



Building The Employee Experience

A HANDBOOK FOR MANAGERS



“

Employee experience is the sum of everything an employee experiences throughout his or her connection to the organization.”

DENISE LEE YOHN
FORBES

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Engagement vs. Experience

Around two thirds of all employees are not engaged at their jobs. You've probably heard the next part too – companies with fully engaged employees are highly productive, enjoy lower turnover, and increase profits.

But if we know so much about what disengages employees, why does engagement at work continue to be so elusive? Perhaps it's because employee satisfaction is about much more than engagement. It's also about building a daily experience with a fine balance of effective communications, relationship building, and recognition, among other things.

Frontline managers are usually relied upon to do most of the heavy lifting when it comes to building a winning employee experience. However this can be an entire discipline within itself. There are many bases to cover and striking the right balance can be daunting.

This handbook is all about giving you practical techniques you can start using today to build that positive daily experience and reap the benefits of a highly engaged workforce.



**Managers
account for**

70%

**of variance
in employee
engagement.**

Source: Gallup

Why Managers Matter

Managers spend the most time with employees day-to-day and as a result are responsible for the lion's share of work when engaging them, wielding considerable influence over employee experience, perception of company culture, and voluntary turnover rates. In this way they lay the foundation of the employee experience.

Here are a few things to remember:



**Employee
Experience**

**Perception
of Company
Culture**

**Voluntary
Turnover
Rates**

- An employee's relationship with their direct supervisor is the number one driver of their job happiness and willingness to stay with the company.
- By and large a manager's role in engagement is simply taking an interest in people and creating meaningful bond between management and staff.
- It's perfectly natural for even good managers to have stage fright or feel unprepared.
- Nobody can expect managers to be perfect. We all say the wrong thing at one time or another. The goal is to always be mindful.
- With practice and a firm grasp of fundamental engagement principles, any manager can make a considerable impact!

The Power of Personal Connections

People need genuine connections with others to be engaged not only at work, but in their everyday lives as well. Cooperation and teamwork are deeply tied to our natural survival instincts.

- It is very easy for most of us to recognize when someone's intentions may be false or transparent.
- When you try to manufacture relationships in the workplace, it comes off as insincere and most everyone knows it.
- It can be a struggle to make a genuine connection with another person. Some people prefer not to let people in right away, but others are open books. Each new person presents a unique challenge.
- You won't understand how to be a good boss to your employees until you connect with each of them personally to discover what makes them tick.



60% of employees say "the ability to do what they do best" in a role is "very important" to them.

Source: Gallup

Here's how you can create a positive work environment that builds trust between staff and management, setting the stage for genuine personal connections:

Be Real

Follow the Golden Rule and treat everyone as you would like to be treated. Don't overthink interactions or try to force anything. Be yourself, be human and helpful, and most people will happily return the favor regardless of who they are.

Be Fair

Create a "safe haven" where employees can come and talk to you about anything without fear of repercussions or judgment. Be a confidant they can rely on, and take immediate action on any pressing concerns.

Be Decisive

Always show enthusiasm toward employees and their projects, but also be mindful of your own schedule and communicate your needs clearly as well. It's always better to say "no" than it is to say "yes" and let someone down.

Be Appreciative

Make recognition a daily way of life in the workplace. Give sincere and specific praise when it is deserved, and ensure the individual knows exactly why their actions helped the overall mission of the company.

Be Unforgettable

Get in the habit of making peoples' days. Surprise everyone with breakfast/lunch, offer meaningful help on tough projects, be proactive with employee issues, and create memorable workplace experiences.

Keys To Being a Great Manager

You've set the stage for genuine personal connections, now comes the task of sustaining those connections with day-to-day engagement.



Here are a few things to consider:

- One rule of thumb for daily engagement is to mostly stay out of the way. A big part of being respectful is trusting employees to do their jobs well, just as employees trust the company will treat them fairly.
- Engagement is a leap of faith the employees take with the company, and the manager's chief responsibility is to step in when appropriate to make sure nobody loses that faith.
- The more people enjoy working for you, the more likely they are to stick around and be engaged regardless of how they feel about the company as a whole.

1. Attitude

Treat Employees as Partners

You've set the stage for genuine personal connections, now comes the task of sustaining those connections with day-to-day engagement.

