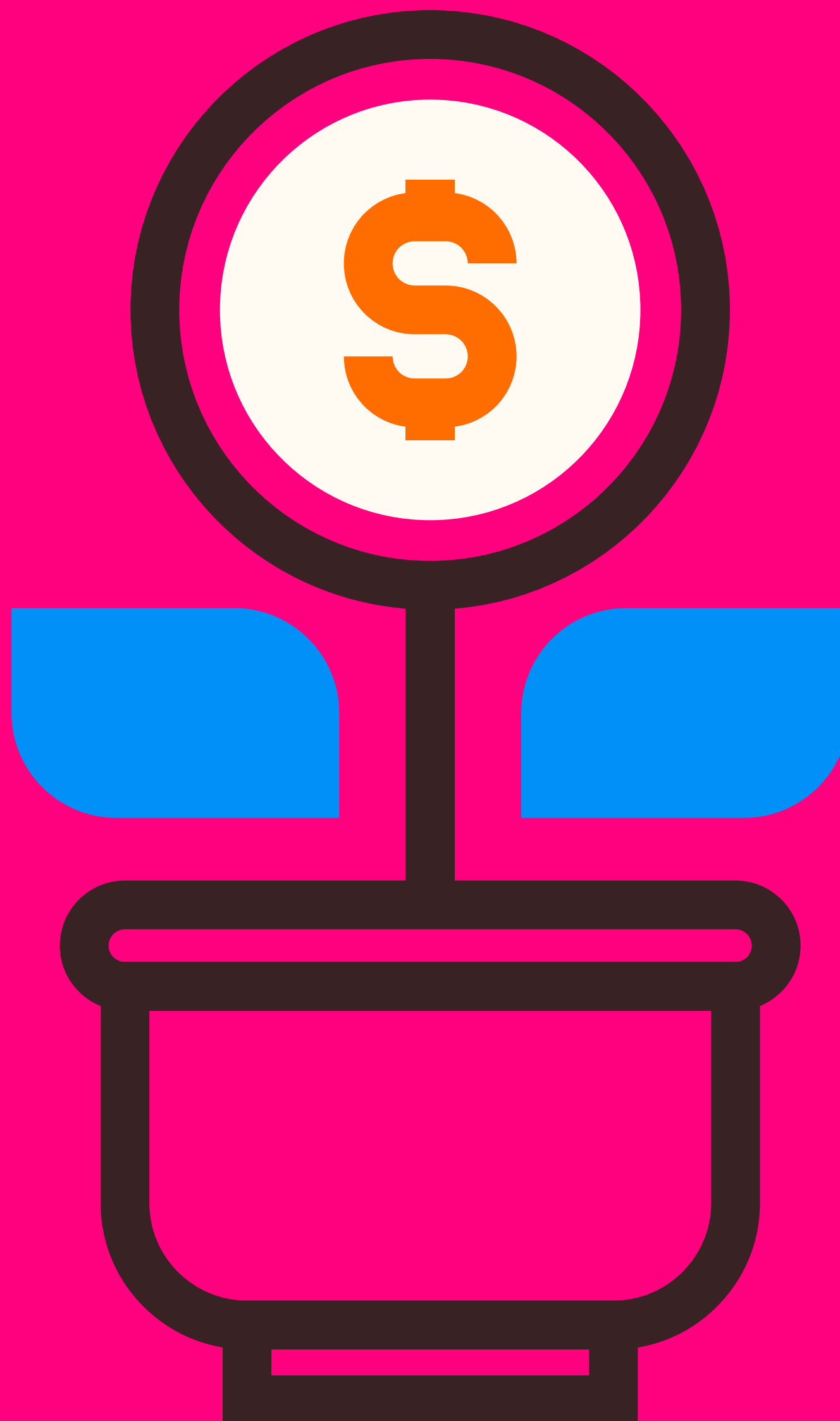# EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A MYSTERY

*The 7 Facets of Engagement &*
*55 Easy-To-Implement (and Mostly Free)*
*Action Items to Get Started*

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# What is Employee Engagement?

A 2014 Gallup Poll defines employee engagement as being involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to work and the workplace. Gallup is talking about a profound connection here. How many of us can say that our employees feel an intense connection to our business, our products or services, and our mission? Unfortunately, the Gallup Poll found that only 31% of employees do.

