THE RULES OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Building a Culture of Engagement in an “Always-On” World
Unemployment is the lowest it’s been in a decade. Yet the percentage of employees who are disengaged in their work is frighteningly high, costing organizations thousands of dollars in lost productivity.

Your company values are the foundation of everything you do as an organization. They can also determine how engaged your employees are at work.

It turns out engagement is a two-way street. As a leader, there is a lot you can do to foster an environment of engagement for employees, but a recent study by Aon found that certain personality types are more hardwired for engagement than others.
WHAT REALLY DRIVES EMPLOYEE HAPPINESS?
BY CHARLES COY
From competitive signing bonuses to flexible schedules and prepaid vacation, the perks designed to increase satisfaction on the job are more diverse than ever. But do these things actually drive employee happiness?

TIPS FROM DIGITAL DETOX CAMP: HOW TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
BY KYLIE ORA LOBELL
Can you improve employee engagement by disconnecting from technology? Yes, says the founder of a popular digital detox retreat.

TEAM-BUILDING EXERCISES AREN’T JUST FOR FUN
BY SUZANNE LUCAS
According to recent studies, office friendships increase employee engagement, satisfaction and productivity. Here’s how your company can help encourage office friendships.
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Introduction

It’s time to rethink employee engagement—both in terms of how we evaluate it and how we work to engage employees. Rapidly evolving technology has created a world of work where employees are always connected, but rarely engaged. While unemployment rates in the U.S. are the lowest they have been in a decade, data shows that engagement rates among U.S. workers are also at an all-time low, with nearly 70 percent of people reporting they feel disengaged at work.

But it doesn’t have to be this way. As the lines between work and life continue to blur, digital disruption presents organizations with the opportunity to move beyond job-based skills training to help holistically develop each employee as a productive, fulfilled and committed individual. Companies that embrace this shift and use technology as a means to cut through the noise—rather than create more of it—will not only create a more engaged workforce, but will enable their workforce to make positive contributions to the bottom line.

So how do you build and sustain a culture of engagement? In this guidebook, you’ll learn how to both identify pain points and rebuild your culture in a world that’s “always on.” With six articles on everything from the true drivers of employee happiness to the benefits of a digital detox, our featured experts will help you create an environment in which every employee feels invested in the work and mission of your company.
The world of work is entering unprecedented times. By many measures, unemployment is as low as it has been in a decade. Yet the percentage of employees who are disengaged in their work is frighteningly high. In fact, according to Gallup research, more than 70 percent of U.S. employees are not engaged or are actively disengaged. Behind this statistic are real people just trudging through their workday. It seems a lot of workers are uninspired, deflated and not fulfilling their human potential.

The human cost of disengagement should be enough for executives to investigate and take action. We all spend a lot of time at work and with our colleagues. While competitive salary is important, research indicates that it’s not enough to get employees engaged. As the Harvard Business Review observed, “The association between salary and job satisfaction is very weak.” Yes, inadequate pay can make employees unhappy. But adequate pay doesn’t directly correspond with happiness and engagement.
Aside from the human cost, there are real business consequences to a lack of employee engagement. In fact, unhappy employees cost American businesses between $450 billion and $550 billion each year. High attrition, for one, can drain a company’s human capital and profits. But there is also a clear connection between employee engagement and customer satisfaction.

In your own life as a consumer, when was the last time you had a good experience with a company that had disengaged employees? When most companies try to solve customer satisfaction issues and low net promoter scores, they first think of customer experience (CX) processes and technology. But the best CX programs in the world are useless without an engaged workforce.

What can organizations do to improve employee engagement?

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Invest in New Technologies

Of course, technology is important. Employees expect consumer-grade technology that is available where and when they need it. Disconnected systems force employees to spend time hunting for answers instead of servicing customers. Enterprise social networks can also help employees connect. Clearly, good technology and data management are big factors in employee engagement.

Educate Managers on Smart Leadership

But good technology is not enough. Employee engagement begins with your leadership team, and trickles down to front-line managers. As Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic writes, “The biggest organizational cause of disengagement is incompetent leadership and 85% of executives are not confident in their leadership pipelines. Thus, as a manager, it’s your personality that will have a significant impact on whether your employees are engaged at work, or not.” Make your managers talent magnets with a robust leadership training program.
Encourage Free-Thinking

To truly increase employee engagement, it is important to inspire free-thinking across your organization. A company culture based on free-thinking allows employees to speak their minds, and it encourages the C-suite to match individual worker values to organizational goals. Employees in this atmosphere know that their minds are respected. Employees feel heard, needed and appreciated.

When executives think about employee engagement, the first place they should look is into the mirror.

