

# A Positive Organizational Culture Will Foster Employee Engagement



By Cindy Schuler

In Sandy Smith's "Employers Rank Employee Engagement as a Strategic Priority," over 82 percent of employers surveyed by TalentKeepers said that employee engagement was a priority in 2016. Engaged employees are happy, committed and loyal to their organization. In addition, engaged employees are more than likely productive firm citizens who have a desire to contribute to the success of the organization for which they work. How is employee engagement fostered? It begins with a positive organizational culture - and HR leaders are responsible for cultivating that culture for employees.

## What is Engagement?

Wikipedia states, "Employee engagement is a property of the relationship between an organization and its employees. An 'engaged employee' is one who is fully absorbed by and enthusiastic about their work and so takes positive action to further the organization's reputation and interests." Simply said, if there is a positive connection between an employee and the organizational culture in which the employee works, the employee will most likely be committed to helping the organization achieve success.

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Are your employees engaged or are they just “going through the motions?” Accessperks.com states in one of its blogs that only 13 percent of employees are engaged worldwide. That is an extremely low number. What does that mean? It means that the other 87 percent of employees are just “going through the motions.” Unfortunately, HR leaders are challenged with disengaged employees who are not happy, who do not have the desire to be part of the team and who do not support a positive organizational culture. In Kate Taylor’s “13 Personality Traits of a Disengaged Employee,” disengaged employees do not care about the organization or have a desire to help it grow. Ms. Taylor also discusses the negative traits disengaged employees display which include lack of enthusiasm, unwillingness to help others, always making excuses and not taking initiative. Unfortunately, at some point, disengaged employees become toxic to the environment. So, it is important for HR leaders to take responsibility for creating a positive organizational culture that will foster engagement.

## Creating a Positive Organizational Culture

Employees pay very close attention to HR leaders and their behavior in the workplace and they will naturally emulate what they see. HR leaders should be aware of this fact and commit to always behaving in a positive manner. While there are many ways to create a positive organizational culture which will foster employee engagement, below are five simple ways HR leaders can begin the journey of creating a positive organizational culture in an organization:

1. **Create an environment that is inclusive of all employees.** HR leaders must open the lines of communication and attempt to make all employees feel welcome and comfortable. Creating an environment where all employees feel as though they are a member of the team and that they have a purpose is critical for organizational success. In Susan David’s “Inclusiveness Means Giving Every Employee Personal Attention,” she states that we must do three things to create a culture of inclusiveness:
  - a. Be aware of biases
  - b. Create a shared identity
  - c. Be aware of emotions

She also points out that that interest and attention will help employees thrive. That is if we show interest in our employees and pay attention to each one of them, HR leaders should be able to create strong teams.

2. **Create an empowering environment.** Giving employees the opportunity to be innovative and creative is powerful. Allowing employees to make suggestions and to challenge each other in a respectful and professional manner is healthy. HR leaders should drive home that no idea is a dumb idea and that each employee’s opinion adds value. While every idea presented may not be implemented, having an opinion, being confident enough to voice that opinion and potentially implementing a unique idea presented by an employee will encourage and strengthen the team.

3. **Create an environment of trust and respect.** Trust and respect are earned. Communicating the goals of the organization, beginning with the interview and continuing throughout the onboarding process and during the employee’s tenure, is imperative in gaining trust and respect of employees. The more transparent HR leaders are with their employees, the better. Protecting confidentiality and displaying a good work ethic are equally important. And finally, HR leaders must display the behavior they are looking for employees to emulate. Practicing what we preach (i.e., talking the talk and walking the walk) is imperative in earning employee trust and respect.
4. **Coach and mentor employees.** Taking an interest in each employee’s professional goals must be a priority. There is a possibility that an employee may need to be coached up and out and that is okay. But, HR leaders will not know if that is the case unless conversations are conducted about short- and long-term career goals on an ongoing basis. HR leaders must also commit to giving regular feedback. It does no good for the employee or for the organization if constructive feedback is not shared on a consistent basis.
5. **Reward employees.** Celebrate victories and learn from mistakes. Congratulate employees on a job well done. Acknowledgement of an individual or team success is critical in creating a positive culture. On the flip side, if there is a need to provide constructively critical feedback on how to improve on something, it is important to always begin with a positive message such as “great job on ‘x.’ If I may give you some feedback, the one thing I may have done differently is ‘y.’” Using failures as learning experiences are also important in an employee’s professional growth.

## The Intersection of Culture and Employee Engagement

If the behaviors above are displayed by HR leaders, there is a good chance the positive organizational culture created will foster employee engagement. But, it is our responsibility as HR leaders to create that culture for employees. We all want to work with employees who care about an organization and who are driven to help push the organization to the next level. In order to get there, it is important for all HR leaders to create a positive organizational culture where employees feel included, where employees feel a true sense of empowerment, where trust and respect are earned and appreciated and where employees will be coached, mentored and rewarded. As Cristina Regalado states in “Follow the Leader: Shaping Organizational Culture:”

**“Magic happens when leaders create the conditions for employees to contribute meaningfully.”**

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