

# **All together now!**

a guide to employee  
engagement

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## Design

This eBook was designed entirely using web-based tools (most notably Aviary image editor and Google Docs) on a Google CR-48 ChromeOS computer. Not that it matters to most of you, but just in case you were curious.

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## About the editor

My name is Ben Eubanks and I am... Well, I'm a lot of things. My day job is a generalist role with a government contractor in Huntsville, AL. When I get off work, I have a few things that take up my time, whether it's volunteering with my local SHRM chapter as the Social Media Director or writing my blog about [HR, leadership, culture, and passion](#). I'm the 2010-2011 Chairman of the SHRM YP Committee. I cofounded an unconference event called [HRevolution](#). I've written a handful of [eBooks](#). Told you I did a lot! In my spare time I read, connect with other great HR pros, and play with my kids. Want to connect? I'm on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), and you can always hit me [via email](#).

*This book was put together with the support of Shauna Moerke, [HR Minion](#) and keeper of the [HR Carnival](#). I appreciate her willingness to assist!*

## Introduction

Engagement. It's the buzzword of the year. *Last year*. Seriously, though, it's tossed around as a cure-all. If you can just get people engaged, then the world will be at your fingertips and you'll be able to do the work of fifty people with a dozen staff members. Um, not exactly. Let me share a quick story about what engagement means in my mind.

A CEO was walking down the hallway of the hospital he managed one day and came across the janitor working. He stopped to talk with him for a few moments and eventually he asked the janitor what he did. The janitor stopped, turned to the CEO with a completely serious look and replied, "I save lives." The CEO was taken aback. What was this guy talking about? He's the *janitor*, not a heart surgeon. He continued, "See, when I do my job well and clean the operating rooms and other work areas, the doctors have a sanitary, safe place to do their jobs. I clean things, yes, but in the bigger scheme of things, I'm helping to save lives." The CEO instantly realized his own "small thinking" and saw that the janitor had a view of the mission of the hospital from an entirely different, yet valuable, perspective.

In my mind, engagement is about turning people on to the aspects of the job that appeal to them on another level. Maybe it's showing them exactly how they fit into the mission of the company so that they aren't just scrubbing floors. They are saving lives. That's one of my favorite stories to tell, and it applies to nearly any job you can throw into the scenario.

Get people *engaged* on a deeper level. When they stop thinking of what they do as a *job* and start thinking of it as something more, then you're on the right track.

I hope you enjoy this guide and learn some new tips and tricks. **Note the wide margins.** I leave those so you can take notes, scribble ideas, and make connections between what you read and how things exist in your own organization. By the end of this guide you should have a handful of ideas to follow up on. Have fun!

## How to Keep Interns Engaged and Why It's Important

I've been an intern before. I've grabbed the coffees, cleaned the kitchen. I've even driven the boss' car to pick someone up (didn't mind that one). But on top of the trivial tasks, I also did some pretty meaningful work – tasks like writing proposals to attend conferences and making wicked presentations that were seen by hundreds of people. These tasks benefited the business and freed up other employees' time.

Meaningless tasks are part of the intern life, but that's okay as long as you get to do challenging and rewarding stuff too. If an intern is engaged and learning then they can be very productive and beneficial to your business.

Here's why I think it's important to keep interns engaged:

- An engaged intern will achieve better results and free up your 'real' employees' time, allowing them to do more important tasks.
- Treating your interns poorly says a lot about your company culture. An intern may even write about how awful their experience was on their blog, and who wants to have to deal with the consequences of that? Far-fetched? Maybe. Impossible? No.
- An engaged intern will be more likely to want to take an entry level position after they complete their internship. Hiring a former intern is less risky than hiring a complete stranger for an entry level position.

I'm guessing a lot of you who are reading this agree with the benefits of keeping interns engaged. The tricky part is how. Interns have no experience and require a lot of hand-holding which takes valuable time away from the employees who are responsible for managing them. Below are three ideas on how to keep interns engaged so you can free up your time and focus on your responsibilities:

- Before you take on an intern, develop a project that they can focus on and run with. Let them know that this is their project and they are responsible for the results. This will make them feel more like a full-time employee and free up your time, too.
- Challenge them. Assign them a task that's beyond their skill level and ability and see

what they come back with. It's important to let them know that their assignment is beyond their abilities so as not to discourage them. Young people like a challenge, especially if they think it's 'cool'. And who knows, they may even come back with a great result. Bonus.

- Tell them about a challenge that is facing the company or a certain department. Let them brainstorm ideas on how they would tackle the challenge. Not only is this a great way to engage them, they may also come up with some great ideas.

An engaged intern will be productive and eager to take on the menial tasks. If you're going to have interns why not treat them as a potential employee and get them to be as productive as one?

Do you have interns at your company? How do you keep them engaged?

*Nathaniel Rottenberg writes for [TalentEgg.ca](http://TalentEgg.ca).*

## **Over-Engineering Human Resources**

They had just spent the last ten hours cramped together in a tiny room, sitting on short stools and hunched over buckets. The room was hot, and the stench of sweat and dead fish lingered in the air.

The three Thai men moved the buckets of fish – 90 pounds in all – that they had spent the day washing, gutting and filleting into a neighboring room. Then they scrubbed the floors with bleach to remove the smell of the dead fish.

It didn't work that well.

As cockroaches scurried out from the cracks in the walls, the men pulled cots into the center of the room, and settled down for a night's sleep. The next morning, they would wake up early and take the fish to market, where they would make a grand total of \$10.

### *The Folly of “Best Place to Work” Lists*

That was a scene from a show I watched last week, [Blood, Sweat and Tears](#). The show follows a group of six young people from the UK through Thailand, as they work alongside poor, migrant workers and gain a better understanding of the food industry.

Contrast that with the latest issue of *Fortune's* [100 Best Places to Work](#) list, which had arrived in my mailbox just a day earlier.

