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# What is Employee Engagement and why does it matter?

By Leanne Burrows



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## OVERVIEW

Have you ever wondered why your team seems unhappy and unproductive? Perhaps you're struggling with absenteeism, increased safety infractions and unproductive meetings. If that's the case, you may have a disengaged employee base.

According to Employee Engagement experts Gallup, as of 2023, 33% of U.S. employees are engaged, and 16% are actively disengaged. Why does it matter? Gallup states that, "...engaged employees have higher well-being, better retention, lower absenteeism and higher productivity."

## CONTENTS

1. What does communication have to do with employee engagement?
2. How can Leaders use Communication to Increase Employee Engagement?
3. So, what's next?
4. Conclusion

Employee engagement is a somewhat misunderstood term. Indeed, this [Forbes article](#) explains that employee engagement isn't simply having happy employees, nor is it as simple as employee satisfaction. Employee engagement runs deeper and is "the emotional commitment [that an] employee has to the organization and its goals." An engaged employee is the team member who demonstrates enthusiasm, dedication and passion for their work that is reflected in individual outcomes that, ideally, culminate in organizational success.

Employee engagement is the level of enthusiasm and dedication an employee feels toward his or her job. To these engaged employees, it is far more than a pay cheque – the eagerness towards their task makes them passionate in their work, and this passion is reflected in their work. Sounds like the ideal employee, doesn't it?

Unfortunately, particularly post-pandemic, businesses worldwide are experiencing high levels of disengaged employees. Indeed, some research bodies have decreed an "employee engagement crisis," and the practical implications are hard to ignore, and according to HR University, disengaged employees cost US businesses \$450-500 billion annually in the form of absenteeism, turnover and loss productivity.

Signs of a disengaged workforce include the following:

- High absenteeism
- Decreased productivity
- Safety infractions
- Negativity and cynicism
- Low appetite for change
- Poor participation in meetings and initiatives

## What does communication have to do with employee engagement?

While internal communications are essential to the health of an organization, they are often overlooked or neglected entirely. Too often (particularly in the private sector), Leaders are intensely private about business operations. Worse still are those who believe that their employees should be of the mind that "no news is good news."

The unfortunate reality is that in the absence of communication, lives conjecture. That is to say that employees will assume or, worse still – jump to conclusions in the absence of communication. Unfortunately, conjecture often leads to gossip - one of the number one killers of organizational trust and can quickly create a toxic and disengaged workforce.

Let's say, for example, that a business has been struggling financially since the pandemic. Employees have been told to watch their spending and have heard rumours about Senior executives receiving pay cuts but have been given no further details.





One day, they see their boss touring a team of sombre-looking executives around the building. This prompts one nervous employee to remark to another that it looks like the CEO is touring around potential buyers for the organization and that rumour gains traction. Unbeknownst to employees, the CEO was touring the building owners through his space, discussing plans to expand the office footprint to accommodate the additional hires they anticipate making due to rising revenues and an exciting new project. Employees leave that day feeling nervous about their job security, and some even begin searching for new jobs. In this scenario, keeping employees apprised of plans for expansion and an exciting new project on the horizon could have led to an entirely different outcome.

While employee engagement is a complex and moving target. There are some simple ways that Leaders can leverage communication to begin to build bridges with a disengaged employee base.



## How can Leaders use Communication to Increase Employee Engagement?

### Organizational Trust

First, Leaders must be strategic about using communication to ensure a high level of Organizational Trust. Organizational trust

refers to the confidence, belief, and reliance individuals within an organization have in the integrity, reliability, and intentions of the organization itself, its leaders, and its members. Unfortunately, organizational trust tends to be overlooked, using strategic conversations in favour of more profit-focused topics. Tellingly, Corey Scheer, Founder and CEO of TrustCentric, indicates that according to a survey with 1,800 participants across the USA, over 50% of employees surveyed do not trust their leaders.

Communication is an essential ingredient to building and maintaining organizational trust. Internal Communications experts at the Grossman Group explain that Leaders aspiring to build and maintain trust should prioritize consistent and transparent communications focused on timely and relevant organizational happenings so that employees have context for what's happening within the organization. Remember, context can help to mitigate gossip and conjecture and maintain an engaged employee base.

### Increased Transparency

It's important to remember that transparency doesn't mean having all of the answers all of the time, and oftentimes, "transparency" can send a shiver down a leader's spine. Fortunately for leaders, there are ways to communicate that foster employee engagement, even in the private sector, where some information is more sensitive. Simon Sinek frames transparency in communications as follows: "...transparency doesn't mean sharing every detail. Transparency means always providing the context for our decisions."

