

# How to Engage Employees

**A Guide for  
Employees,  
Supervisors,  
Managers, &  
Executives**



***Employee Engagement is a good in and of itself.***

## What is Employee Engagement?

Employee engagement is the degree to which employees are connected and committed to their work, their colleagues, and the purpose of the organization. Engagement is encouraged and demonstrated in the way the organization and employee work to support each other's success.



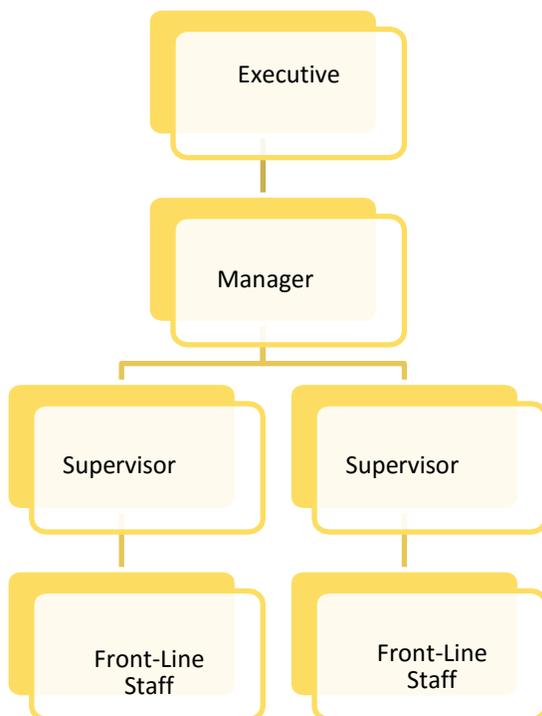
## Why is Employee Engagement important?

Engaged employees experience greater meaning, satisfaction, and success in their work. Organizations with engaged employees have higher levels of customer satisfaction, service quality, innovation, and productivity, as well as lower rates of absenteeism, turnover, and accidents.

## How can Employee Engagement be increased?

Employee engagement is increased when the leaders of the organization, as well as the employees, are invested emotionally. Departments can help to create a workplace where they help employees find meaning in their jobs and in turn, employees bring focus, passion, and pride to their work. Fostering employee engagement starts at the top and involves authentic thoughts and actions at all levels to achieve positive results. These levels are: Executive, Managerial, Supervisory, and Front-Line Staff.

The most critical leadership level is the Supervisory level because the supervisor-employee relationship is the most important one in any organization. When employees rate low levels of job satisfaction, it is usually attributable to a poor relationship with their supervisor. Conversely, satisfied and engaged employees typically have good relationships with their supervisors that lead to high levels of job satisfaction and increased loyalty, productivity, and effectiveness.



## What are some specific activities that can be followed at each leadership level?

The individual leaders throughout the entire organization are primarily responsible for creating the culture and communication climate that encourages and supports employees to be engaged in their work.

When the actions in this document are taken at each level, and result in a coordinated, sincere, and sustained effort, positive results can follow. Some of the same activities are listed under each level because they are best practices that are appropriate up, down, and throughout the organization. Other activities may be better suited to the specific level indicated. The intention of these lists is to inspire some new thinking and actions and also reinforce what is already being done that result in a high level of employee engagement.

# **EXECUTIVE LEVEL**

## **❖ Create and communicate vision/goals throughout the organization and describe how employee efforts at various levels contribute:**

1. Hold an annual meeting to communicate goals each year and include quarterly or semi-annual progress updates using a newsletter and/or online media (i.e. blog, intranet, etc.).

## **❖ Help employees understand how their work/goals support the larger goals of the department:**

1. Use multiple methods to communicate the goals of the department to all employees throughout the year.
2. Regularly highlight the achievements and progress of specific work units and describe how their results and efforts support the larger goals.
3. Remove obstacles to effort and performance.

