



# EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

..... toolkit

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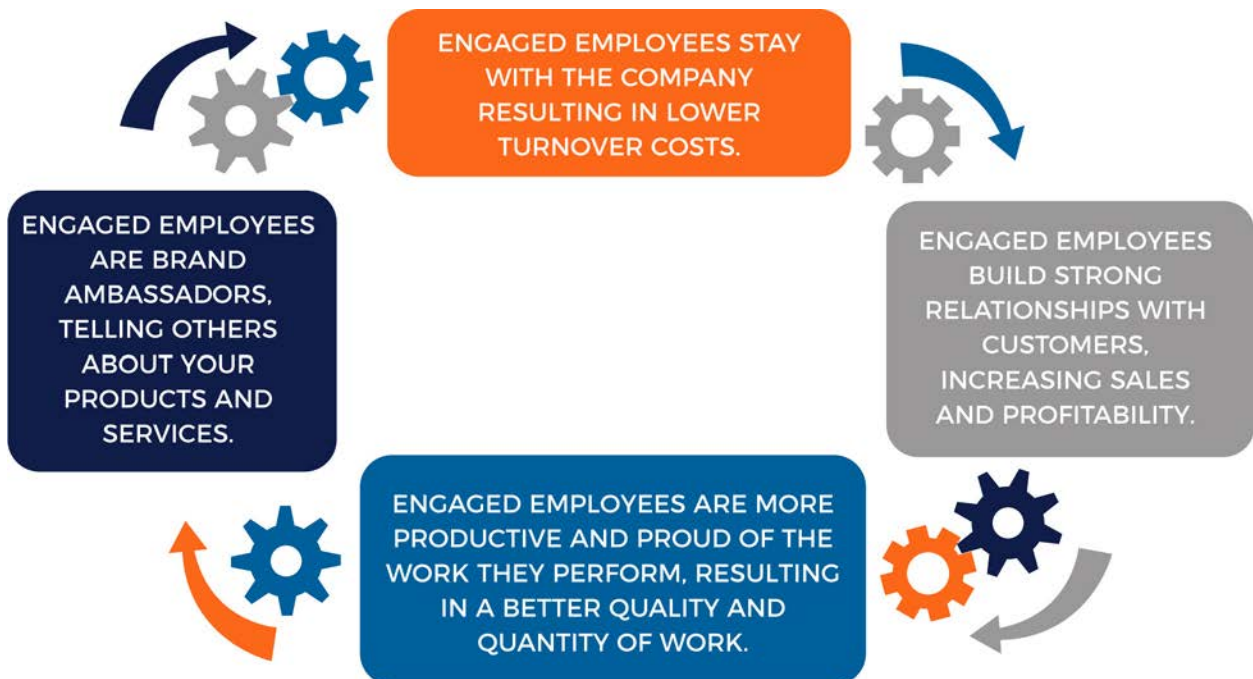
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If you've heard statistics or read articles about employee engagement, these resources have likely mentioned the [State of the American Workplace](#) report from Gallup. You may have heard things like:

- Only 33% of the US workforce is engaged.
- Actively disengaged employees are almost twice as likely as engaged employees to seek new jobs.
- Actively disengaged employees cost the U.S. an estimated \$483-\$605 billion each year in lost productivity.

This lengthy document is just the beginning of the research and articles that have been written about the topic. There is so much data out there that it can be difficult for a business leader to nail down what exactly they can do to improve employee engagement in their workplace. That's what we are here for.

Employee engagement may seem like a buzz word, but it's not going anywhere and the impact it has on the success of your organization is real. It isn't just about having happy employees (although that's also nice) – it's about the positive chain reactions that occur when your employees are engaged.



When you focus on the performance outcome rather than just the happiness of your employees, it impacts your bottom line. Gallup estimates that actively disengaged employees cost the U.S. up to \$605 billion annually in lost productivity.

Beyond the financial impact, engaged employees are generally more pleasant to be around. They feel fulfilled by their work and that shows in how they treat their peers and your customers. Not only that, they are more reliable and accountable for their work. They motivate one another and become integral players on high-performing teams.

## WHAT DOES AN ENGAGED EMPLOYEE LOOK LIKE?



It is often thought that employee engagement strategies are comprised of ping-pong tables, free lunches and unlimited vacation plans. While these perks may be part of the employee engagement strategy of some organizations, perks alone do little to motivate employees. Many of the suggestions we share throughout this guide don't actually cost a penny.

Engagement is not about making employees "happy." Instead, it is about meeting the needs of your employees so that they can perform to the highest level possible. The goal of any employee engagement strategy should be improved productivity and performance.

