

Employee engagement: the benefits

This resource is part of SAIF's leadership project, which is meant to help employers and leaders of organizations establish strong and sustainable safety cultures using research-based concepts and strategies.

"Employee engagement" is a management buzzword, but what does it mean? While there's no precise meaning, engaged workers are generally defined as those who feel strongly connected to their organization's mission and goals. They feel valued for their contribution and are often willing to go the extra mile to support their organization.

When there are more engaged workers, it could mean less turnover and absenteeism, and fewer workplace injuries. At the same time, employers notice an increase in profitability, sales, and customer satisfaction—so it pays off to look for ways to engage employees.

Unfortunately, only 33% of U.S. workers are engaged, according to a recent report compiled by Gallup. That means most employees feel disconnected from their organization, and feel that their contributions are unimportant to the overall mission.

What increases engagement?

There's been a lot of research on what increases employee engagement. Gallup has created a list of the elements of engagement, some of them are summarized here:

- Clear work expectations
- Resources are available to do the work.
- Employees feel able to give their best every day
- In the last seven days, they have been acknowledged for doing good work
- A supervisor or other co-worker cares about them
- A mentor who encourages their development
- Their opinions matter
- Their job is important to the organization's mission

Employee engagement benefits by the numbers

- Gallup Poll

17% ↑ HIGHER
Productivity

20% ↑ HIGHER
Sales

21% ↑ HIGHER
Profitability

70% ↓ LOWER
Fewer employee safety accidents

41% ↓ LOWER
Absenteeism

Actively disengaged employees cost US employers **\$483** to **\$605** billion a year in lost productivity

- Fellow employees also have a commitment to quality
- Supervisors provide regular check-ins on an employee's progress
- They are offered opportunities to learn and grow
- They are involved in purchasing decisions that impact their work, including machines or personal protective equipment

What can an employer do?

Employers can use this list to guide them, and below are a few more ideas for getting started.

Establish a mission and vision. Knowing the overall purpose of an organization helps employees feel connected, especially if they can see how their work contributes to it. Better yet, ask your employees for suggestions and use that work to craft a mission statement.

Communicate effectively. Inform employees about changes that impact them and the way they do their jobs. Begin messaging early and provide a channel for two-way communication.

Provide relevant training opportunities. Are your employees encouraged to acquire skills and knowledge? Employee feedback consistently rates that as a priority. If you don't have an internal training and development department, consider offering reimbursement for external training.

Offer ways to get involved. Safety and wellness committees are a great place to start because they involve all areas of work and provide a way for employees to give feedback. Think about other work that needs to be done and consider involving employees in selecting new equipment and tools, programs, or training options. This will increase employee engagement as well as employee buy-in.

Examine pay and benefits. Keeping track of the average pay within your industry is important, as it will allow you to attract and retain the best employees. Offering good benefits, including those that help employees maintain a good work/life balance, is also a smart engagement strategy.

Employee engagement – doing it right

One manufacturing firm with about 180 employees had an issue with morale – people were showing up to do their job but didn't seem to be motivated to do much else.

The CEO started a recognition program that allowed workers to nominate each other for making positive contributions to the team and the company. They purposely left the definition of a positive contribution vague – and employees were thanking one another for big and small acts across the board.

The result? More employees said they enjoyed coming to work, which translated into real benefits for the company with decreased turnover, increased sales, and fewer employee workplace incidents.

Activity ideas

- List ways employees can engage at your workplace. Do you have paths to employee involvement? If not, talk about why and look for ways to create opportunities. Discuss in a small group or provide those ideas to the management team.
- Consider surveying employees on employee engagement and review the results. The Society for Human Resource Management lists sample questions other organizations have used in this employee engagement guide: bit.ly/3x3lb7A. Another option: contract with an outside organization to conduct your survey.
- Learn more about the topic online. Consider using Oregon OSHA's Foundations for a safe workplace to find ideas for increasing employee engagement: <https://osha.oregon.gov/OSHApubs/4755.pdf>.