

IF YOUR MANAGERS AREN'T ENGAGED, YOUR EMPLOYEES WON'T BE EITHER

Many CEOs and CHROs list “culture change” as a top priority. They know their organizations need to become more agile and adaptable to rapid transformations and they want to be able to make good decisions and execute them quickly. Furthermore, they especially want to attract and retain the biggest stars. Building and maintaining a good corporate culture is key to all these aspirations. Yet many CEOs and CHROs ignore the most important factor in building the culture they want: managers.

Too often, the very managers upon whom organizations depend to create better cultures are themselves unhappy and unmotivated at work. Management really isn't a great experience for most people; managers report more stress and burnout, worse work-life balance, and worse physical well-being than the individual contributors on the teams they lead. **Approximately two-thirds of managers are either not engaged or actively disengaged in their work and workplace. Less than 30% of managers strongly agree that someone at work encourages their development. According to the people receiving manager development training, the programs in place don't work.**

Shifting how your company trains and supports managers, and repositioning them as coaches, is essential for helping managers to change culture. The transition from boss to coach means managers are expected to do a lot more than give orders and delegate assignments—a primary role is to develop stars through collaborative goal setting, future-oriented coaching, and achievement-oriented accountability. Moving your managers from boss to coach not only increases employee engagement and improves performance, but it's also essential to changing your culture to align with the changing workforce – a workforce that no longer wants, nor responds to, the traditional “command and control,” top-down boss.

Getting the Manager Experience Right

The employee experience starts with applicants' first impression of your organization — how they perceive your culture and brand — and then how their employee journey, from onboarding to development and eventually departure, validates those impressions. Top executives need to be aligned, consistent, and committed to the purpose and brand. That is the starting point for bringing teams together and effective decision-making.

Second, all programs and communications — including human capital practices, performance management, values and rituals, and team structures — need to be audited for alignment and consistency with your organization’s purpose and brand. Gallup has found that this can be a quick process and we recommend performing this audit annually.

Finally, like their employees, your front-line managers and supervisors need to have jobs where they feel they are continuously developing. **Managers and team leaders need to have coaching conversations with their manager, just like they are expected to with their employees.** The best learning programs are not a compilation of one-time “events,” but rather teach fundamentals of coaching, including deep learning on strengths, critical employee engagement elements, and performance coaching.

The best programs help managers develop within the context of who they naturally are. All managers become better coaches by developing competencies such as building relationships, developing people, leading change, inspiring others, thinking critically, creating accountability, and clearly communicating— if they aim their unique strengths at each competency.

Using multiple modes of learning—including ongoing e-learning experiences that advance the foundational coaching concepts—can help reach your managers no matter what their unique strengths. For example, technological solutions should start with a good foundation in human nature, not expect human nature to automatically adapt to the technology. This is a basic requirement for any human capital management system—it needs to be progress-oriented, trustworthy, easy to work with, cool to use, and individualized. While there is an increasing amount of “nudge” technology to remind and motivate managers to do the right things, it’s important that it doesn’t become “nag” technology that is soon ignored or seen as a nuisance.

The right kind of manager “nudges” are those that leverage each managers’ innate tendencies—resulting in actions that don’t come across as pre-programmed or phony. Great managers also adjust their approach to the individual differences of the people they manage. A highly focused person will have different needs from a highly adaptable person, for example. And a highly analytical person will respond differently and have different needs from someone with high empathy. These nuances can only be leveraged through great coaching, or technology that starts with each person’s innate strengths and then builds feedback or nudges that are quickly implemented through those natural tendencies.

How do you know if your current management development program is meeting your individual managers' needs? Ask them. Managers should strongly agree that every tool inspires them, changes how they lead, can be applied easily, and has improved their performance.

Exceptional Employees, Brought to You by Exceptional Managers

You can't change a culture without great managers who themselves are having an exceptional employee experience. This means they need to have challenging experiences where they, themselves, are engaged and developing through their strengths. They need to be coached, as they progressively become more effective coaches themselves.

Managers at all levels — whether they are team leaders, managers of other managers, or executive leaders — need a well-defined and well-articulated mission and purpose that everyone can easily relate back to the work they do every day. They need clear expectations that are continually redefined with the ongoing, often changing, corporate strategy. And they **need continual coaching and accountability so that they can see their progress and potential.**

Finally, managers are much more likely to inspire big-picture, cross-team cooperation in their employees when they themselves are engaged. The teams they are on are made up of other managers who are either on the same page or not. They see other managers as either allies or enemies. How connected your teams of managers are as a group will determine whether the teams they manage will support other teams or not.



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