Gallup has found that engaged employees exhibit common characteristics. They take ownership of their work, they hold themselves accountable, they are productive, they go above and beyond their job description, they are at work on time, etc. We will break down the topic of employee engagement into five areas you can begin working on today.

## IMPROVE YOUR EMPLOYER BRAND

Employees want to be proud of the company they work for and the work they do. They want to work with loyal customers and employees who are also proud of their association with the company. An unfavorable employer brand can lead to turnover as employees who do not believe in the company or its brand and reputation are likely to look for employment elsewhere. Additionally, recruitment can suffer as the positive employer brand of a competitor can tip the scales in their favor if all other things are considered equal.

Creating an Employee Value Proposition (EVP) can help you shape the perceptions others have of your organization as an employer. Organizations cannot completely control what is being said about them as an employer, but they can be part of the conversation. An EVP should be similar to a customer-facing brand statement—it should describe how a company seeks to make an employee feel, not the benefits and perks an employee receives. It should answer the question, why would someone want to come work here and contribute their best effort to the organization?

Make sure your EVP is something you can actually deliver and not just somewhere you hope to be in the future (or what you think employees want to hear). If you are looking for some examples of EVPs, check out the online career pages of your favorite companies.

Here are some examples:



STARBUCKS: Being a Starbucks partner means having the opportunity to be something more than an employee. Gigantic possibilities lie ahead—to grow as a person, in your career and in your community. To live the Starbucks mission and to be a leader. It's the opportunity to become your personal best. To be connected to something bigger. To be meaningful to the world. And to be recognized for all of it. It's all here for you.

APPLE: Do your life's best work here now. With the whole world watching. The people here at Apple don't just create products — they create the kind of wonder that's revolutionized entire industries.



L'OREAL: Be the center of the digitally connected beauty. Invent the future. Flex your innovation muscle and put iconic products in billions of hands worldwide. When you love your work and the people you work with, amazing things can happen.

AMAZON: We're a company of pioneers. It's our job to make bold bets, and we get our energy from inventing on behalf of customers. Success is measured against the possible, not the probable. For today's pioneers, that's exactly why there's no place on Earth they'd rather build than Amazon.



Use the worksheet on the next page to create your own EVP.

## HOW TO CREATE AN EMPLOYEE VALUE PROPOSITION

Think about your top performing employees. List the top five reasons why those employees choose to work for you. If you aren't sure, ask those employees.

1: \_\_\_\_\_

2: \_\_\_\_\_

3: \_\_\_\_\_

4: \_\_\_\_\_

5: \_\_\_\_\_

This about your best customers. List the top 5 reasons these customers bought your services or products.

1: \_\_\_\_\_

2: \_\_\_\_\_

3: \_\_\_\_\_

4: \_\_\_\_\_

5: \_\_\_\_\_

Identify the areas of overlap between the employee and customer lists. Summarize your EVP from the above overlapping areas in some short, memorable taglines. Test it by considering whether you could use it to explain why you do what you do.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# HIRE AND DEVELOP GREAT LEADERS

Your leaders (managers, supervisors, etc.) may be the single most important factor in making sure your employees are engaged. In fact, research from [Gallup](#) suggests that managers account for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores.

Because managers play a vital role in the engagement of your employees, you must provide them with tools and resources needed to develop their leadership skills. According to Gallup research, there are three major reasons that employees fail to reach their full potential:



- 1- unclear and misaligned expectations
- 2- ineffective and infrequent feedback
- 3- unfair evaluation practices and misplaced accountability

There are some simple things your leaders can do to overcome these challenges.

Set Clear Expectations: This starts at the very beginning of employment and must continue throughout the entire relationship. One way to set appropriate expectations from the start is by developing a consistent onboarding program. According to the research, only 12% of employees strongly agree that their organizations do a great job of onboarding new employees. Check out our [Onboarding Toolkit](#) and on-demand Onboarding Webinar for great onboarding ideas.

Provide Frequent, Meaningful Feedback: Employees who have had conversations with their manager about their goals and successes in the last six months are 2.8 times more likely than other employees to be engaged. Only 23% of employees strongly agree their manager provides meaningful feedback to them, but those who do are 3.5 times more likely than other employees to be engaged. Feedback needs to be a scheduled part of your managers' day-to-day responsibilities, in addition to occurring spontaneously.

Feedback should also be balanced between formal and informal conversations. We like to say, "When you see something, say something." Don't wait for a formal, scheduled meeting to tell an employee if they are doing something well or they need to make adjustments. Check out our webinar on [Performance Communication](#) for more information.