I read a few pieces of the article. As was expected, the author went on and on about indoor pools and instructor-led yoga and on-site massages and dry-cleaning.

And all I could think was, “This is bull.”

### *Over-Engineering Human Resources*

Perks are way, way overrated. They have nothing to do with a great workplace.

The migrant workers highlighted in *Blood, Sweat and Tears* put up with horrible conditions and horrible pay because they don't have a choice. I'm in no way advocating that we should treat workers like crap.

There's a happy middle, somewhere between the fish-gutters and the free yoga. We need to find it.

I've never seen [Frank Roche](#) and [Sarah Chambers'](#) organization, [iFractal](#), on a best places to work list. But it is one.

Frank keeps it simple. He hires great people. He pays them fairly. He puts people in roles that align with their passions and their strengths. He creates an environment where people can connect and collaborate and share great ideas. He communicates, openly, honestly and clearly.

He documents the whole thing and puts it up on [their Flickr stream](#).

To my knowledge, there's no pool or on-site massages at iFractal (though in fact-checking this article, I found out they are looking into instructor-led yoga – no joke!). But it doesn't matter. Those things have nothing to do with a great place to work.

### **We over-engineer HR.**

We fixate on employee engagement scores and perks and swag. We create 17,000 policies and treat our employees like children, and then we talk about empowerment. We call them resources instead of people.

This HR thing, it's not really that hard. Hire great people, treat them like adults, and then get the hell out of the way and let them do amazing work.

*Chris Ferdinandi is the author of [RenegadeHR.net](#).*

## **Employee Engagement-Small Business Style**

I am the Director of Human Resources in a 100 employee operation. This affords me the opportunity that might not be available to folks in larger organizations. One of those things is that I get to do is go out “on the road”: and spend time with our sales representatives. We have a handful of off-site/remote employees. They deal with our customers directly. I feel that it is important that they get some attention from Headquarters, other than just the sales department, or the accounting department banging on them for expense reports.

Fortunately our Company President agrees with this concept, so periodically I get out of the office to work shows, visit customers or just ride along with our sales folks. Just this week I went on one of these little adventures. I was in Minneapolis, in February – my timing is not all that great. On this particular trip there were a number of us who went with our sales rep to visit customers.

While the concept of the so called *HR guy* getting out in front of customers is nearly alarming to some folks, I usually get a very positive response. I recall what one Company President said after I met him at a show. After meeting me he replied “An HR guy, what in the heck are you doing here?” I simply told him, supporting our sales staff and seeing what our customers need. He thought about that a moment and said, “hmm sounds like a good idea, maybe I should have my HR people get out and meet with our customers.”

Ok so the point of this post is not to blow my own horn, but rather to discuss some HR practices I have established that are going on at larger organizations. My Project Social Partner Laura Schroeder is also a remote employee. She works in a large organization, and is faced with many of those remote employee challenges. You can read [her take on the subject here](#). Now Laura tells me some of my practices are called employee engagement. (*Actually I already knew that.*)

The point is this, My Company’s sales staff do live a long way from corporate headquarters, they do not interact with company employees everyday and what they do for our Company is huge. Effective employee engagement can run the gambit from being very formal and structured as Laura has discussed in her post, or fairly informal and not too structured,



by simply spending some face time with remote employees, talking to them making sure their needs are being met. Either way can work, but you have to remember them and pay attention to them. Because if you just assume they are doing their job and everything is ok, – well let's just say we all know what happens when you ass-u-me! [Employee engagement strategies](#) are simple, but they can't be ignored.

*Dave Ryan is the author of [HR Official](#).*

## **Engagement: The Good Stuff**

Engaged employees are absent less, stick around longer and – most importantly – devote more of their discretionary time and creative energy to their jobs.

But engagement's tricky. Difficult to quantify, frequently confused with satisfaction and tainted by doubts of its importance to the bottom line, engagement remains elusive to all but a few high performing companies.

So let's talk about engagement: What it is, what drives it, how to measure it.

Engagement is an [emotional involvement](#) with a company, a job, and/or a manager. Engaged employees tend to go the extra mile to make their employer successful and have been spotted wearing 'I love my job!' t shirts in a non-ironic way. They see beyond their own personal short-term success and celebrate achievements that contribute to team or company success.

When you sift through the various research, the top **drivers of engagement** are:

- **Managers** – Good managers can keep people engaged at bad companies, but people leave bad managers at otherwise great companies. Or worse, they *don't* leave, they just withhold their best work.
- **Rewards** – I recently learned that early [sea captains used to kill their paid passengers](#) until someone got the bright idea to compensate them only for living passengers. Rewards impact engagement, at least to the extent that getting them wrong may result in feelings of resentment, information hoarding and other negative behaviors.
- **Opportunities** - The feeling that you're *getting somewhere* rather than stuck in place is a fundamental driver of engagement.
- **Communication** – Good communication means more than presenting the company strategy at the quarterly meeting. Employees who feel informed and involved are more likely to trust their employer, take pride in their jobs and have a big picture focus when it comes to their work.

Quite a few companies survey employees to measure satisfaction but a high employee

satisfaction rating that doesn't mean you're getting the good stuff.

An engagement survey includes a broad spectrum of questions that are designed to gather employee attitudes about their managers, their rewards, their feeling of belonging, opportunity and involvement. It's important to have a complete picture of engagement in order to design effective engagement programs that drive bottom line results, rather than focusing on a single driver.

If you don't have time or resources to design, administer and analyze an engagement survey, here are a few suggestions that don't cost much and focus on all four engagement drivers:

- If you have only \$1 to spend on engagement, spend it on manager quality. Make leadership quality a clearly communicated priority, drill into instances of dissatisfaction or low performance and take action as needed.
- Read the [July 2010 Workspan](#) article 'Performance Management: Rewired for the Recovery' for some excellent ideas from [Intuit](#) about using multiple compensation levers to drive engagement.
- Every company has people with unsuspected skills, talents and ambitions that are just waiting to step up to the plate and show what they can do. Whether you do it in a spreadsheet or a sophisticated talent management system, start mining that talent today.
- The secret sauce of good communication is good listening. Encourage leaders to make a point of reaching out to people, offering feedback, welcoming ideas and constructive criticism and taking action where appropriate.