A free-thinking culture inspires leaders to practice honesty, transparency and a “no bullsh*t” communication style. Even if employees don’t always like what you have to say, they’ll trust and respect you for giving it to them straight. I’ve found that direct reports welcome this approach. However, it’s not just on the shoulders of executive management to lead with transparency: to achieve a company culture connected to high performance, all managers must be on the same page.

There is no magic potion to get employees engaged. Building a free-thinking culture arises from every interaction: from interviewing job candidates to counseling employees who are burned out. It is the job of leadership to model this behavior and address situations that damage the culture. So when executives think about employee engagement, the first place they should look is into the mirror.
Employee engagement may be the latest HR buzzword, but that doesn't mean you should ignore it as a fad. With only 15 percent of employees engaged at work around the world, the majority of employers have a lot of room to improve—and positively impact their bottom lines while they're at it.

A report from Dale Carnegie found that companies in the United States with engaged employees outperform those without by up to 202 percent. Similarly, according to Gallup, organizations with high engagement levels also report 17 percent higher productivity.

Of course, there's no lack of advice on how to join this club of highly engaged and high-performing organizations, but I think any engagement effort comes down to a crucial foundation: your values.

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As a company leader, in HR or at the executive level, strong personal values allow you to guide the organization in a positive and genuine direction. And when your organization demonstrates strong values, then you will begin to naturally attract and hire employees who share and aspire to the same values. Building a culture of purpose and engaging employees still takes significant time and strategy, but finding the right kind of people to work at your organization is a crucial part of starting this journey.

How to Define Your Values

If “values” seem like a vague concept to you, let me put it this way: What defines you at your core? It’s not an easy question to answer—and it shouldn’t be. Over the years, I’ve found that this five-step exercise can provide an inspirational start:

1) Identify a peak moment in your life. Can you recall a moment where your life couldn’t get any better? When everything felt aligned? It may have even felt like the best day of your life. Now, describe this peak moment in detail. If you are working on this exercise alone, write the description. If you are doing this with someone, talk about this moment for 2–3 minutes while the other person takes notes.

For example, one of my peak moments was taking leaders on Safaris for the Soul in Africa. I loved watching the leaders grow during the two-week program and hearing the wildlife sounds.

2) Discuss the values exemplified in this moment. Why do you remember this moment so clearly and fondly? Think about why it stands out to you as a defining experience in your life: Was it the place? People? Activity?

There were three things that contributed most profoundly to my peak moment: being outdoors, working with people to develop their potential and being adventurous.

3) Pick the most important value from your list

Remember that your values apply to both your personal and professional worlds—pick one value from your list that you think is particularly important to you in any context.

For example, I would choose “adventurous.”

4) Define what the chosen value or values mean to you. Why did you choose this value out of all of the ones you listed? In what other ways have you displayed or followed this value in your life? This should be a personal description—so don’t worry about creating a “dictionary” definition that could work for everyone.
In my mind, for example, “adventurous” means choosing an unconventional path, trying lots of new things, going to new places, exploring options and tinkering with ideas to find solutions.

5) Choose a value name that resonates with YOU. Your value doesn’t necessarily have to be one word—it could be two words, or a short phrase. Think of what name exemplifies your value. It could be the original word you wrote on the list, or a brand new one.

Most people would simply call the value I identified “adventurous.” However, the word adventurous doesn’t resonate with me—instead, the name “wind in your face” is much more memorable.

After walking through these five steps and coming to a clear value, go back to step one using the same or different peak moments until you’ve identified five or so core values.

Putting Your Values into Practice

As a leader, it’s especially important that you exemplify these values in the workplace and use them to guide your business decisions. You need to walk the talk.

Before you make an important decision, review your list of values and consider how your potential courses of action align with each of your values on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being not aligned at all). When you’re done, you want at least an average of 7—less than that likely means the course you’re considering will not only lead you astray, but your company as well.

By integrating your personal values into all aspects of business, you will begin to direct the company in a more thoughtful manner and encourage your colleagues to do the same. I also highly recommend working through the values exercise with your leadership team, even if you’ve already done it alone. By helping each member of the team find his or her individual values, you will move toward remedying the colossal lack of engagement in today’s workforce.
Aon's *Trends in Global Employee Engagement* report shows that between 35 percent and 40 percent of employees around the world are “actively disengaged” or “passive” at work. What can you do as a leader to engage your workforce? It’s a question that leaders often ask, but the truth is, there is no one thing. Your organization has to make engagement possible by creating an environment of trust, paying fairly and having a set of values that are known and lived throughout the organization. This sets the foundation for leaders to drive engagement by recognizing employee accomplishments, removing obstacles, helping employees develop and filling them with a sense of purpose.