Really Get to Know Employees: Feedback should not be the only form of communication with employees. Leaders need to understand that employees want to talk about their work and their life. They want to feel like leadership in the organization actually cares about them as a person; that they understand what is important to them. Every employee is different, so this can take many forms. Check out our [Recognition Toolkit](#) for ideas on how to get to know and recognize your team members.

Do What You Say You Will Do: Establishing trust with your employees is vital to engagement. One area that often leads to mistrust is a feeling of unfairness in the workplace. Only 18% of employees strongly agree that employees who perform better grow faster at their organization. This means that the majority of employees do not believe the quality of their work has any bearing on how they are measured, developed or promoted. Ask your managers to take a look at their current performance management system. Are there areas where employees may be treated unfairly?

Creating a culture of trust also means holding your employees accountable for being trustworthy. Teamwork is only successful when everyone understands who is accountable for what tasks, and when everyone trusts that those jobs will get done.

Don't forget to invest in your managers' engagement, as well. If you lead a team of managers, make sure you are providing the same things to them.

## BE STRATEGIC ABOUT YOUR BENEFITS OFFERING

Small businesses need to consider their benefits strategy when they are looking to attract great talent. The truth is that many small businesses can't compete with bigger players offering free lunches, on-site gyms, and employee lounges complete with ping-pong tables and video game consoles.

The most in-demand employees don't expect to be offered every benefit and perk in the world, but providing a handful of meaningful benefits and perks is still important and can make your organization more competitive. According to the research by Gallup, there are some basic benefits that a majority of employees expect to receive. Some vary by industry and location, but most are fairly standard. When looking through the list, think of your company culture and which of these would be valued most by your employees.

## THE BASICS

Health Insurance: If you have a problem with turnover and are not offering health insurance, you may want to consider changing that. Sixty-one percent of employees say they would switch jobs for access to this benefit.



Additional Insurance Coverage: In addition to health insurance, most employees expect some access to additional benefits such as dental, vision, flexible spending accounts, life insurance, disability, accident insurance, etc.

Paid Vacation, Paid Holidays and Other Paid Leave: While the amount of paid vacation and other paid leave offered by companies varies greatly, most companies (92%) offer this benefit. It has become something that most employees expect to have. Getting creative with leave polices has also become a way that a company can differentiate itself from the competition.

Retirement Plans with an Employer Match: About half of employers offer a 401(k) plan to employees. Offering an employer match of some kind can increase employee participation and also aid in employee retention. Make sure your employees understand their retirement options, especially younger workforces. Look for a benefit provider that offers some educational resources for employees.



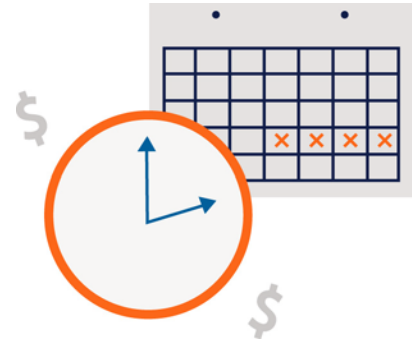
## DIFFERENTIATING

Professional Development Opportunities: Gallup data shows that a lack of development and career growth is the most common reason employees leave jobs. Growth doesn't just mean a promotion. There are lots of opportunities to increase employee engagement through creative development opportunities. Check out the final section in the toolkit, "Offer Professional Development and Career Pathing," for some ideas on making this benefit work for your small business.

Flexibility: This is in the differentiation category for a clear reason. Over half of employees say they would switch jobs for more flexibility, but only 44% of employers offer flexible work time. This is a great way to be a stand-out employer. Check out the section, "Be Flexible," on the next page for some ideas.

## IMPORTANT TO SOME EMPLOYEES

- Paid time to work independently on a project of the employee's choosing
- Reimbursement of fees to attend professional conferences
- Paid time during regular office hours to volunteer
- Company provided cell phones, laptops and other tools
- Financial planning or coaching
- Tuition reimbursement
- Monetary bonuses
- Company vehicles
- Wellness programs
- Paid parking/commuter benefits



## BE FLEXIBLE

A flexible work environment is becoming a necessity for all businesses to consider. According to Gallup, 53% of employees say a role that allows them to have greater work-life balance and better personal wellbeing is very important to them. Additionally, 51% of employees say they would change jobs for one that offers them flexible work hours. This is something businesses of all sizes should consider.