**Bottom line:** We can make it more complicated but the basics of engagement are pretty basic.

*Laura Schroeder is the author of [Working Girl](#).*

## How Marketing Myopia Became Employee Engagement

One of the earliest lessons I learned in business was regarding Theodore Levitt's concept of [Marketing Myopia](#). In short, your business success is as limited as your vision. If you have a wider vision of your business purpose, you are much less likely to be made obsolete. A gross simplification, and worthy of a deeper look if you've not read it, but that's the high level concept.

So companies that have a strong vision are better prepared to deal with change. And part of dealing with change is changing your talent capacity as needed. Therefore, we can and should expand the concept of myopia beyond marketing and well into talent management.

My previous organization was a mid-sized construction company, and thought like one. Our market was repairing infrastructure, specifically in sewer and oil pipes. Not a terribly inspiring sector in which to work, but an important job and one that the company did well. We brought in a new CEO, [Tom Rooney](#), who made many changes, including establishing a new company vision. Our job went from repairing sewers to "providing clean water for the world." We invested in new strategic brands, aligned charitable work with the goal, and set out to re-brand the company.

I carried that mindset when I joined my current organization, who explained that they didn't just build supermarket refrigerators, but they worked to support the world's food chain from "farm to fork." Brilliant and inspiring. When I heard it, I was hooked.

I'm taking the same approach to the work we do in process improvement and standardization. At the 2010 HR Technology Conference in Chicago, a session was held on going global. One of the comments that struck me was not to approach a country with a standard process that they need to use, but to approach it as a custom design that aligns as much as possible to the enterprise standard. Much different approach, and much more suited to the work that needs to be done.

So what is your company's vision? Do you make buggy whips, or do you create new ways to drive transportation? Do you hand out credit cards that place people under a mountain

of debt, or do you enable your customers to live a better life? Do you make managers do performance reviews and fill out forms, or do you help them create and maintain strong teams to reach your shared business objectives?

*Dwane Lay is the author of [Lean HR](#).*

## **Seven Ways Our Nonprofit Engages Employees**

My blog is called *aliveHR* because I am passionate about people who are **engaged**. Not ‘engaged to be married’ (although that’s nice too) but *engaged in life*, immersed in one’s craft, lost in activities that are somehow greater than oneself, that bring intrinsic joy and gratification when done well. I love to watch people “in the flow,” using strengths in service of an activity they love, whether those people are musicians, children, athletes, acrobats, HR professionals or employees.

Of course, as an HR person, I also love observing engagement at work. I work at a nonprofit that serves people with disabilities. The necessary evening and weekend hours are grueling to our staff; the pay is not lucrative and the duties are not highly valued by society. In addition, our counselors work in remote locations with infrequent face-time with supervisors. Recruiting, onboarding, training and supervising in such an environment are challenging activities at best. As you can imagine, having engaged staff is critical to the completion of our mission. While high employee engagement is a strategic competitive advantage at any time, it’s especially important during these lean economic times when margins are tighter for most businesses, especially nonprofits. Here are some ways we have approached engagement at our organization:

**1. Select engaged people.** Chances are you won’t turn a sullen, bored candidate into a rock star employee. In my interviews, candidates have a number of opportunities to talk about what’s important to them. If their faces don’t light up at least once during our conversation—and truly light up with a real smile, not a fake one—it’s unlikely they’ll come to work for us. This is not a test of how outgoing or extroverted they are; it’s an indication of their passion for life and their chosen vocation.

**2. Encourage connections.** Applicants often comment on our friendly environment; you can feel it when you walk in the door. Although we work hard and some of the issues we handle are life or death, the air is not tense or stressed, but rather friendly and convivial. Because of the potentially isolating nature of our employees’ work, we have worked intentionally to build and nurture community, including work teams whose purpose expressly includes the emotional and social support to its members.

**3. Meaningful work.** Most people want to know that their 8+/- hours of effort aren't in vain, that their day results in a product or service they can believe in and feel proud of. If you work in social services, as I do, create a compelling vision, and not just any vision, but the *highest vision* of the difference employees make together in the lives of others. Or if your factory makes widgets, help your employees see how the widgets save consumers effort, bring families together, prevents injuries or otherwise enhances lives.

**4. Values.** We use our values to select, orient, train, and evaluate our employees, as well as to help us solve ethical dilemmas and real-life issues. Values, if accurately identified and broadly accepted, can also be a great way to define an identity and provide a common source of pride and meaning in shared work.

**5. Quality.** Our little nonprofit has an excellent reputation locally and regionally; we've even garnered some national attention for some innovative projects. I believe most achievers prefer to work for a high quality organization that does exciting things. This branding makes it easier to attract, engage and retain talent; which in turn helps ensure you'll continue to operate at a high standard of excellence.

**6. Organizational participation.** In addition to team events, we hold monthly meetings where we gather our employees together, share news and updates, introduce new people and bond over a meal. We have used these meetings to brainstorm about organizational challenges, such as budget cuts or the rising cost of health-care. Twice a year we hold day-long retreats. The Fall retreat is a feel-good event with a motivational speaker; it culminates in some very touching awards to employees who've provided excellent service while exemplifying our values. At the Spring meeting, our employees help set the next year's short-term goals; every three years, they participate in planning the strategic plan along with other stakeholders.

**7. Use strengths.** "Gary" organized exercise classes out of his passion for health and fitness, "Martin" shoots videos for us because he loves making documentaries, and "Maya" facilitates a self-advocacy group because she loves the social aspects. None of these duties are on job descriptions, but it's a win-win to encourage employees to exercise these gifts at work.

