

8 conversations that engage

Whether your issue is keeping your engaged people on track or helping the disengaged to get back on track, all managers are looking for simple methods that will achieve results without costing a fortune.

Research by the internationally renowned Gallup organisation has found that one of the keys to employee engagement is a strong relationship with your immediate manager. In fact, if you have a great manager and work for a not- so-great organisation their research found that you are more likely to be engaged than if you work for an enlightened organisation but have a lousy manager.

At the heart of a strong employee/manager relationship is communication. Old fashioned, face to face, one-on-one conversations. Sounds simple, doesn't it? The question is . . .are you making the most of your opportunities to have conversations that engage?

I believe there are 8 conversations that every manager should be taking advantage of in their quest for an engaged workforce. Some of these are conversations you are probably already having and some are new conversations for you to consider introducing. All have been selected because they give managers the opportunity to directly impact on the engagement levels of their employees.

1. Job preview
Don't just conduct an interview, give them a realistic preview of what the job will really be like including the highs and the lows, the positives and the negatives. If after hearing what it's really like they are still keen, then you have a far greater chance of retaining them in the longer term.
2. Induction review
An induction review conversation allows you to get feedback on the effectiveness of your induction process as well as give the new employee a sense that they are now really part of the organisation if they are able to immediately contribute to making an improvement to the induction process. It also allows you to address any questions or concerns the new employee may still have.
3. Probation review
Traditionally, the end of the probation period is when an employee has their status as a full time staff member confirmed. Why not also use this conversation as an opportunity to learn more about the employee, their goals and aspirations, their strengths and weaknesses. They may be more willing to discuss these things with you now that they know their employment is secure.
4. Performance review
Too many managers (and employees) look upon the performance review process as a "form filling exercise" designed to keep the Human Resources department happy. They don't take full advantage of the opportunity to have one of the most crucial engaging conversations.
5. Employment anniversary
Put yourself in the shoes of the employee. A milestone arrives, another year on the job, and no one notices. It's a bit like having a birthday and everyone forgets. Now imagine what it feels like to have your birthday remembered and even celebrated. The purpose of this conversation is to get them to think about the year just gone and to contemplate the year ahead.
6. Major event
It may be appropriate to initiate a conversation with your employees before, during and after a major event, particularly those involving change. Your goal should be to explain what is going on, answer their questions, discuss any of their concerns and, finally, get their input and feedback on how the process is being handled.

7. Stay interview

The important question that remains unasked in so many exit interviews is not “why are you leaving” but “why are you not staying?”. Rather than leave it until it’s too late, why not conduct a workplace health check in the form of a “stay interview”. The stay interview is a relatively new addition to the manager’s toolkit. The main benefit of this conversation is that managers are able to identify issues and problems at an early stage before they reach crisis point and people start leaving.

8. Exit interview

The exit interview is designed to uncover issues that were glossed over, promised and not delivered or misunderstood during all stages of the employee’s relationship with the organisation. They can also be used to highlight the areas where the organisation is excelling! What you learn in the exit interview process should be used to improve the realistic job preview discussion that should form part of your recruitment process.

These conversations don’t have to be difficult or time consuming. They can be a highly productive use of your time if you do them correctly. However, if you make a half hearted attempt they can have the opposite effect and actually decrease engagement. So here are a few quick tips on making the most of the 8 conversations that engage:

- Make it more about the dialogue than the paperwork
- Have a clear purpose before you begin
- Discuss the real issues rather than just the easy topics
- Choose the right time and place
- Be genuinely interested in hearing feedback
- Take action!

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