Many small businesses express frustration with offering workplace flexibility. There is often a misconception that flexibility must include working remotely or from home. While remote work definitely has a positive impact on engagement, it does have its limitations. According to Gallup research, engagement is highest when employees spend three to four days per workweek working off-site. It turns out that remote work has the best positive impact on engagement when employees maintain some face-time with managers and coworkers.

Remote work doesn't make sense for all companies or roles. Leaders need to consider the demands of each job and how time spent working remotely could positively or negatively impact an employee's ability to deliver on business outcomes and customer needs.

Just because you may not be able to offer remote working options to your employees, it doesn't mean you should give up entirely on flexibility in the workplace. There are many other options for flexible working arrangements. Get creative and find what works best for your company and your employees.

Here are just a few examples:

In Early/Out Early or In Late/Out Late: Individuals have different periods of the day when they are most productive. Some people are early risers while others are night owls. Additionally, your employees may have family schedules that work more efficiently with an earlier or later start than normal. If you have multiple employees interested in this option, you may be able to stagger work schedules to ensure coverage without any disruption.

Four-Day Workweek: Consider whether some employees might actually enjoy working longer shifts over fewer days each week. These shifts could also overlap to ensure that coverage, collaboration and communication don't suffer.



Flexibility in Scheduled Breaks: Allowing employees the opportunity to schedule their breaks and lunches when convenient for them can actually add a lot of value without a lot of sacrifice. Perhaps you have an employee who would like to be able to take their lunch break later in the day, so they can call their school-aged child who will be heading home from school at that time.

Job Sharing: If you have employees interested in reducing their hours to part time, you might consider job sharing. Job sharing occurs when two or more workers share the duties of one full-time job, with each person working on a part-time basis. This can be helpful for businesses looking to reduce costs as two part-time employees typically cost less than one full-time employee, due to fewer applicable benefits and a lessened chance of overtime hours worked.

The most important part of a flexible work arrangement is communication. The employer needs to communicate options and guidelines to employees. Accountability and expectations regarding flexibility need to be clearly outlined and detailed so everyone is on the same page.

## OFFER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER PATHING

Only 30% of employees said they feel their company is invested in their development. This is likely the reason why an overwhelming majority of employees (91%) say the last time they switched jobs, they left their employer for more development options. Offering development opportunities and clearly communicating career paths to employees is a great way to keep them on board and engaged, rather than losing them to your competition.



You may be able to think back to a time when you lost a great employee for this very reason. It's probably not because you didn't have opportunities available, but that the employee didn't have a clear understanding of what these opportunities were. This is why career pathing is so important.

Often small businesses only have a few positions and limited hierarchy, which can create challenges when it comes to creating clear career paths. Just because your company doesn't have a traditional career ladder, it doesn't mean you can't help employees understand potential career opportunities.

As we mentioned with previous employee engagement initiatives, communication is the key to success. One-on-one meetings between leaders and employees provide great opportunities for career path and professional development conversations.

If promotions are scarce, it is even more important to provide employees with opportunities to grow and develop in different ways. Here are some ideas we have seen work well in the small business environment. To know for sure that they will work for you, ask your employees if they would be interested in these types of programs.

Cross Training: Cross training employees can have many benefits for the organization and for individual employees. Employees will be excited to engage in new activities and mix up their daily routines to learn something new. If your company struggles with departments operating in silos, cross training can help break down barriers and eliminate the "us versus them" mentality. You may also discover that particular employees have an aptitude for an area you didn't expect. This can allow you to move employees into roles that best fit their interests, skills and abilities, increasing their engagement level.



Lunch and Learns: Lunch and learns have become popular ways for individuals to learn new skills. There are a couple different ways these can be structured. We have seen some organizations use this time to allow employees to teach each other skills (work related or not). For example, if you have an employee who is an expert in Microsoft Excel (or any other software), they may be able to share some of their best tips and tricks. Or if an employee is passionate about hiking, they could share some of their favorite hiking places and tips for first-time hikers.

You could also bring in experts in areas of interest, such as a yoga instructor who can demonstrate relaxation and stretching techniques that can be done at work. The possibilities are endless and the cost can be very low or next to nothing. You can encourage employees to bring their own lunch and simply provide space for the shared learning to occur.

Book Club: There are many great personal and professional development books available. Many can be found online at great prices and others may be available at your local library. If books aren't interesting to your employees, consider a podcast or video series that might draw their attention. TED talks can also generate a robust discussion and most are 15 minutes or less.

