



Bridging the Engagement Gap

8 No-cost Strategies for Increasing Employee Engagement

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Despite the efforts of many well intentioned leaders, the gap between engaged employees and disengaged employees continues to grow. Numerous studies have confirmed that regardless of industry, market sector or organizational size, the ratio of disengaged employees to engaged employees remains at nearly 3 to 1. While this number at first glance is quite unsettling, the good news is that not all of the disengaged employees are fully disenfranchised or disconnected. Some (or possibly many) are what are best described as ambivalent. These employees struggle to understand where they fit in the organization and perhaps even more importantly, what the future holds for them. To be sure, the struggle for engagement most often arises from a longing to be more than their job, to feel connected to and proud of the organization of which they are a part.

This universal desire represents the common ground shared by engaged and disengaged employees alike, and offers leaders the opportunity to reengage the ambivalent and maybe even the disengaged too.

How do astute leaders who understand the relationship between engagement and results do this? The answer is really very simple: They satisfy those universal desires. They help employees become more than their jobs, feel connected to and proud of the organization. The following 8 no-cost strategies will not only help to bridge the engagement gap but quite possibly help leaders move from well-intentioned to highly effective.

1. **Assess your leadership.** As a leader, you set the tone for your team. Everything you do or don't do impacts employee engagement at some level. How well do you model the behavior you want from your team? Do you demonstrate the critical leadership characteristics of openness, integrity, resilience, trust, and respect? What are the top five characteristics of your leadership style and what impact do they have on your team?

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2. **Show employees that you value them.** Research shows that one of the chief influencers of motivation and engagement is *feeling valued*. You don't need a complex program to show employees you value them. Connecting with people on a personal level and building relationships can take you much further. Schedule 20 to 30 minutes of Leadership By Walking Around time on your calendar every week to let your team know that you're there for them and that you care about how they're doing.
3. **Communicate clearly and frequently.** Another key factor in engagement is providing information that enables them to do their job and information about what is happening in the organization, especially around change. Keep them informed about *what* is happening, *why* it is happening and its impact on the team so they don't have to depend on the rumor mill.
4. **Ensure performance expectations are clear and attainable.** Develop specific measures by soliciting input from employees. Hold everyone accountable for team success. Aligning talent capacity with interest, needs and motivation allows each team member to understand their contribution to team and organizational success.
5. **Link each person's role and contribution to the key goals of the department and organization.** The more each employee understands how their efforts impact the greater good of the group, the more likely they are to find meaning in their work.
6. **Give timely and specific feedback.** No one knowingly chooses to fail. People need feedback in order to improve their performance. Make sure your feedback helps and motivates them to improve.
7. **Involve employees.** Hold a discussion with your team about their view of engagement and what they think are the key actions and behaviors that support success for the group and organization. Identify the top 3 shared motivation drivers of the group. Involving them helps to build a common language, clarify purpose and increase their ownership.

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8. **Manage the rumor mill.** Play an active role in managing your team's perception of the organization. Focus on what is working well and on the positive aspects of the culture including recent successes, external reputation, shared values and future goals. Above all, never contribute to the rumor mill no matter how tempting it may be.

About David A. O'Brien

David is President of CT based WorkChoice Solutions, a trusted provider of leadership and team effectiveness consulting services that was founded in 2000. He works with a wide range of corporate, nonprofit and municipal clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational effectiveness. He is also an in-demand keynote speaker on the topic of leadership excellence. His first book, *The Navigator's Handbook, 101 Leadership Lessons for Work & Life* is available on-line and in bookstores nationwide. His second book, *The Navigator's Compass, 101 Steps Toward Leadership Excellence* will be released in February 2014. To learn more, please visit [WorkChoice Solutions on line at www.workchoicesolutions.com](http://www.workchoicesolutions.com) or contact him directly at 860.242.1070.