This above list is not exhaustive. It doesn't cover every aspect of engagement, such as setting expectations and giving continuous feedback. But I hope it shows that an organization doesn't have to be big/have a large budget to find creative ways to provide an atmosphere conducive to engagement.

For us, some pay-offs related to employee engagement have been a waiting list of families interested in our services; turnover less than half our industry average over a span of 10+ years; positive licensing reviews; positive customer surveys; staff that routinely promote us in the community; and employees who help us continue our legacy of high quality and innovative services. In addition, I can't prove how much of this can be attributed to employee engagement, but while many of our competitors are contracting, laying people off, freezing positions and salaries, we are actually expanding, building programs, maintaining and adding positions and operating in the black.

*Krista Francis is the author of [aliveHR](#).*



## **Socrates Was On To Something**

Both of my kids are really into the [stretchy bracelet craze](#). On the way to the grocery store today, my nine year old son remarked that one of his bracelets looked liked Medusa. Feigning ignorance, I said, “Medusa? Who’s that?” He replied, “You know, Mom, the mythological character who had snakes on top of her head.”

Of course, *I* know who Medusa is, but I wanted to know if my *kid* knew. Later, I realized that this conversation represented a technique honed during my years as a corporate trainer. I think of it as the “low-key testing for understanding.” This method isn’t a new concept, of course. Greek philosopher [Socrates](#) is credited with creating a method to help people form their own conclusions by asking questions. As a more contemporary example, [Dave Meier](#), founder of [The Center for Accelerated Learning](#), says “never do for the learners what they can do for themselves”. His point is that people know a lot more than we give them credit for. Given the right tools and encouragement, people can usually figure things out for themselves. Leaders can use this approach too. The primary objective of leadership is to bring out the best in one’s contributors. When a contributor has a procedural question or is facing a dilemma the “test for knowledge” technique is an excellent way to demonstrate a collaborative leadership approach. Leaders don’t develop others by being the “sage on the stage”; they help their contributors figure it out for themselves.

Back in my supervisory days, whenever my direct reports had a question about how to do something, I’d draw on this “test for knowledge” approach. Instead of immediately launching into an explanation, I’d start by “testing” for what they already know with a question like, “What have you already tried to solve this problem?” or “Tell me which parts you’re clear about and which parts need clarification.” Doing this accomplishes two things. It: a) Saves time by avoiding a rehash of something the contributor already knows and b) Models open-ended questioning, which the contributor can in turn use with their colleagues.

After discussing the answers to the low-key understanding test, I would then follow up to help the contributor think through their options and uncover answers. Some of my favorites inquiries:

- Do you know where to find the answer on the company intranet? Let's go take a look and find it together.
- What part of the process is unclear to you?
- What are the pros and cons of this situation?
- If you decide on taking this action, what's the worst thing that can happen?
- What's your gut telling you?
- How can I support you in this decision?

Some say a leader's job is to remove the barriers to their contributors' performance. While this is true, a leader must resist the temptation to jump in to "fix" problem so that people can quickly move on with their day. By taking a few extra minutes to fully explore a contributor's knowledge base, a leader will actually save time in the long run. Beyond time-saving benefits, employee engagement will get a boost too. Contributors who are involved in solving their own problems gain confidence, which leads to future positive contribution.

Whenever you're tempted to take the short cut, remember this: *it's not what you know, it's what they learn*. Do Socrates proud and use the low-key test for understanding.

*Jennifer V. Miller is the author of [The People Equation](#).*

## **Beyond Your Expectations: What Engages Your Employees?**

The race is on to find qualified, quality employees and to engage them.

A recent article in ROI Central Minnesota, a business and economics magazine published by the St. Cloud Times, reports that, on average, replacing an employee costs 30% of the individual's salary considering use of overtime, temporary workers, loss of productivity and loss of knowledge. The author, Dawn Peake, continues by saying, "compensation has fallen on the list of what drives workers to a company, so now many promote their culture and ability to provide meaningful work." The article highlights some unique perks being offered locally that include chef prepared meals, coffee clubs, vacations at executive cabins, better than average recruitment incentives, and employer paid premiums and deductibles. Reading this, I felt a bit hand-tied; these options are not permissible in a tax-payer funded organization. How are we ever going to compete?

Nevertheless, I continued reading and felt my tension release with Ms. Peake's statement that "there is no one size fits all approach. Companies need to determine what motivates and satisfies their particular group of employees." Ok, that we can do and that we must do. It is not about being everything to everyone, it is not about the cool idea of the month. It involves benchmarking as a guide but not as *the* answer. If we are always looking to see what others are doing so we can do the same, we are committing ourselves to be the eternal follower and never the leader (can you see the light bulb turn on?!).

So let's get back to basics. People valuing certain things will not be drawn to a tax payer funded organization There are people who would not consider working anyplace else. These are the keepers and they are our market. This is our world. The task: capture the **physical and psychic** and **qualitative** "whys" of the work environment. Keep in mind that it does not need to be flashy, it need only be real. It needs to answer the questions, "what are we about?" and "why do people want to work for us?" Ah, here is the **internal branding** piece again! How are the answers already reflected in the things that your organization does or how can they be? Basically, enhance what is in alignment and not so gently realign what is not.

This is not a one person, sitting at their desk, in the quiet of their own mind kind of thing

to do. It is the work of employees across the organization. It is a creative, messy, iterative, colorful sticky note, fruity markers, brainstorming, no idea is a bad one kind of a process. It is a necessary, can't proceed without addressing, discussing, creating and identifying type of task.

*Lisa Rosendahl is the author of [Simply Lisa](#).*

## **Business Advice from the Queen of Soul**

Oh how we folks in HR love to talk about engagement. Not the Royal Engagement of Will and Kate, but rather ***Employee Engagement*** (***EE*** – with two capital Es, underscored AND in italics). We read about it, we devise plans and strategies to increase it. We fret over the percent of our employees who are either actively engaged, disengaged, or (horrors) actively disengaged. Thankfully, many HR pros have now come to the realization that, contrary to our long-standing inflated sense of worth, we cannot motivate people – let alone motivate them to ‘be engaged.’