## **❖ Improve the overall work environment:**

1. Listen to all employees equally and find out what is really needed by creating platforms for employees to share input and designate individuals to seek out input that is not freely volunteered, don't just respond to the "squeaky wheels."
2. Take any necessary steps to ensure that the work environment is safe and hazard-free.
3. Ensure that employees have the tools and equipment they need to do their jobs.
4. Consider the overall and long-term benefits of improving the furnishings and workspace design factors (i.e. noise, privacy, lighting, etc.).
5. Maintain a work environment free of illegal bias or discrimination, harassment, and retaliation.

## **❖ Create a culture of recognition:**

1. Find opportunities to compliment employees thoughtfully and personally (i.e. teamwork, special projects, exemplary effort, client feedback).
2. Design and implement a recognition award program with employee input.
3. Communicate behavioral (performance) expectations related to recognition to managers and support them as they devise recognition efforts appropriate for their divisions.

## **❖ Implement a management development process for all managers and supervisors:**

1. Assess all managers and supervisors to determine what development is required to be able to acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to manage people effectively.
2. Invest in providing targeted, needs-based training and development opportunities involving multiple methods (i.e. On the job training, classroom) and using internal and/or external resources.
3. Provide feedback and coaching regarding their roles as managers and supervisors to help reinforce learning and skill-building by using a combination of internal and external resources (i.e. coaching and assessment/feedback instruments).

4. Consistently model the behavior, walk the talk, to ensure that developing people management skills are a priority and an expectation.

❖ **Provide coaching and mentoring support to your senior executives and managers:**

1. Treat your regular one-on-one meetings with your direct reports as most important and schedule them bi-weekly if possible.
2. Establish performance and development goals and objectives related to managing people and improving employee engagement.
3. Encourage the use of development-oriented feedback instruments that deal with personal styles and strengths.
4. Review quality and completion of Performance Reviews and Evaluations.
5. Support managers to take appropriate corrective and termination actions with employees who are not performing at a satisfactory level.

❖ **Facilitate the flow of regular communication about what is going on in the organization, etc.:**

1. Find opportunities to reinforce messages about values and expectations.
2. Keep employees up-to-date on things they need to know.
3. Use e-mail, bulletin boards, brief presentations, calendars.
4. Talk to individuals and find out firsthand how, and what, messages are getting through to managers, supervisors, and line staff.

❖ **Increase visibility by regularly walking around and listening to employees:**

1. Make seeing them your only reason for visiting their workspace.
2. Gather ideas and opinions and acknowledge and implement their suggestions.

❖ **Form task forces and other self-directed work groups designed to improve the quality and efficiency of work processes:**

1. Encourage diverse, multi-disciplinary membership.
2. Give them a clear purpose with autonomy free from the traditional chain of command structure.
3. Clarify how recommendations will be evaluated and how implementation decisions will be made, and do so before they begin their work.

❖ **Support programs and activities that promote employee well-being and balance:**

1. Provide employees with the opportunity to achieve a work-life balance & encourage this pursuit.
2. Review flextime and alternative work schedule policies where feasible.
3. Gather anecdotal and survey data to determine what employees need and want to balance work-life issues.
4. Encourage the use of existing leave benefits and time-off options, including the use of vacation.

# MANAGERIAL LEVEL

## ❖ **Help employees understand how their work/goals support the larger goals of the department:**

1. Use multiple methods to communicate the goals of the department to all employees throughout the year.
2. Regularly highlight the achievements of specific work units and describe how their efforts support the larger goals.
3. Remove obstacles to effort and performance.

## ❖ **Create a culture of recognition:**

1. Find opportunities to compliment employees thoughtfully and personally (i.e. teamwork, special projects, exemplary effort, client feedback).
2. Communicate behavioral expectations related to recognition to supervisors and support them as they devise recognition efforts appropriate for their units.