Show Respect/Kindness

Resolve yourself to be the bigger person in any situation, and always take the high road. Be a living example by respecting your own boss and showing kindness even during the tough times. Set your company culture bar at a high level and aim to keep it that way.

Be Flexible

Thanks to rapidly advancing communications technology, the traditional 9 to 5 office is morphing into a more flexible, agile, and atomized beast. Employers must be more willing to accommodate flexible schedules, parallel careers, and be more aware of work-life integration and holistic employee health.

2. Communication

Communicate Clearly

Deliver both the good news and the bad news gracefully, and always stand for truth and clarity. People are naturally more drawn to leaders who give it to them straight as opposed to loading them up with jargon and excuses. Anticipate and encourage follow-up questions.

Give Constructive Feedback

Be solution-oriented as opposed to problem-oriented with your feedback. For example, instead of “Your attendance is becoming a problem,” try “I’ve noticed you’ve been coming in late. Is there anything I should know about, that I can help you with?” Purely positive feedback should come with no qualifications – let the praise stand on its own and give the employee a moment to bask in his/her accomplishment.

Tailor Praise To The Individual

Pay attention to the personalities and demographics of your staff. Some of your people are introverts, and some of them are extroverts. Night owls and early birds are energetic and outgoing at different times of the day. Younger employees are used to communicating in different ways and prefer more daily feedback than their counterparts. The more you can adapt your praise to the individual, the more engaging it will be.

3. Recognition

Give Timely Recognition

Whenever you see an opportunity to recognize an employee, don't put it off – seize the moment and strike while the iron is hot. Praise given weeks or months after the fact just doesn't have the same glow or impact that immediate recognition brings. Recognizing employees in the moment shows that you're paying attention, and encourages a culture of mutual respect.

Connect Accomplishments To Company Goals

It is the manager's job to give context to the employees' accomplishments, even if that meaning isn't readily apparent. Whenever you recognize your employees for excellent work or valued behaviors, be sure to communicate how their actions contributed toward the company's goals and overall mission. Always be looking for ways to remind employees of their impact on the "big picture."

Create Your Own Recognition Opportunities

Get creative and come up with your own recognition opportunities within your own department/area. For instance, many managers use a "work swap" incentive to motivate employees, where in return for reaching a departmental goal they will assume the duties of their staff for a day.

Get Your Employees Recognizing Each Other

Nobody said you had to do all the recognizing. In fact, peer-to-peer recognition is one of the most effective ways to foster long-term engagement. Encourage your employees to recognize each other for daily accomplishments that reflect the desired company culture.

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**When people are financially
invested, they want a return.
When people are emotionally
invested, they want to
contribute.”**

SIMON SINEK

AUTHOR, *START WITH WHY*

The Art of Small Talk

Small talk happens every day in every workplace in the world and it is usually how we connect with each other and start conversations, making it an essential skill for building relationships.

Arm yourself with some proven strategies:

Break The Ice

NEVER FORGET A NAME

Names can pass by in a blur during a conversation, but not if you repeat the person's name at least twice after they introduce themselves – “Chris? Nice to meet you, Chris.” The repetition helps your brain create a more indelible memory. Got a hard-to-pronounce name you just can't keep in your head? Try leading with “How do you pronounce your name correctly again?”

WSW (WEATHER/SPORTS/WEEKDAY)

The three topics everyone can agree are always acceptable for opening a small talk session are the weather, sports, and what day of the week it is. Everyone expects them, but that's the whole point: to start the conversation on common ground.



Keep The Conversation Going

FORD THE CONVERSATION

If you just can't think of anything to say no matter how hard you try, FORD can help - it stands for Family, Occupation, Recreation, and Dreams. Think of a few questions in each category, and before you know it you'll be the toast of the water cooler.

EMBELLISH RESPONSES

If you are asked about what you did last weekend, instead of "nothing much" you could say "I sat around the house and did nothing, and it was the most amazing thing ever!" Short, plain responses put pressure on the other person to scramble for questions, so embellish your responses to give others more to work with.

REPEAT AND ASK METHOD

Repeating the last few words of a person's response and continually asking relevant questions keeps you in the conversation, lets them know you are listening, and can help clarify your own responses. Stir up questions and engage the answers, and you'll be surprised at how people praise your listening skills.