Your organization has to make engagement possible by creating an environment of trust, paying fairly and having a set of values that are known and lived throughout the organization. But even if you can do all of the above, at the end of the day, it comes down to how motivated and willing your employees are to engage. This is a critical and often missing piece in the engagement equation. However,
Personality Assessments Reveal More Than You Think

The science behind employee engagement is fascinating. Of course you want your candidates to have the ability and knowledge to do the job for which you are hiring. However, our Assessment & Selection experts have found that candidates who take our ADEPT-15® personality assessment and score high on four of the 15 personality aspects—drive, cooperativeness, sensitivity and positivity—are far more likely to be engaged when they become employees than those who don’t score high on them.

According to Anthony Boyce, an organizational psychologist and product developer at Aon, these aspects predict who will work to overcome obstacles and show commitment to their organization and their teammates.

"Engagement is about more than the environment. Some people are just wired for engagement and show up every day ready to do their best work, no matter what else is going on around them. For these people, the glass really is always at least half-full," says Boyce.

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Eliminate Disengagement Before It Spreads

Assessing your candidates for engagement isn’t an immediate solution for every employee who might be bringing something other than their best to work. However, it will have a strong influence down the road.

Imagine reducing or even eliminating disengagement among your new employees. You would be introducing a shot of positive, problem-solving adrenaline into the organization. Engagement is contagious. The veteran employees will notice, and it should have an influence on the way they show up to work, too.

"Getting hiring right by assessing for engagement will help leaders and organizations prevent the headaches of disengagement later. More CHROs are beginning to understand this has to be part of their talent strategy," says Boyce.

using an employee selection tool can help you identify if a candidate is more likely to be an engaged or disengaged employee.
As the competition for top talent intensifies, organizations are seeking new ways to attract and retain employees. From competitive signing bonuses to flexible schedules and prepaid vacation, the perks designed to increase satisfaction on the job are more diverse than ever.

This growing list of benefits may seem superfluous to some, but attempting to improve employee happiness is a strategic business decision. A study from the University of Warwick found that job satisfaction can directly benefit the bottom line, as happy employees are 12 percent more productive than unhappy employees. And with less than half of employees currently chipper at their jobs, successful efforts to increase satisfaction at work have the potential to substantially improve organizational results.

But what factors actually make employees happy?

The Secrets of Job Satisfaction

While you may think the best way to determine employee happiness is to ask them about it, turns out people are generally poor judges of what makes them tick. There are some stark differences between what we think makes us happy compared to what actually contributes to our satisfaction on the job.
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As seen in our infographic above, a study from Cangrade examined the relationship between individuals’ job satisfaction and the prevalence of certain factors in their work. The results showed that some of the factors people report as “most important” to job satisfaction, such as security and work-life balance, don’t matter as much as we think.

Instead, the most significant influencers on job satisfaction were intellectual stimulation, achievement and power. The difference between perception and reality is particularly interesting when it comes to power—employees rated it as dead last in terms of importance, but the study found that it’s the third most influential factor in overall job satisfaction and happiness.
In a similar vein, while money was perceived as the fourth most important component to happiness, it ranked last in terms of actual impact on satisfaction—reminding us that as much as we think a raise or bonus will boost morale, compensation isn’t the best way to your employees’ hearts.

However, despite these discrepancies, the study found that people do have some level of self-awareness; when people list a factor as very important to their happiness, it turns out that quality impacts their satisfaction more than it does for the average employee. For instance, intellectual stimulation accounts for 18.5 percent of job satisfaction on average, but it’s even more influential for people who also listed it as important—accounting for 23 percent of their satisfaction.

The main takeaway? Listen to your individual employee’s feedback about company culture, but consider proactive ways to engage your workforce as well.

Listen to your individual employee’s feedback about company culture, but consider proactive ways to engage your workforce as well.

By offering cross-training opportunities across projects and departments, you can ensure they feel both intellectually challenged and influential. Instead of simply providing bonuses, provide employees with ongoing feedback about their achievements and value at the company. Your workforce—and your bottom line—will be happier for it.
Smartphones and computers have made their way into almost every moment of our lives. From checking emails, researching for work, scrolling through Instagram and playing games, our average screen time only continues to expand.

A Nielsen study found that Americans spend more than 10 hours a day on computers. In addition, a Microsoft study found that 85 percent of employees experienced discomfort on a daily basis due to screen time—pain in the neck, shoulders, wrists, upper back and hands. The always-on culture could be hurting your business, too. A study in the Academy of Management Journal titled “Exhausted But Unable to Disconnect” found that the expectation to check email after work negatively impacts employees’ well-being, which can weaken job performance.