I like to say employee engagement is happening when an employee gives over their mind, body and soul each day at work. Mind refers to the decision that an employee makes every day, every minute, to be engaged. Body refers to the behavior or actions they take each day to further your business and the mission. Soul refers to emotions and feelings that one has towards work – if employees feel happy, for example, they will produce.

Bottom line is that if your employees feel a profound connection to what your organization is doing, they will give over the mind, body and soul every day at work, and that will drive your business' success.

There's a lot of other good things that come out of employee engagement too. For example, a 2016 research study by Brandon Hall Group found that organizations that prioritize engagement - and link it to performance – have employees

who are 62% more likely to promote the organization internally and externally over those who do not. According to a 2016 study by the Aberdeen Group, companies with an employee engagement program see 233% greater customer loyalty, and 26% greater annual increase in revenue, over those organizations that do not.

In both of these studies, the authors are sure to point out that these numbers come from organizations with clear processes for building and measuring engagement and tying it to performance. That means ad-hoc, once-in-awhile-we-do-something-related-to-engagement programs probably won't drive these numbers.

This eBook will not give you the tools to create a comprehensive program that you can then tie to performance, customer service and sales revenue.

What it will give you, however, is a place to start. I find that many organizations ignore employee engagement because it feels elusive, and then it feels expensive. Rather than get caught up in the fear and do nothing, this eBook will help you do something. Once you get started, you can build from there.

## The tips in here are free. No excuses! Get started!

# Seven Areas of Focus
## And Action Items for Each

I'm the kind of person who looks for patterns, and in doing a whole lot of research on building engagement I noticed that, no matter what list, article or book I read about engagement, the conversation was always centered around the following seven areas:

1. Feeling valued
2. Connection to work
3. Positive relationships
4. Work environment
5. Trust in leadership
6. Opportunities to grow
7. Recognition

# Feeling Valued

Feeling valued is about being appreciated, understanding why your role is important, and feeling like you're contributing to the organization.

For example, when I was the Director of HR for a financial services company, we hired file clerks who came in after high school each day to file.

In my naivety, when I trained them for their jobs, I told them, "Here's the stack of papers, pick up a paper, find the number it corresponds with, and file it. Repeat." I didn't make any attempt to help them see why this was valuable, partly because I didn't really think it was all that valuable until something bad happened.

One clerk took large chunks of paperwork and stuffed it into random files in an effort to reduce the amount of filing she had to do. She did this several times, because she didn't think it mattered.

Clients were getting angry that we'd lost their information and customer service really suffered. Turns out, file clerks are contributing to customer service, and of course good service means

more customers. They weren't just file clerks, they were an extension of customer service! My file clerks didn't see the value in their jobs because I'd failed to help them see it, but now I realize every single job in your company provides value. It's your job to help each person see that.

# 9 Ways to Show Employees You Value Them

1. Look employees in the eye and say "thank you."
2. Start all staff meetings off by opening the floor for people to thank each other.
3. Cover a wall with paper so employees can graffiti successes and thank you's.
4. On social media, announce something specific each employee has done in the last week that you appreciate.
5. Do something an employee despises for an hour to show them you appreciate them doing it anyway.
6. Ensure your onboarding program includes time to talk with everyone about why the new person is valuable.
7. Ensure your onboarding program shows the new person his tasks tie into the company history and current goals.
8. If an employee has an idea, actually listen to it. Discuss it. If it will not work, talk about why.
9. Let your employees be autonomous.