## ❖ **Correct behaviors and performance which are inconsistent with goals, standards, and expressed values and interests:**

1. Maintain a work environment free of illegal bias or discrimination, harassment, and retaliation.
2. Initiate and support progressive disciplinary action when coaching and corrective actions fail to correct performance or conduct problems.

## ❖ **Support supervisors in dealing with poor performance and conduct issues:**

1. Ensure that all supervisors are adequately trained in corrective action processes and procedures.
2. Provide supervisors with appropriate coaching and advice.
3. Review work processes and workload issues to determine if the “system” is a contributing factor and if it is, correct it.
4. Review and analyze causes for employee turnover and take actions to address it.
5. Review quality and completion of Performance Reviews and Evaluations.
6. Support supervisors to take appropriate corrective and termination actions with direct reports who are not performing at a satisfactory level.

## ❖ **Assess workload issues to achieve balance:**

1. Treat your regular one-on-one meetings with your direct reports as most important and schedule them bi-weekly if possible.
2. Gather information to understand what employees need and what their priorities are.
3. Meet with supervisors to understand what the issues and opportunities are.
4. Consider the combination of activities performed vs. the volume of activities when designing a job description.
5. Communicate needs to executives and be an advocate when appropriate.

❖ **Promote the investment in training and other learning opportunities:**

1. Encourage supervisors to attend developmental training and approve reasonable training requests.
2. Encourage supervisors to promote and approve training opportunities for their direct reports.
3. Consistently model the behavior, walk the talk, to ensure that developing people management skills are a priority and an expectation.

❖ **Facilitate the flow of regular communication about what is going on in the organization, department, etc.:**

1. Find opportunities to reinforce messages about values and expectations.
2. Keep employees up-to-date on things they need to know.
3. Use e-mail, bulletin boards, brief presentations, calendars.
4. Talk to individuals and find out first-hand how, as well as what, messages are getting through to supervisors and line staff.

❖ **Conduct “stay interviews” with your employees to assess what’s working and what’s not. They can make your employees feel valued and heard and build better relationships:**

1. Hold informal and formal meetings.
2. Use surveys.
3. Walk around and listen. Some good questions are:
  - Why do you stay with us?
  - What do you like best/least?
  - What makes for a great day at work?
  - What is it that keeps you motivated?
  - What is something new you would like to learn this year?
  - Is there anything you’d like to change about your job?
  - What kind of recognition would be meaningful for you?

❖ **Support programs and activities that promote employee well-being and balance.**

# SUPERVISORY LEVEL

## ❖ Clarify roles and responsibilities of employees:

1. Ensure each direct report understands their role, responsibilities, and what they are accountable for.
2. As a supervisor, describe how the employee will be supported.
3. Be sure there is no confusion over who has authority when questions or problems arise.

## ❖ Provide clear goals and expectations:

1. Involve direct reports in the goal setting process and gain their agreement. Encourage them to stretch.
2. Ensure that direct reports understand the quality and quantity expectations – how much and how well.
3. Continually clarify expectations to eliminate misunderstandings and disagreements.
4. Provide enough time and support for each employee to practice or learn what is expected and required for success.

## ❖ Provide regular value-added feedback to direct reports:

1. Consistently provide unit performance results and discuss individual progress toward meeting goals.
2. Provide specifics on what employees did well along with the impact it has had, and let them know what they need to do to improve.

## ❖ Know your employees and what is important to them – both inside and outside of the workplace:

1. Treat your regular one-on-one meetings with your direct reports as most important and schedule them bi-weekly if possible.
2. Conduct “stay interviews” with your employees to assess what’s working and what’s not.
3. Know their personal and professional goals, their stressors, what excites them and how they define success.
4. Find opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate personal milestones (i.e. birthdays, anniversaries, etc.).
5. Listen to the stories that are shared and pay attention to how employees are treating each other.
6. Give them opportunities to do what they do best and most enjoy.