Make a Graceful Exit

POLITELY CHANGE THE TONE

Exiting a conversation doesn't have to be stressful or awkward. All it takes is a change in tone, and some validation that the talk is over: "Hey, it was great talking to you, Bill. Glad I ran into you." Even if you have to leave abruptly, validating the conversation signals the exit clearly and politely. End with "I need" - the last thing you want is for employees to think you've ended a conversation because you were bored. Experts advise always using the phrase "I need" to make a clean getaway, since we can all relate to it - "I need to make a call." "I need to use the bathroom." "I need to go to lunch."

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Research indicates that workers have three prime needs: Interesting work, recognition for doing a good job, and being let in on things that are going on in the company.”

ZIG ZIGLAR

AUTHOR AND MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER

Positive Body Language

Your body language communicates things to the people you interact with whether you intend it to or not, so it's best to be aware of nonverbal communication skills if you wish to engage others:

Treat Employees as Partners

We are constantly and subtly checking other people's eyes during a conversation to "connect" and make sure they're paying attention. Making and reciprocating eye contact is the simplest way to tell a person, "I'm with you."

Be Conscious Of Your Arms

Even if you're engaged in the conversation, folding your arms is a visual cue that you are turned off by something around you. Hanging them comfortably below the waist tells employees you're open to what they're saying.

Lean In Slightly

Simply leaning in toward someone during a conversation signals that you are actively listening. Leaning back signals the opposite. Leaning in at key points in the conversation can quickly show a person you care about what is being said.



Show Your Palms

Keeping physically relaxed, open, and loose while occasionally showing your palms through gestures communicates “I have nothing to hide,” and engenders more trust in the speaker. Showing closed fists or keeping your hands in your pockets makes people wary.

Take Pauses

A conversation is not a race. Don't be afraid to pause for a few seconds and think about your response before you say it. Not only will it help you relax and come up with better conversation; people will see you as thoughtful and listen to your responses more attentively.

Remember To Smile

The smile is so important to interpersonal communications that the human brain can spot one at 300 feet, and we use it as a universal benchmark to judge intentions. Smile frequently in conversations and make it genuine, and people will respond positively.

Stand Naturally

When your feet are close together during a conversation you appear hesitant or unsure of yourself. Adopt a wider, more natural stance, plant your feet in the ground, relax your knees, and you will exude more confidence and charisma.

Use Affirmative Gestures

Nodding in agreement, rolling your eyes in commiseration, or shrugging in disbelief are all ways we communicate that we are listening closely to what is being said without interrupting the speaker. Affirmative gestures increase your empathy and perceived listening skills.



Brief - Aid - Care Philosophy

When it's all said and done, an engaging manager must effectively **BRIEF**, **AID**, and **CARE** for employees. These three acronyms are great to have in your pocket for remembering the key principles of employee engagement:

Communications: BRIEF*

(B)ackground: Provide quick context for the message – where is this coming from?

(R)eason: Explain why you're speaking – why should your audience pay attention?

(I)nformation: Provide two to three key nuggets of information you want to share – what's it all about in a nutshell?

(E)nd: End by telling employees what the next steps are – what can everyone expect?

(F)ollow-up: Anticipate any questions that may be asked and prepare your answers – how can I clarify this better for you?

Operational Support: AID

(A)ssist: Provide any and all assistance required to get the job done to the extent of your reach. If it is out of your reach, escalate appropriately.

(I)nform: Keep employees informed on strategy changes, important communications, and general feedback on their work.

(D)efend: Defend your employees from any and all things that may impede their progress, distract from their work, or pile on unneeded stress.

*Joseph. Brief: Make a Bigger Impact by Saying Less. Hoboken: Wiley, 2014.

Personal Connection: CARE

(C)all: Don't lock yourself away in an office and send emails – reach out and make the connection real when you can. Real interactions are always preferred, and talking on the phone or in person is always more efficient.

(A)sk: Ask them how they're doing every now and again. Showing a genuine interest in an employee's life outside of work creates opportunities to connect with them as people while building mutual trust and respect.

(R)emember: Remember your employees' major milestones and celebrate accordingly – It is the most expected form of workplace recognition, and you will look out-of-touch if you let them pass without comment.