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So how should employers approach this “always-on” environment? We talked with Sonja Rasula, founder of CAMP, an adult summer camp where no electronic devices are allowed, about why digital detoxing is necessary for improving employee engagement and productivity.
Why did you start a digital detox camp?

At CAMP, guests attend seminars from thought leaders, participate in workshops, go horseback riding and do yoga—all without their devices. It helps people actually understand that their version of self-importance is kind of a silly idea. A lot of us, myself included, are connected 24-7, and we have this feeling that everything should be responded to immediately. If I’m not on Instagram or social media, what am I doing? It’s a release from that. It truly allows people to just give themselves time to think.

If we can force people to actually interact with each other and be very present in this beautiful outdoor environment, they will get much more from the experience.

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How could a detox increase productivity at work?

The fact that everyone tends to have their phones on their desks at work means they can quickly look over at their device and instantly be disconnected from the task at hand. If they were brainstorming or thinking creatively, all of that instantly goes out the door, and their attention is on whether or not they should check Instagram.

If we concentrated on one task, and cut out the distractions, it would take half the time to complete.
What can companies do to encourage employees to unplug and be more present?

Have walking meetings! That gets you away from the screen and gets your blood flowing. Or make your meetings phone-free, as in no phones in the room. These tactics ensure everyone is present 100 percent of the time—and if you’re in the room waiting to start, you are actually socializing instead of looking down at your phones in silence. I also think meetings should be laptop and tablet-free. Those are just as distracting and can be easy ways for people to disengage from the rest of the room.

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If a task does not need to be done online, change your environment and go outside or work from a communal space in the office. And yes, that also means using a pen and pad of paper. [You can also] set aside time at company retreats for people to check their phones and respond to email, so that all other time is device-free.

How often do you recommend people disconnect?

Everyone should try to do it daily. It’s getting to the point that people are digitally connected almost 24 hours a day. It’s becoming a societal norm to have your phone by your bed. That’s introduced a whole can of worms. Once or twice a day you should set your phone in a space in your house that is not accessible, and try to let go and not think about it. Go outdoors and instead of taking your phone to take photos to post, be in that moment and enjoy it.
Companies and employees are increasingly focused on finding a healthy work-life balance, but that doesn’t mean the two need to be entirely separated. We spend the majority of our days in the workplace—which means we spend a majority of our days with our coworkers, and it turns out, we’re happier if these coworkers are our friends, too.

According to recent studies, office friendships increase employee engagement, satisfaction and productivity. LinkedIn found that 46 percent of professionals across industries believe having friends at work is important to their overall happiness. Similarly, a 2016 survey by O.C. Tanner revealed that 72 percent of employees who have a best friend at work are satisfied with their jobs, compared to 54 percent of those who don’t have a best friend at work.

Seventy-two percent of employees who have a best friend at work are satisfied with their jobs, compared to 54 percent of those who don’t have a best friend at work.
How can companies encourage office friendships? One way is through team building—even if your employees don’t turn out to be BFFs, they’ll get to know each other better and engage in conversations that don’t revolve around the latest client project. I spoke with Ido Rabiner, co-founder and CEO of Strayboots, an organization that specializes in team building through scavenger hunts, about the importance of team building and personal relationships in the workplace.

Does it really matter if employees know each other on a personal level?

Knowing your teammates better, even just one small new detail, can improve your connection at work and create a healthier office environment. If people are more sensitive and responsive to each other, they’ll be better working together. I’m not talking about invading their privacy, but about getting to know your teammates as people first.

Why is it important to build up teams?

Your “human resource” is the most precious part of your organization. Research shows that companies with a 5 percent increase in employee engagement report 3 percent higher revenues the following year. In other words, team-building exercises can have a direct impact on the quality of the work itself, in addition to improving employee engagement and loyalty.

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How do you design team-building activities to meet employees’ diverse interests?

We deal with this every day because teams, by definition, are diverse, and we want to make sure everyone on the team feels included. We work with our clients to incorporate different types of challenges and layers into the scavenger hunt that align with different themes or objectives. All of our scavenger hunts can be fully customized to address a specific need, whether it’s taking the teams through specific areas to get to know their new office location, or adding company-focused questions and branding to improve their knowledge of the business.
When’s the ideal time for team-building exercises? Nights? Weekends? During the workday?

Every team has its own agenda and company culture, so it varies from group to group. We’ve seen that most teams prefer doing their hunts in the early afternoon on weekdays, when people are still fresh and can make the most of their adventure. After all, it’s a fun activity and companies want full participation, so weekends and nights won’t work for everyone.

Why is it important to invest in team-building exercises outside of actual work?

Employees need to feel that their company cares about investing in helping them become better teammates. Setting aside a special time and place for team-building exercises communicates the message that it’s a mutual commitment.

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