## ❖ Create a culture of recognition:

1. Find opportunities to compliment employees thoughtfully and personally (i.e. teamwork, special projects, exemplary effort, client feedback).

## ❖ Guide new employees beginning day one:

1. Assign a co-worker to partner with new hires to help them get up to speed quickly.
2. Meet weekly with new employees to share information and solicit any questions or concerns they have.

❖ **Solicit regular value-added feedback from your direct reports:**

1. Ask questions like, “What would you like to see me do differently?” and “What could I be doing to make your job easier?”

❖ **Provide performance and developmental coaching:**

1. Help employees develop their skills and build their knowledge to enable them to grow with the organization.
2. Coach with open-ended questions to help “lead” employees to their own learning.
3. Delegate meaningful and challenging assignments and help remove barriers to performance.

❖ **Provide employees with training and other developmental opportunities:**

1. Approve training requests and help them find the time needed to be able to attend training sessions.
2. Encourage job rotation and cross-training to build the unit’s capacity and decrease boredom.
3. Ensure that they are well-trained in dealing with common workplace issues, like conflict resolution.

❖ **Provide timely and thoughtful Performance Reviews and Evaluations:**

1. Provide documented evaluations that recognize accomplishments and contributions and identify areas where improvement can be made.
2. Take appropriate corrective and termination actions with direct reports who are not performing at a satisfactory level.

❖ **Help employees achieve a work-life balance:**

1. Assist employees with developing time management and organization skills.
2. Be reasonable in approving leave requests and other schedule accommodations.

❖ **Support programs and activities that promote employee well-being and balance.**

❖ **Maintain a work environment free of illegal bias or discrimination, harassment, and retaliation.**

❖ **Support employees to solve problems themselves:**

1. Make sure they have the training they need to understand how to solve problems.
2. Give them an appropriate amount of authority to make decisions.
3. Allow people to make intelligent mistakes and hold them accountable for understanding what the lessons learned are from the experience.
4. Reward people for taking initiative and thoughtful risk-taking.
3. Identify situations and opportunities when employees can use their own judgment without fear of failure.

# EMPLOYEE'S ROLE

## What is the Employee's role in Employee Engagement?

Executives, managers and supervisors are the real levers for sustainable employee engagement and performance. However, employees also have an important role to play for real change and real engagement to take hold.

Here are some positive actions an employee can take:

### ❖ Focus on your strengths:

- Understand your strengths and talents and find every opportunity to use them and build on them as you do your job and learn new skills.

### ❖ Offer ideas and suggestions:

- Your job is to not only “do,” but to “think.” Think about ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the work you do.
- Provide solutions, don't just identify problems.

### ❖ Share positive stories:

- Although there is always something to criticize, try to focus on those things that are positive. Your positive focus can be infectious and will help to create a workplace that people want to be a part of.

### ❖ Take pride in your work product:

- Spend a little extra time proofing your work, checking your figures, following up with a client, making sure the job meets expectations, etc.
- Learn from your mistakes.

### ❖ Be a team player:

- Support your co-workers.
- Offer to help when you have time available and/or you know someone is operating under a tight deadline.
- Recognize your peers for doing good work or being helpful.

### ❖ Make time to refresh and re-energize:

- Take regular inventory of your accomplishments and lessons learned.
- Seek out positive relationships.
- Find time to laugh.

### ❖ Listen and learn:

- Seek to understand the big picture.
- Listen carefully to understand what your manager and supervisor are trying to communicate.
- If you're not clear about what is expected, just ask in order to help foster a two-way open dialogue around expectations.

***Increasing levels of employee engagement improves productivity, quality, and creativity; fundamentally advancing the goods and services we provide to the community we serve. Yet, even if we ignore these facts, we still have good reason to care about employee engagement. Our County Government does amazing things and it is therefore our collective responsibility to ensure that our fellow employees are able to realize the fruits of their labors, be appreciated for their efforts, and take personal pride in the exceptional work that they do.***