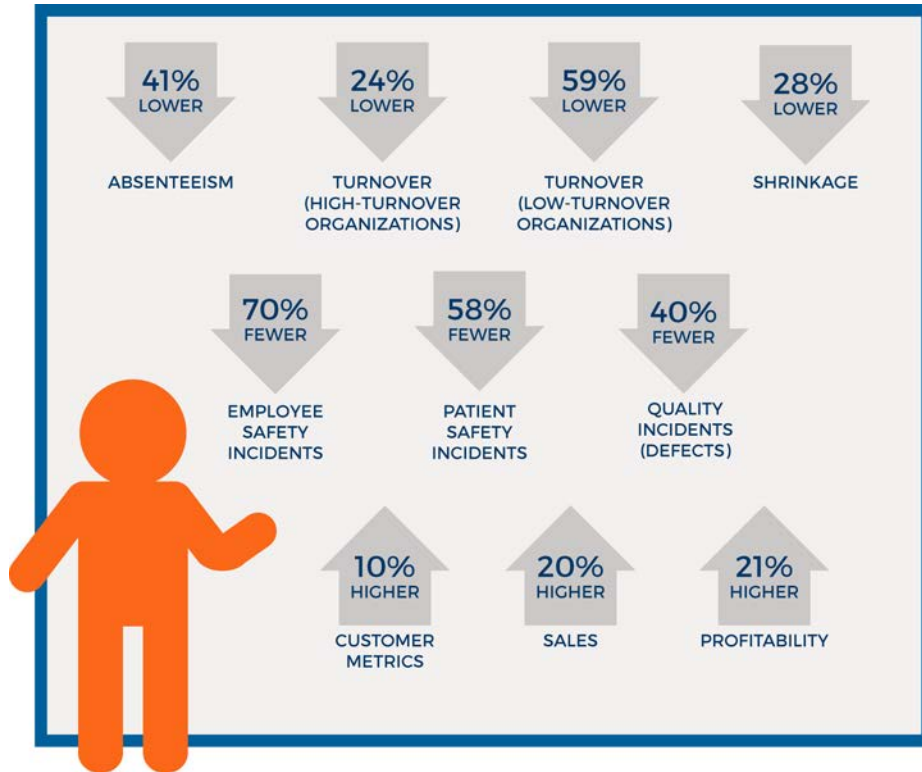
Online Learning: There are many online learning resources available for little to no cost. Websites such as Lynda, Udemy and Coursera offer courses on a large variety of topics. Some are available for free, while others are offered for a fee. If employees are willing to put in the time and effort to complete the learning, an online learning program can offer a great return on investment. Perhaps you have an employee who would like to learn another language, or improve their skills within a certain piece of software. There are likely online resources available to help support this development. There may even be industry-specific resources available. Look around and see what you can find.



## **CONCLUSION**

As you can see, none of these employee engagement strategies exists in a vacuum. Many of the areas we discussed rely upon one another to be successful. Engaging employees takes work and ongoing commitment, but it is not impossible - even for small businesses. Following the steps above will help your company see some amazing benefits.

Employers with the highest number of engaged employees experience the following benefits:



Don't try to tackle everything immediately. Use the Employee Engagement Checklist on the next page to prioritize your employee engagement activities. We have heard from many small businesses that they don't have the time or money to focus on employee engagement. However, the research shows that as the job market gets increasingly competitive, no business leader can afford to ignore the importance of engagement.

The PDF versions documents and forms in the toolkit can be found at: [www.helpside.com/employee-engagement-toolkit](http://www.helpside.com/employee-engagement-toolkit)

## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT CHECKLIST

Use this checklist to prioritize and document your employee engagement activities.

Priority	Activity	Completion Date
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Improve Your Employer Brand</b>	
	Create an Employee Value Proposition	
	Communicate your Employee Value Proposition	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Hire and Develop Great Managers</b>	
	Review interview questions for managers and add questions about leadership aptitude, if necessary	
	Provide tips from the Employee Engagement toolkit to managers	
	Create a consistent onboarding process and train managers	
	Encourage managers to view the Performance Communication webinar	
	Hold managers accountable for scheduling weekly one on one meetings with employees	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Be Strategic About Your Benefits Offering</b>	
	Review current benefits offering	
	Research options for new benefits offerings	
	Gather feedback from manager conversations with employees	
	Decide on new benefits (if any) and communicate to employees	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Be Flexible</b>	
	Review your current flexible work policy	
	Research options for flexible work arrangements	

**Priority**

**Activity**

**Completion Date**

Gather feedback from manager conversations with employees
Decide on new flexible work options (if any) and communicate to employees
<b>Offer Professional Development and Career Pathing</b>
Review your professional development polices and career pathing discussions
Research options for development
Gather feedback from manager conversations with employees
Decide on new development opportunities (if any) and communicate to employees