Transparency as a Leader requires some vulnerability and means sharing challenging news alongside the good. As Howard Schultz,

chairman and CEO of Starbucks for 20+ years, says “I think the currency of leadership is transparency. You’ve got to be truthful.” There are several ways that leaders can be more transparent, according to Jon Youshaei at Entrepreneur Magazine:

- Share successes and failures. Ironically, showing some vulnerability and admitting some failures as an organization shows that a leader is human and willing to take accountability.
- Set clear expectations that set your team up for success. Clearly define what “success” looks like for them.
- Be consistent! Walk the walk – don’t just talk the talk.

## Setting Clear Expectations

Can you say with certainty that every one of your employees knows how to contribute to your organization’s success? Gallup’s Q12 survey is a globally recognized method to gauge employee engagement. Tellingly, one of the 12 questions asks participants to indicate whether they know what’s expected of them at work. Alarmingly, nearly half of respondents don’t know what’s expected of them daily. Unclear expectations set the stage for very disengaged employees. Indeed, unclear expectations can cause anxiety and confusion for an employee base, leading to low productivity and wasted time.

According to the Society for Human Resources Management, there are some simple methods to set clear expectations for your employees, including:

- Emphasize and clearly define objectives (extra points for making these objectives measurable)
- Set expectations early and ensure that new employees understand what success looks like within their role
- Make employees accountable by following up and checking in
- Give meaningful feedback - don’t let your employee guess about their performance!

Clearly defined expectations are vital for an engaged employee base. Indeed, according to Isaiah Atkins

Staff Writer at Business World Daily, “clearly communicating your expectations as a manager can help employees better understand your company’s goals and work toward them more effectively.”

## Communicating a Sense of Purpose

Leaders play a crucial role in fostering a sense of purpose within their teams through effective communication. Often, this essential aspect gets overlooked, but conveying the company’s vision and mission is key to fostering an engaged employee base who understands their unique role in achieving the vision and mission. Thus, leaders must chart the company’s course and effectively communicate this vision to their employees.

Consistency is key here, and regularly communicating the organization’s mission and purpose is essential. Leaders should take every opportunity to articulate this through channels like town hall meetings, emails, team gatherings, and more.





# What is Employee Engagement and why does it matter?

Consistency in reinforcing the purpose solidifies its significance within the team's collective mindset, driving alignment and motivation toward common objectives.

When employees have high organizational trust, understand what's expected of them, and feel engaged in the work that they do, an organization will be resilient, growth-oriented and embrace change.

## So, what's next?

A crucial step in any communications strategy is understanding your audience, and as a Leader, you must understand your team's dynamics. For organizations to create fertile ground for engagement, a leader must lead with self-awareness and encourage that self-awareness amongst their team.

Training is an essential ingredient in equipping your team with a self-awareness toolkit that can help them tackle effective conflict and communications and become better managers and leaders.

Everything DiSC is the perfect place to start building an engaged team and contains a suite of tools including:

## EVERYTHING DISC WORKPLACE

Engage every individual in building more effective relationships at work.

**Everything DiSC® Workplace** is a personalized learning experience that can benefit every person in an organization, regardless of title or position, in building more effective relationships at work.

The **Everything DiSC® Workplace Profile** focuses on:

- Discovering your DiSC® style
- Understanding the styles of others
- Building more effective relationships
- Exploring People-Reading and Comparison Reports

The **Everything DiSC Workplace® Profile** provides you with valuable insights that will help you better understand yourself and others, all while offering actionable ways to strengthen your relationships in the workplace. Using a research-validated learning model, the profile offers personalized insights for participants, helping you discover how to better connect and effectively work with each other. Everything DiSC® Workplace can be used with people at any level in an organization, ultimately improving the quality of the workplace.

## EVERYTHING DISC PRODUCTIVE CONFLICT

*Harness the power of conflict by transforming destructive behavior into productive responses.*

**Everything DiSC® Productive Conflict** is a personalized learning experience that increases self-awareness around conflict behaviors.

The Everything DiSC® Productive Conflict Profile focuses on:

- Deepening understanding of self and others in conflict
- Understanding and recognizing destructive behaviors
- Exploring techniques to redirect destructive behaviors into more productive responses





# What is Employee Engagement and why does it matter?

Rather than focus on a step-by-step process for conflict resolution, Everything DiSC® Productive Conflict provides you and your team members with techniques to curb destructive behaviors and effectively respond to conflict situations. The program features an exploration of DiSC® in a conflict context, provides an opportunity for you to explore your destructive conflict responses, and offers you a method for making more productive choices in your response to conflict.

