

10 Tips for Engaging Your Team

Insights from Employee Engagement Practice Leader Wendy Fencil

As a manager, you are a — if not *the* — critical ingredient in successful employee engagement.

Like catalysts in chemical reactions, good manager-employee relationships smooth the way for mutually beneficial connections between individual employees (on their very personal paths for great "work") and their employers (with ambitious strategies that need execution).

You probably have employees on your team who could benefit from an engagement "boost." The BlessingWhite 2008 Global Employee Engagement research suggests that only **26% of the Australia workforce is fully engaged. (Lagging significantly behind India at 34%, but considerably better from China at 10%)**

Here are ten steps you can take to ensure higher levels of engagement among your team members:

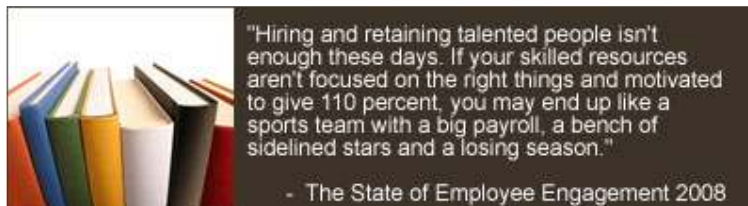
1. Reflect and recharge. Where are **you** on the engagement spectrum? (See # 9 below for clues.) You can't help your team much if you're spinning out of control or disengaged. If you're not engaged, consider what matters most to you. Then consider where the organization needs you to focus your talents. Can a few job tweaks improve things? If you are fully engaged, how can you "infect" others?

2. Hire "engage-able" team members. One HR leader we interviewed underscored this point: *"Our number one problem was lack of fit. We needed to hire people who could be successful. Instead of training square pegs to fit the round hole, we now try to hire round pegs."*

3. Earn trust every day. Trust provides the essential foundation for your effectiveness as a manager, whether we're talking about engagement, innovation, or high performance. To build it, you need to reveal who you are as a person. Your title and accomplishments aren't enough.

4. Stress employee ownership. You can't create an engaged team if your employees don't have clear visions of personal success. Make sure they know that you're available to provide guidance, remove barriers, and help them find fulfilling work. However, they are ultimately the ones responsible for their success.

5. Find out where the bus is going — and remind people of the destination. If you're not clear on your organization's strategy, find someone who can give you some answers. Demand clarity — you owe it to yourself and to your team. Once you are clear, help your team members understand their role and prioritize the myriad tasks they face each day to achieve meaningful results.



6. Remember that feedback is a gift. Employees want feedback. They deserve information that can help them achieve their goals and the organization's. Let them know what they do well so they can keep doing those things with confidence. Suggest course corrections to help them use their time and effort most efficiently.

7. Talk and listen more. Communication (especially in today's email-driven workplace) is often one-way. Conversation, on the other hand, is about dialogue between two or more people. Conversation drives clarity. It is by far the most effective vehicle for providing performance feedback. It is the only way to efficiently generate

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new ideas for increasing business results and personal job satisfaction. It helps prevent misunderstandings. It builds trust.

8. Match projects, passion, and proficiency. Every person comes to work with a different combination of personal values, talents, and goals, which they are looking to satisfy on the job. They don't necessarily want a lofty title, a higher salary, or your job. If you can help them connect what's important to them with what's important to the organization, you can make a positive impact on their job satisfaction, commitment, and contribution.

9. Get to know your team members. You don't need to be their friend. You do need to know what makes them tick. Where are they on the engagement spectrum? Pay attention. Ask questions. Nearly three-quarters (71%) of employees in North America don't qualify as "fully engaged." They are:

- **Almost Engaged:** Among the high performers and reasonably satisfied with their job. They have the shortest distance to travel to reach full engagement, but are also at risk of jumping ship if the offer is right, and because they are so good, they are exactly the people search firms will be "having a chat to" occasionally...
- **Honeymooners and Hamsters,** who are happy, but contribute little to the success of the organization. Honeymooners are new to the organization (or to their role) and aren't yet fully productive. Hamsters may work hard but are focused on the wrong things (they're not "going anywhere," like hamsters running on a spinning wheel).
- **Crash & Burners:** Disillusioned and near exhaustion. They are top producers who are not satisfying their personal definition of success and satisfaction. If left alone, they may slip into disengagement and bring down the morale of those around them.
- **Disengaged:** The most disconnected to organizational priorities, who are not getting what they want from their work. They may stick around because of what they get, (a decent pay check or favourable job conditions) but they'll contribute minimally. Some disengaged employees will leave, but more likely they'll just talk about leaving — and bring everybody else down. Misery seeks misery!

10. Tailor your coaching strategies. Invest in your Almost Engaged team members, providing feedback, more resources when possible, and continuous opportunities to excel. Get your Hamsters on the right track if they are happily lost, or spur them into action if they're coasting, by providing or by reinforcing expectations and communicating changes. Help the Honeymooners understand their top priorities and discuss what they specifically need to do to be successful on the job. Take a timeout with the Crash & Burners to take stock of how they're feeling and clarify what personal success looks like to them. Then provide more resources if you can, development opportunities, feedback, and perspective when competing priorities loom large. Size up your Disengaged. You may need to coach some out of the organization for their own good... and yours. Spell out expectations with the rest, take stock of their interests and talents, and try to provide opportunities for them to do work that matters. And don't take the Engaged for granted. Full engagement is hard to sustain on one's own. Nurture them, recognize them, stretch them, and develop them. Keep them involved.

But remember, as a manager — the catalyst for successful workforce engagement — you need to be enthused and in gear in your own job every day. Now scroll up and re-read Tip #1!

For a copy of the Asia-Pacific Executive summary of the Employee Engagement Report, contact Rebecca at +61 3 9889 5687 or Rebecca@blessingwhiteap.com.

For more information on how BlessingWhite can help your organisation's managers help their teams reach higher levels of engagement and productivity call +61 3 9889 5687 or email info@blessingwhiteap.com.

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