

Engaged employees are involved in their work, enthusiastic—or at the very least positive—while on the job, and committed to your organization. That usually translates to greater productivity and a higher return on the investment you have in your workforce.

However, studies show that many employees simply aren't engaged at work. The reasons why vary; they can include upheaval in organizations, distrust of managers, job market unease, and a lack of cohesion among workers and teams.

Whatever the cause, staffing experts say the need to monitor and boost engagement is an urgent one.

To help you boost engagement and foster the highly motivated workforce today's marketplace demands, here are a few best practices to consider for the year ahead.

1 Don't be a stranger.

Job one for any manager who wants to keep employees engaged is familiarity. Your employees need to know you. It's human nature. Particularly in an era of cyber relationships and individual isolation, people need connections. To people.

So put yourself out there. Show your human side. Give your workforce access to your office and to you. And open up. Allow them not only go know you as someone other than "the boss," but let them know what the company is doing and why.

When you are open with people, they're open with you. That's engagement.

2 Recruit ambassadors.

Make a point to share your company's brand with employees. And, in doing so, rally them around it. This fosters a sense of belonging, of pride, and of being involved in something bigger than simply "a job."

Then, every chance you get, cultivate employees as storytellers. Show them how they can be brand ambassadors at all points of contact with customers, vendors, and others. Remind them to use Snapchat, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Glassdoor to engage others on the positive aspects of your work environment, your products, and services--your brand.

3 Share your 2020 vision.

To be fully engaged, employees need to understand why you're doing what you're doing. So tell them. Remind them why you exist. Talk about your goals. Explain what you expect to do to reach those goals.

Make them part of your vision. Because they are.

Employees need to know that what they do matters. By telling them where they fit in the grand scheme of things, you take things like "values" and "mission" and "vision" off the whiteboards and out of the PowerPoint presentations, and put them front and center for everyday employees, every day. This enables them to align their own daily performance goals with those of the organization.

That's engagement.

4 Three letters: EVP.

Your employer valuation proposition (EVP) is, in essence, the promise you make to your employees. It plays a big role in how your workers perceive your brand and directly impacts how they engage and support your goals and objectives.

You need to keep that EVP fresh. Step back and take a look. Think about what makes your organization different, from an employee perspective, and then upgrade your EVP accordingly. Doing so will foster engagement that is organic, not merely transactional.

5 Shift power outside of HR.

Studies show that employee engagement improves when it's driven by department managers rather than human resources personnel. By putting supervisors in charge, you not only empower them, you can hold them accountable and create a feedback loop in which to evaluate the progress they make.

Just keep this in mind: Shifting leadership doesn't mean human resources shouldn't be involved. In fact, every stakeholder in your organization needs to be part of the journey toward a more-engaged workplace. Responsibility can begin with supervisors, but it should involve senior leaders and HR. Of course, don't forget employees themselves, who, not surprisingly, feel more engaged when you ask them about employee engagement.

6 That leads us to the heart of the matter: Communication.

If you want engaged employees, you need to have open lines of communication with them. And you must have internal messaging that is consistent and clear.

So first, think about your internal brand. Forge agreement among the stakeholders on what your tone and attitude should be. Discuss the process for communicating with employees about important announcements, events--even about employee engagement issues.

And before you roll out your company newsletter and call your communications efforts "good," ask yourself how and where today's employees digest content.

To keep employees engaged, think bite-sized communications rather than long-form news pieces. Develop short, concise, personalized emails and mailers to announce rewards for important accomplishments. Share musings from leaders in a conversational, friendly tone via Slack and other apps.

Above all, remember that this is a two-way street. Whether you chat, text, email, or videoconference, true engagement involves listening. When employees feel as if they can't speak their minds, engagement levels fall. So be transparent. Be interesting. And be interested.

7 Use video. Use podcasts. Get gamified.

So, about technology. Use it.

Whether it's through a live conference call or pre-produced, video is ideal for making company-wide announcements. And, if it features real employees discussing issues or making presentations, it engages people at all levels of your organization.

For remote workers and employees in far flung offices, podcasts can also be invaluable engagement tools. Through them, employees connect to, and learn from, each other's stories. Podcasts also give managers and execs a channel through which they can offer important insights and information. They're shareable, portable, and, of course, re-listenable. Perfect for engagement at a personal level.

Gamification is also a thing. A really valuable thing. By using video game-like technology for everything from training to internal announcements, companies engage workers in a fun and powerful way. Game-based learning has been shown to boost productivity levels. It also encourages healthy competition, boosts collaboration, and elevates the drive to succeed. With Gen Z beginning to enter the workforce in large numbers, gamification may be vital to boosting engagement in your learning and development programs.

8 Give them what they want: more information.

Within a few years, millennials will comprise a huge chunk of your workforce. Theirs is a generation with high expectations. They want more learning opportunities, not fewer; greater access to data, not less.

And they want it all. Now.

Keep them engaged by keeping them up-to-date. Offer collaborative learning platforms, social learning portals, and mobile learning.

You also might want to consider establishing a microlearning program that delivers segmented, bite-sized chunks of information via mobile devices. Employees can view these insightful modules anytime, anywhere. They're quick, detailed, and easy to follow without being monotonous. And in an era of ever-changing job demands, they engage employees with the type of data they need to stay ahead.

About EmBrand

EmBrand is an integrated employer branding firm. EmBrand's principals and associates have been building international and national brands for over three decades. The company's brand process has been proven in the competitive world of brand management for both B2B and B2C markets. Let EmBrand put its unique, proprietary brand process to work for you to define, manage and build your Employer Brand.