## **EVERYTHING DISC® MANAGEMENT**

Teach managers to successfully engage, motivate, and develop their people. Everything DiSC® Management is a personalized learning experience proven to increase the effectiveness of anyone in a management role.

The Everything DiSC® Management Profile focuses on:

- Your DiSC® Management style
- Directing and delegating
- Motivating and developing others
- Working with your manager

Participants learn how their management style influences how they manage time, make decisions, approach problems, and what they need to do to adapt to the styles of others to bring out the best in each and every employee in their charge.

## **EVERYTHING DISC WORK OF LEADERS**

Create impactful leaders through the process of Vision, Alignment, and Execution.

Everything DiSC® Work of Leaders is a personalized learning experience that connects unique leadership styles to real-world demands.

Everything DiSC® Work of Leaders focuses on:

- A simple, compelling model of leadership
- Personalized insights to leverage strengths and overcome challenges
- A clear path for improvement

Using the framework of Vision, Alignment, and Execution, Work of Leaders encourages leaders to

understand their own leadership behaviors and how these behaviors impact their effectiveness.

## **Conclusion**

The importance of employee engagement cannot be overstated in the realm of organizational success. As revealed by Gallup, the current state of employee engagement in the U.S. remains a critical area for improvement, with only 33% of employees engaged and 16% actively disengaged. The repercussions of this disengagement are profound, resulting in substantial economic losses amounting to billions for businesses annually.

Effective leadership communication is vital to fostering and sustaining employee engagement, and the consequences of disengagement—ranging from reduced productivity to increased absenteeism—underscore the critical need for effective communication within teams. Without strategic leadership communication, speculation and gossip can thrive, leading to a disconnected and disengaged workforce.

To counteract disengagement, leaders should leverage tactics like communicating transparently, setting clear expectations and consistently conveying the organization's purpose to employees.



# What is Employee Engagement and why does it matter?

Self-awareness among leaders and team members is a fundamental building block in building an engaged team, and this awareness can serve as a catalyst for effective communication, conflict resolution, and overall team alignment. Without a fundamental understanding of ourselves and others, we cannot communicate effectively.

X5 Management's suite of tools, such as Everything DiSC, offer comprehensive frameworks to strengthen relationships, manage conflicts constructively, and enhance leadership skills within organizations.

Ultimately, the understanding team dynamics and using effective communication can drive engagement and create a resilient and productive team. By implementing these strategies, organizations can cultivate an environment where employees feel connected, valued, and motivated, setting the stage for future growth and organizational success.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

X5's team of Trainers and Facilitators is equipped with the knowledge and skills to guide teams through the fundamentals required to build robust communications strategies and creating space for engagement to thrive.

If you'd like to learn more about how our services can help your workforce become more engaged, please contact us for more information today.

## TRAINER, FACILITATOR

**Leanne Burrows** (Calgary-based)

"Leanne is dedicated to helping organizations build productive, resilient teams"

Leanne Burrows is a dedicated communications professional with nearly 14 years of experience in several industries, including Engineering, Construction and Oil and Gas Industries. Recognized as a strategic partner in internal communications, employee engagement and marketing, Leanne is known for her energy, creativity and drive.

Leanne was raised on a farm in Northern Alberta to parents who were farmers and small business owners. Leanne credits these formative experiences to her deep love of business and fondness for working with Alberta-based entrepreneurs.

Throughout her career, Leanne has recognized a deep passion for helping individuals thrive and find purpose at work. This interest has led to Leanne achieving a Postgraduate Certificate in Organizational Psychology, and currently, Leanne is working towards a Master's Degree in Organizational Psychology. Further, Leanne's extensive internal communications experience has parlayed into a keen interest in effective change management, and she is certified as a Procsi Change Management practitioner. Additionally, Leanne is Lean Green Belt Certified and has extensive experience designing effective processes. Recently, Leanne became certified as an Everything DiSC Certified Facilitator.





## What is Employee Engagement and why does it matter?

Leanne's diverse strategic knowledge and comprehensive educational experience make her a dynamic professional who can provide unique, well-rounded insights to any business. Her background and experience will be a great asset to X5 Management clients in a training and facilitation capacity.

Currently, Leanne is the Director of Communications at Sky Eye Measurement, an Alberta-based Energy Transfer Solutions organization serving clients across North America. In that role, Leanne sits on the Primary Management Group, oversees internal change management, manages strategic initiatives, and drives communications and marketing strategies.

Leanne resides in Calgary, Alberta, with her husband and young daughter. In her spare time, Leanne loves to spend time with her family, be active, and pursue various creative outlets.