There are as many definitions of ***EE*** as there are people thinking about it. The phrase and concept first came to the forefront in 1990 when William Kahn of Boston University published “*Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work*,” in which he worked to determine to what extent individuals used varying degrees of their selves (physically/behaviorally, cognitively and emotionally) in work role performance. Over the years, ideas came and went – terms such as satisfaction, motivation and culture were often used interchangeably. Companies conducted climate surveys, opinion surveys and engagement surveys of their employees. Consultants and survey companies hauled in boatloads of money.

Ultimately, in 2006, the Conference Board took a stab at clarifying and came to define ***EE*** as “***a heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organization, that influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to his or her work.***”

So what if you don’t believe in surveying people to determine their emotional connection to your company? Or, more importantly, what if you don’t have thousands of dollars to invest? What are some simple things that you can do to create an environment where, when all is said and done, your employees will give a crap?

In this case, I suggest taking a lesson from the songbook of Aretha Franklin. The Queen of Soul, American icon and treasure, has done a lot more than inspire us with her musical legacy. I believe she’s given us the KEY to fostering engagement in the workplace --

## **Step 1: Show Respect**

- Respect others by showing consideration for different ideas, viewpoints, philosophies, beliefs and personality-types. Respect people regardless of their religion, age, physical ability... well, you get it.
- Respect your employees by paying an appropriate wage for the work performed for your organization and by providing adequate and basic benefits.
- Respect the abilities of your employees – after all, you DID hire them for their abilities.
- Respect the fact that your employees are adults. They were adult enough to find and accept a job with your company and you thought they could make a good decision then, right? Respect their intelligence and don't impose policies that appear straight out of a Dickensian workhouse.

## **Step 2: Gain Respect**

- Spend time with people and get to know them as individuals.
- Listen. I mean REALLY listen.
- Ask for their opinions.
- Communicate and share information. And it's OK if you don't know all the answers.
- Be honest.

## **Step 3: Maintain Respect**

- Be consistent in your actions. Follow through when you say you will and handle problems and issues without dragging your feet.
- Be positive and find ways to focus on the good in situations. Being honest (see above) doesn't mean sugar-coating or being a Pollyanna. Just remember that most people would rather follow a leader with a positive can-do attitude than tag along after Debbie Downer.
- Do the right thing – even when it's a tough thing.

As she sings, Aretha suggests that the listener “find out what it means to me” – in other

words – find out what respect means to the person wanting it. Take the pulse of your workplace, observe and reflect. Seriously ask yourself if you are showing, gaining and maintaining respect. Before anything else occurs – THAT must be in place. I think you'll find that if you start with the right foundation, you can create the environment where your employees WILL have a heightened emotional connection.

Would the Queen of Soul put up with some of the typical nonsense that goes on in organizations? My guess is no. Rather she would tell you to **'Think'** about it, go take care of business (TCB) and not let her add you to the **'Chain of Fools.'**

*Robin Schooling is the author of [HR Schoolhouse](#).*

## **Accidents Can Happen**

I have the green light as I approach the intersection. I'm on my bike at 7th and Pine and I'm preparing to turn left. Luckily, for me and for the jogger who jumped out in front of me that morning I was paying attention. While I came to a dead stop, the jogger keeps on running. As this occurs, I say kindly, "I had the green light." Her response was, "I was there first."

"I was there first." Really?

I had to laugh. But after my first reaction of laughter was over, the second reaction occurred: what stupidity. Would this jogger have thought the same thing about a car? I then imagined this woman in court trying to explain to a judge how the accident with the car was not her fault because she "got to the intersection first."

My third reaction was what a skewed vision of the rules of the road and how could anyone believe this is the way to approach an intersection.

My fourth and final reaction was I want to share this story with my fellow employees. The reason is this reminded me that just recently a staff member asked me, "What do I do if I need to call for an ambulance?" And the reason this employee asked me is because they had asked a couple of other people and received answers that just didn't add up.

My company does not have an internal blog. But a couple of months ago, I added another type of correspondence that I send to staff that is written in a blog-type style. It's not crude or nonchalant. But it's in a more informal style and I use it to communicate policy reminders.

For the last article I wrote to staff, I told the same story about the jogger. I relayed how the incident occurred and how this made me wonder: we all know what to do in an emergency at home or driving; but what about work? Instead of restating all of the details of our safety policy, I mentioned the two most important things in three sentences: (1) what to do if you hurt yourself at work; and (2) what to do if you need to call an ambulance.

Considering the comments and further dialogue these articles created, I believe that writing



this way speaks to people on a more personal level and not just as employees. You can repeat policy until you are blue in the face. But chances are it will be considered HR-Speak and not something important enough to resonate with them.

When writing policy reminders in a blog style, I follow three simple guidelines:

- (1) Tell a story [a true one]
- (2) Don't be afraid to show sincere emotion [e.g. honestly I would hate to see anyone get hurt]
- (3) Keep it short.

The first time I did this type of correspondence, it happened by accident. I needed a method to promote one of our new initiatives but wanted to go beyond just the normal promotion/reminder email. When I had the opportunity to participate in the initiative, I wanted to express my personal satisfaction with it and share this with my colleagues. Thus my blog for employees was born.

Accidents will happen. In fact, they happen constantly. Accidents can derail your whole day, your commute to work, or your normal correspondence to staff. Accidents can result in hit-and-runs or home runs. Or they can result in people hearing what they need to hear.

What matters most is what you do after the accident occurs.

*Paul Smith is the author of [Welcome to the Occupation](#).*

## **Five Reasons Your CEO Doesn't Care About Employee Engagement**

I can't tell you the number of times I've heard about employee engagement at various webinars, lunches, and conferences. We talk about ways to improve it, ways to measure it and ways to sell it up and get it implemented.

