nearby coworkers, one actively disengaged employee can "poison the well," leading to an atmosphere of lowered drive and productivity. Acting to foster engagement from day one is much

A boost in constructive feedback will have a transformative effect throughout the workplace, creating a consistent flow of communication that would not be found between disengaged employees. If you're successful in increasing engagement, expect to see a substantial boost in overall productivity.

<sup>3</sup> Accenture Survey: <http://www.accenture.com/us-en/company/people/women/Pages/insight-womens-research-2012-path-forward.aspx>

easier than reversing the course of an actively disengaged workplace.

## How Can I Measure Engagement?

While engagement may seem abstract or unquantifiable, there are reliable ways to measure and obtain useful engagement data to make proactive changes across your entire organization.

1. **Conduct a simple, employee-wide survey to obtain a baseline level of engagement at your organization.**
  - Assure your employees that all responses will be strictly confidential
  - Use direct and even extreme language in every question and possible answer choice to obtain an honest assessment from each and every employee
  - Use a scale such as “extremely satisfied” to “extremely dissatisfied” so respondents can describe their true feelings
  - A survey with sugarcoated results will be of no use to you in forming a strategy to improve engagement, so encourage employees to be candid
2. **Analyze your survey results.**
  - Determine the levels of engagement across your workforce
  - Identify the items with the strongest correlation to engagement—don’t always assume low scoring items should be your focus
  - Uncover any disparities among different teams
  - Gain an understanding of employees’ perceptions about their managers
  - Take note of departments that need particular attention
3. **Share results honestly with everyone.**
  - Formulate and set engagement goals for the future
  - Tie this “engagement index” directly into your business objectives to give every member of your team incentive to see it through

Remember, there is no point at which your workforce will simply “become engaged” and require no further attention. Fostering engagement is a permanent, ongoing process. Begin to include engagement questions in all manager-employee performance assessments, and schedule further surveys and analyses to regularly update your impressions and adjust your goals.

## Who Is Responsible for Fostering Engagement?

Everyone! Employers and employees need to take an equal share of the effort in promoting engagement, and each will have an equal stake in the results. Employers must actively create an environment that encourages thoughtful, motivated workers, while employees

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must make proactive career decisions and resist the temptation to do “just enough.”

Managers have perhaps the most direct role in this arrangement because they will serve as a model for their subordinates. Managers that enthusiastically pursue goals that benefit the entire organization and communicate often will inspire their employees to do the same. The executive team sets the tone of engagement for the company. Ideally, this process means encouraging frequent, open feedback and a consistent example of improvement to emulate.

Leveraging new technology to foster engagement can provide enormous advantages to employers as well. Clear, convenient methods of providing feedback via the web will spur both employees and managers to do so frequently. For example, performance management tools allow managers to set and track career goals from a new hire’s first day on the job, while succession management enables you to encourage professional growth and groom talented employees for additional responsibility and potential leadership opportunities.

When part of a comprehensive people management solution, these tools will be a seamless and invaluable part of your organization. And more recently, integration with social media allows managers to recognize achievement and promote employee collaboration and innovation.

Once everyone begins to do their fair share, you’ll see rapid improvement in motivation and morale, and your business will begin to see tangible results including improved productivity, better customer service, increase employee retention, and increased customer retention—just a few of the many benefits of an engaged workforce.

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2000 Ultimate Way  
Weston, FL 33326  
1 800-432-1729  
[www.ultimatesoftware.com](http://www.ultimatesoftware.com)  
[ultiproinfo@ultimatesoftware.com](mailto:ultiproinfo@ultimatesoftware.com)