(E)mpathize: Empathy from management is strongly correlated with higher job performance. Always show respect by listening intently and attempt to see things from the perspective of others in every interaction.

Organizations with high employee engagement can achieve **19.2% more** annual operating income, **13.7% greater** annual growth rate, and **27.8% better** annual earnings per share.

Source: Towers Perrin

The Presentation Experience

You will use most if not all of the aforementioned engagement skills when you make a formal award presentation to an employee, so plan accordingly:

- Schedule a specific date, time, and place
- Announce the event to coworkers and team members
- Invite upper management, colleagues and friends to attend
- Create an atmosphere of celebration (food, decorations, etc.)
- Customize and review your speech
- Practice your presentation
- Ensure all presentation materials are on hand
- Take a deep breath and relax!

A memorable presentation is personal, genuine, and celebrates the employee's successes. Here are some tips to creating a successful presentation:

HIGHLIGHT OF THE EMPLOYEES CONTRIBUTION

- Achievements, special efforts, and personal sacrifices
- Be specific with people, places, and dates
- Make the presentation genuine and tailored to the employee
- Successes, awards, promotions, and skills learned
- Events during recipient's employment
- New products/new clients/company growth

TOUCH UPON THE EMPLOYEES PERSONAL LIFE

- Family
- Hobbies/organizations/personal interests
- Successes outside the workplace
- Relate gift choices to employee's interest

Generational Considerations

When showing appreciation, consider each employee's generation. Every generation has its own cultural backgrounds, work tendencies, definitions of success, and behaviors. Below are some characteristics relevant to each generation.



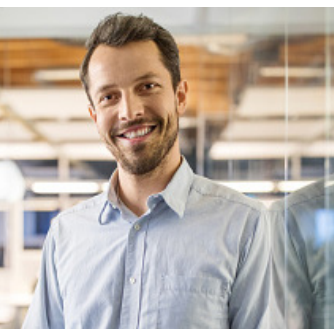
BOOMERS (Born 1946-1964)

Boomers inherited a windfall postwar economy and embraced the corporate structure to create one of the most profitable economic eras in history. They are more set in their ways, value long-term stability and security, and feel more comfortable in a traditional office hierarchy. Focus on long-term achievements and life accomplishments, and stress their loyalty to the organization.



GENERATION X (Born 1965-1978)

Sometimes referred to as the “lost” generation, Xers were the first to truly challenge the idea of the traditional office hierarchy, giving them a strong sense of independence and personal agency. They typically have their own way of doing things and value autonomy. Be sure to recognize their resilience and uniqueness as individuals, and praise instances where they adapted well to a challenging situation.



MILLENNIALS (GENERATION Y) and POST-MILLENNIALS (GENERATION Z) (Born 1979+)

Make up the largest segment of the workforce. They are very social and entrepreneurial, and many have parallel careers, but can be very loyal if companies are willing to keep up with them. Many are not sure if they are on the right career track. Show support for their interests outside of work and give them moral and personal praise. Social media shout-outs are a plus.

The Employee Experience Starts With You

Connecting with the hearts and minds of people, which is what true engagement is all about, has always been a noble challenge. Employee engagement is not appeasement, it is not surrender; it is the human struggle every one of us faces when trying to make a genuine connection with someone else.

But for better or worse, interpersonal connections are the life force of a company and the foundation of the employee experience. With them, you have a dedicated group of individuals doing the best job they can. Without them, all you have are warm bodies logging hours – and you probably already know which situation is better for everyone.

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In a world where money is no longer the primary motivating factor for employees, focusing on the employee experience is the most promising competitive advantage that organizations can create.”

JACOB MORGAN

AUTHOR, The Employee Experience Advantage

About HALO

HALO is a leading full-service provider of recognition, reward, and incentive programs covering all milestones and touchpoints in the employee experience. HALO's universal cloud-based recognition platforms scale to any workforce and give HR full control over engagement strategy, with support for mobile, global, and offline teams. We reach far beyond what startup providers or plug-and-play recognition apps do, offering comprehensive services like strategic design, personal account teams, and program marketing support to be the single source for all your employee appreciation efforts.

For more information please visit: www.halo.com