Wait a second, strike that last one. We never talk about why having strong employee engagement (a no-brainer in most progressive HR circles) doesn't resonate with the CEO. Don't get me wrong, she might shake her head agreeing with you or he may say everything your saying is right on. They might even believe it (or believe they believe it). And everyone knows they like to talk it up too, especially to new employees.

But then comes the time to take action. Whether it is developing or moving a manager who shouldn't be in their role, managing your compensation, or changing the tiny pieces of your culture that robs engagement, there is resistance. And while it isn't explicit, there are five reasons your CEO rejects improving employee engagement.

### **1. The company isn't ready**

It seems funny that the very reason one should start improving employee engagement is the first in the line of defense against it. "Look," they say, "I understand the advantages but we just aren't ready." And guess what: they are probably right. But let's also be frank that they are probably right about another thing: THEY aren't ready. I'm sure you've all tried to implement something with a CEO's half-hearted support (if you haven't, the short version is somewhere between partial and total failure). You're either going to have to build readiness through the CEO or through your fellow executives.

### **2. Jobs that don't lend themselves to engagement**

If you work for a hip, high tech firm and you think that employee engagement should be a simple, you're right (at least for you). There are plenty of jobs out there that aren't fun and don't draw natural enthusiasm. Does that mean a guy working on a factory floor isn't great at his job because he isn't enthusiastic? Is it worth the cost of trying to "fix" engagement in jobs that are physically or mentally exhausting? Or is it better to think of proven processes that

allow for stress relief while on the job and keep mistakes from being made? Your CEO knows the answer.

### **3. There's no ROI**

In order to drive employee engagement, you're going to have to suffer some initial pain. Do you make enough money to make the pain worth it though? If you can't answer in a concrete manner about the hard costs and expected benefits of increasing employee engagement, and only talk about soft benefits or are unrealistic about the impact, just forget about it. There are instances where fixing employee engagement might make sense, but you've got to make that case.

### **4. Oh, hey look — another touchy feely HR initiative**

Sure, we want people to be satisfied with their job and know they are making a difference. If you can swing that, pay everyone what they want, and still be in business, that's even better. But if you have to prioritize between certain jobs or if part of one of your worker's job description is "Change sewer filter and empty storage container," there might be better ways to spend that money. Mainly, by giving that guy a bonus and a pat on the back (before he starts of course).

### **5. Engagement isn't a real objective**

If you want an employee to be engaged in their work, there is no training for that. Engagement is a matter of employee selection, leadership, and creating an environment that doesn't get in the way of (and encourages) an engaged employee.

When you break it down, many managers aren't asking for employee engagement, they are asking things like if an employee is thinking about the impact of their decisions on their company. Are they proactive in dealing with issues? Do I have to babysit them instead of telling them my expectations, giving them resources and trusting they'll complete the work or ask for assistance? Especially think about this last one.

Honestly, a solid dose of communication, transparency, and performance management (not

the “yearly evaluation” type either) could go a long way in taking care of that. And in the long term picture, dealing with those sources of pain you know exist but don’t have the guts to truly tackle (whether it be compensation, internal politics, or bad managers).

What do you think? Do CEO’s respect the idea of engagement but don’t do it when it comes down to take action?

*Lance Haun blogs at [TLNT](#).*

## **Don't be a Wallflower-Be Heard**

Being in social media takes more than just pushing out information, it takes involvement... engagement. It is about more than your name or your company logo or brand, it is being there to converse and interact with the community.

Social media is a community, like it or not, and is a particular chosen and accepted platform for diverse people to connect and talk about everything from breakfast/lunch/dinner to movies to video games to customer service to shopping to job searches to the GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Not every message is for everyone but each person's community will have some sort of theme to it. That is where Twitter lists and Facebook pages come into high regard.

If I want to follow thought leaders in mobile marketing & recruiting, I will follow a specialized group of industry experts to discuss the topic. If I want to make a crock pot meal, I will interact with those that love sharing recipes.

Social media is more than self-promotion and publication but it is about interaction, networking and relationships. How do you achieve this?

## **ENGAGEMENT!**

Following a wide array of people makes attending a conference so much more interesting and personable. For some of us, going to a crowded conference makes the introvert become prominent. But if you are able to find a friendly face from social media that you have been conversing with for some time in the room, this event just became more interesting and friendly. For others of us, meeting new people is not a problem but social media lets those connections develop for a longer lasting period of time.

Do you use LinkedIn Groups to engage others? You do not need to ask questions but by joining groups and participating in the conversations you are much more likely to exchange professional ideas and even brainstorm on the topics you may not have ever considered previously.

Engagement starts on your mobile phone or personal computer and evolves over time into real connections and relationships. Take the time to connect with others and see what develops and where you will go engaging with a whole new community.

*Keith McIlvaine is the author of the [HR farmer](#).*

## **Employee Engagement-Your HR Life Raft in Turbulent Times**

Recently I attended one of the several monthly program offerings that [IndySHRM](#) has on the agenda for 2011. The speaker, much to my excitement, was [China Gorman](#). China was the COO for the Society of Human Resource Management for several years and is a known expert as a Global Business Leader. Her topic was focused on employee engagement and this was one of those sessions that really gets you thinking.

It seems that more often than not, I walk away from presentations like this one, where they showcase an awesome company (like [Zappos](#)) who do awesome things and you are all pumped up to do things exactly the same way....but then reality hits and you end up simply feeling deflated and defeated when you realize you do not yet have the same power and influence as, say [Tony H.](#), CEO of Zappos.

This time, however, China's presentation really got me thinking about how folks like me can take the cool example of a company like Zappos and apply it in a realistic fashion to our business at hand. The timing on this one was perfect, as we all know that this is the typical time of year for performance evaluations and the creation of development plans for the coming year. There are all kinds of great studies, stats and stories about employee engagement from resources such as [Gallup](#), [BlessingWhite](#) and as China suggested, [Dilbert](#). The sheer amount of information out there on this topic is overwhelming and would intimidate even....well, me. You have to boil it down to what is most relevant to your customer needs and your employee needs and how to best engage your employee to meet and exceed those customer needs.

For example, for a small locally owned and operated Indianapolis staffing company like [That's Good HR](#), we have neither the time nor the financial resources to engage an outside consultant to help us work through all of the fine details of how to engage our small workforce. The cool part about being small, however, is that as long as you are keeping your finger on the pulse of what is going on around you with your staff and your customers, you likely have a good idea of where you stand and what needs to be done.

This is where the critical part comes in. Take this information that is at your fingertips and

do nothing with it and you fail...you fall out of the boat, no life raft. Take this information and expand upon it in a useful forum with each staff member and custom design a development plan for each person based on this and you win. Sounds so simple, doesn't it? Well, it is. A development plan does not have to be (and should not be) complicated. It can and should be 1 page, focused on the strengths and interests of the individual and how they can be best applied to the goals and the mission of the organization.

Development plans...what a concept. So often we stop with the performance evaluation. A look at the PAST, not the future. What you DID do right or wrong, not what you WANT to do better in the future. In my opinion, if you have to choose, dump the performance evaluation and create a development plan the incorporates the strengths demonstrated in the previous year. Engage your employees by knowing them and listening to them well enough to be able to create opportunities for development that are custom to them. Give it a try and if I am wrong on this one, drop me a line and tell me about it.

*Karen Seketa blogs at [ThatsGoodHR](#).*



## **Employee Engagement: The Basics**

Wikipedia describes an engaged employee as one who is fully involved in, and enthusiastic about, his or her work, and thus will act in a way that furthers the organization's interests. In today's competitive business environment, employee engagement is required to drive business success and to gain much needed competitive advantage.

Like most of the facets of the employment relationship, employee engagement may be likened to the relationship that exists between couples. Usually when a couple gets engaged, they start off with each party being attracted to the other because of various qualities exhibited. Based on the feedback garnered from the dating process, they think they would be a good match for each other. Promises are made implicitly and explicitly and based on mutual consent, they become engaged. Their engagement can only last and proceed to the next level if both parties maintain an open trusting relationship and retain the attitude and characteristics that led them to get engaged in the first place. If either party feels cheated, mistreated or deceived, the relationship will experience varying degrees of friction and disengagement will occur.

I see the above mentioned scenario being played out in many employment relationships with less than savory results. In work settings, employee disengagement occurs when employees feel undervalued and disappointed with the system. Unfulfilled expectations and perceived or actual broken promises could lead to employee disillusionment and disenchantment. These negative emotions are generally revealed by behaviors such as absenteeism, poor quality of work and general disinterest in the progress of the organization.

I find it interesting that when top performers become disengaged, they seldom wallow in their disengaged state for long. As soon as they begin to feel unappreciated and perceive a breach in their psychological contract the process of active disengagement occurs. They begin to harbor the intention of leaving their current employer and seeking employment in another organization better suited to their career goals and aspirations. The key point to note here is that because they are top notch employees with valuable and transferable skills they usually find employment elsewhere with minimum difficulty. The point is that if you do not value and recognize your top performers, chances are the competition will.

On the other hand, there is a group of demotivated employees who seem to remain with the company for long periods of time. These employee groups do not remain out of a sense of loyalty; on the contrary they stay on for lack of a better option. More often than not, the mediocre performers are the ones who populate this assemblage. At all costs you want to avoid losing your high potential employees and be stuck saddled with a disengaged group who continue to show up for a paycheck.

Do all you can to retain your top talent. Losing them means losing their knowledge, experience and competence. Added to this would be the costs of new recruitment efforts and the time required to get a suitable replacement up to speed.

In employment relationships as it is in life, The Golden Rule is to treat others as you would like to be treated and do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Engaging employees does not have to be an event where you break the bank. Practices such as on the job training, employee recognition and positive reinforcement can go a long way to motivating employees and showing that management cares.

As a gentle reminder of the time tested ways of encouraging employee engagement, I propose this catchy acronym: AVERT! To AVERT means to ward off or prevent. The following are time-tested methods of warding off disenchantment and preventing our employees from becoming discouraged and disillusioned.

- **ARTICULATE**: Communication is key. Employees need to know what is expected of them. Managers should provide clear job expectations and the required tools and resources to get the job done effectively.

Encourage a culture of open communication between all levels within the organization. Change initiatives need to be communicated, consistently and in a timely manner. Management should stay close to the pulse of employees via town hall meetings, regular surveys informal and formal, via electronic media and company bulletins.

Feedback is great. Leaders should welcome feedback and use it to bring about real and positive changes. When employees raise pertinent work issues, leaders should listen with the willingness to see the employees' point of view. They should go a step further and assure the employees that their concerns have been well received, will be acted upon and will not be used against them.

- **VISION** : Employers and employees and everyone in between should have a shared vision of the company's goals and how the employees' work objectives can contribute to the achievement of the company's overall goal. Line managers and leaders should endeavor to understand their employees' goals, dreams and aspirations and to do what they can to help them achieve those. If you help employees reach their full potential and achieve their career goals they will return the favor and the company will benefit immensely. It has been said that people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.
- **ENGAGE**: Be engaged. Show zero tolerance for shoddy and substandard performance. Have an upbeat attitude. Be committed to your company. Exceed expectations and give your best every day. It will encourage your employees to emulate you. Engaged employers attract engaged employees. Engage your employees' minds, emotions and energies. Engage them in meaningful, thought-provoking conversations. Make them think deep and wide. Empower them to make visible and tangible contributions.
- **RECOGNIZE & Reward** : Provide a list of desirable qualities and reward employees who exhibit such qualities. Catch your employees doing something right. Praise them for exceeding expectations. Reward exceptional performance. Say thank you as often as the need arises. Celebrate small, medium and large victories.
- **TRUST**: Care about your employees. Believe the best about them. Develop a culture of openness; being overly secretive can only breed suspicion and mistrust. Build relationships of trust and confidence with your employees. Let them know you have their best interests at heart. Tell them about the great contribution they make to the team.
- **TRAIN**: Invest in your employees, the rewards are well worth the effort and your business will reap the rewards. Provide new opportunities to stretch, grow and develop new

and relevant skills. Set stretch goals and supply the tools, training and resources necessary to accomplish them. Provide an enabling environment for employee advancement and development.

On a macro level we can all do with more engagement in our lives. Let's be more engaged. Not just at work but in life, marriage, academics, religion, in whatever projects we are involved with, let's bring our whole selves with us.

Help drive your business success because your business can only succeed when all stakeholders are completely engaged. In the same vein, you can only succeed in your chosen career when your business succeeds. **So GO engage and BE engaged!**

*Tamkara Adun*

## **5 Recognition Strategies to Improve Employee Engagement**

Retirement and healthcare benefits have dominated the discussion on total rewards lately as public employee benefits have been scrutinized. But benefits aren't the only component of a total rewards program that is significantly impacting the workforce right now.

Employee engagement surveys have revealed that employees don't feel appreciated in their current roles. In fact, as many as two thirds of employees are actively looking for a new position right now, and one of the primary contributors to the discontent is a lack of appreciation. **More than half of respondents in an Aon Hewitt survey said being appreciated would motivate them to stay at their organization.**

We all know that recognition can improve employee engagement, yet many organizations and managers fail to implement more appreciation into their routines. And it's so easy to do! Here are five strategies that every manager, supervisor - even employees - can practice to improve employee engagement.

- **Feedback**

Employees desire feedback about their work. You can implement weekly one-on-one or team meetings to add regular feedback to your schedule. These are great opportunities to review work, projects, or goals and give advice. Be open to receive feedback, too. Your employees are very familiar with your work, and listening to their feedback will likely make you a better manager.

- **Thank Yous**

This is the easiest way to improve employee engagement, and it should be a natural part of any management strategy. **Say thank you! Every day!** Common courtesies like saying thank you can have a huge impact on employee engagement and make employees feel more appreciated.

To make your thank yous more memorable, write it down. Handwritten thank you notes are often saved, displayed, and reread. Some people even make their thank you note collections official by naming them, such as Bravo File or Feel Good File.

- **Fun**

Don't be afraid to have fun at work. We spend a lot of time at work, but it doesn't mean we can't enjoy ourselves! Having more fun at work can be as simple as celebrating birthdays, incorporating team games, or having a team mascot. Peer recognition programs can also add fun to an organization and increase team member interaction. We've had some pretty creative peer recognition notes passed between team mates! When employees enjoy their work environment, they'll be more committed to staying.

- **Time**

Show employees you truly appreciate their efforts by rewarding them with the gift of time. Give hardworking employees a pass to leave early or extra paid time off to make up for long hours. Our employees even love receiving casual days during busy times because they don't have to spend as much time worrying about what to wear to work. When you respect employees' time, they'll reward you with increased effort (and engagement) during work hours.

- **Mementos**

When you recognize employees, give them something to remember the recognition. Non-cash recognition continues to out-perform cash recognition in performance and recall indicators. Check out our non-cash recognition white paper for more stats to back this up. If you want your appreciation to stick and engagement to increase, give a gift with your recognition!

Employee engagement has a significant impact on any business, but thankfully it can be impacted with simple strategies and sincere appreciation. What are you waiting for? Start retaining your high performers today!

*Cori Curtis writes for [Baudville](#).*

## **Engagement, Leadership, and the Power of Storytelling**

Last week, I had a short conversation with one of my colleagues in HR about the all important topic of employee engagement. In an impromptu conversation, we touched upon a very important point: **People love (and remember) stories, not facts.**

We loved it when our grandparents wrapped important life lessons in form of stories. Vivid situations weaved in words and narrated with great zeal. The stories I heard in my childhood, and the messages therein, are still afresh in my memory. My daughter almost gets hooked when a story is narrated. We grow up on stories, so do our belief system and our world view. For leaders, ability to communicate using stories, choosing stories in line with listener's current context and structuring them for maximum impact are very crucial skills.

Here are a few ways you can use power of storytelling:

- **As a speaker/presenter**, you can use stories to capture the imagination of audience. The lessons we learn as conclusions of interesting stories make a bigger impact than getting directly to the lessons. Great presenters tell great stories, anecdotes and experiences that truly engage the audience. They make a point at the end of each story.
- **As a business leader**, your biggest challenge is to keep your people engaged with your mission and with their work. Inspire them with stories about the organization. Show them the future. Tell tales of triumphs and trials, of success and failures, of past and future. Stories reinforce the belief system. Stories validate people's aspirations and empower them. Stories create alignment and hence culture. Your people, new hires and aspiring leaders are not as fascinated by numbers as they are with the stories associated with the organization. Listen to their stories as well.
- **As a sales leader**, you can use power of well crafted stories to project your organization. Numbers and explicit details are fine, but stories of your inception, growth, challenges, success stories (in similar context) can help you a great deal in establishing comfort and confidence with your prospective customers.

**Critical Question:** How can you leverage the power of storytelling to [enrich your conversations](#), build great relationships, [truly connect with people](#) and make a difference?

*Tanmay Vora is the author of [QAspire](#).*



## So, what do I actually do now?

You have a few things to take care of, so let's get started.

- First, share this book with anyone who might find some value in its contents. It doesn't help anyone if it's not being read, digested, and put into action!
- Second, look back through any notes you might have made while reading and see what you can start exploring in your own organization. I'd enjoy hearing if you were able to put some of these ideas in motion.
- And finally, keep your eyes peeled for [more guides](#) coming throughout the year. The easiest way to do that is to [subscribe for free email updates](#) so you never miss a thing.

If you enjoyed this guide at all, I'd love to hear about it. My contact info is below. Have a topic you'd like to see covered a future guide? Let me know!



**Rock it,**

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