# Connection to Work

To be engaged, employees must feel a connection to the work itself. They must also feel autonomous and flexible in their work schedule, be challenged by their work, and understand the link between their job tasks and the organization's mission.
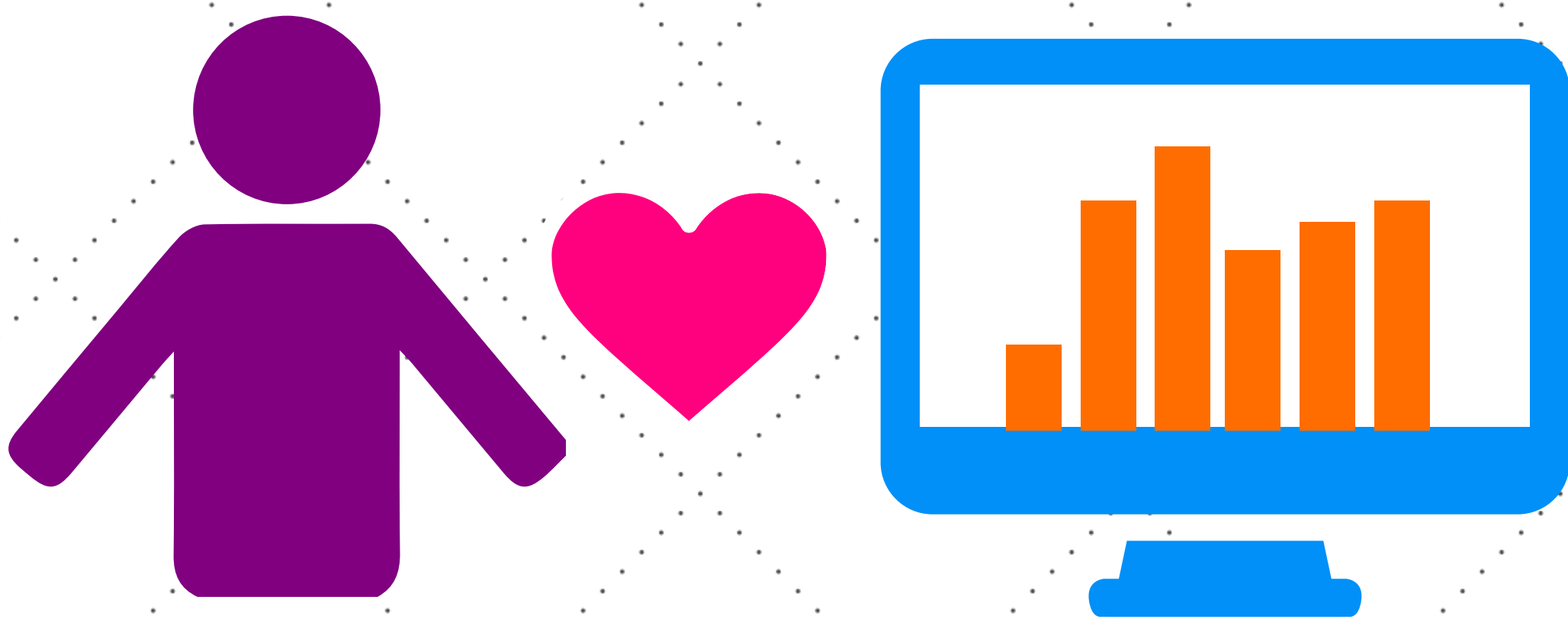


I once did a training for a company who had been set up by the city government to kill mosquitos. The town had a mosquito problem, and this agency was set up to solve it. On a break, I asked one employee standing near me to tell me more about the company. She said, "We kill mosquitos. That's all we do."

Another employee overheard her and jumped in with, "Is that all you think we do here? We are saving the community from West Nile Virus!" He saw a connection with the mission, and I guarantee he was more engaged than the first employee.

# 8 Ways to Help Your Employees See Connection Between Their Work and the Mission

1. On Fridays, require the lights be turned off by 5 pm (or require they turned off by 6 pm Monday through Friday).

2. If you have employees working late, buy them dinner.

3. Reward employees with half-days off.

4. Offer the opportunity to work from home sometimes.

5. Talk about how each and every employee is connected to the mission, and do it often.

6. Make stretch goals part of your performance management system.

7. Determine if your work/life balance programs really meet the needs of your employees by doing a work/life balance survey.

8. Be careful who you acknowledge as corporate heroes – if you say you have a culture of work/life balance, for example, don't promote people who work 80 hours a week.

# Relationships

To be engaged, employees have to believe that there is strong teamwork and trust among the team. Employees must receive constructive feedback along with positive feedback, receive effective and useful communication from peers and managers, and believe in the group's ability to make good decisions.

Have you ever worked with someone you didn't like, or that you perceived didn't like you? Did it affect your work? I bet it did. You spent time thinking about interactions with that person after they were over. If you were headed to a staff meeting where he was going to be in attendance, you were distracted by him instead of fully engaged in the meeting. When he sent you emails, you skimmed them and moved on because you were trying to stay focused, or if he was a bully, you deleted them so you could avoid being harassed in that moment.
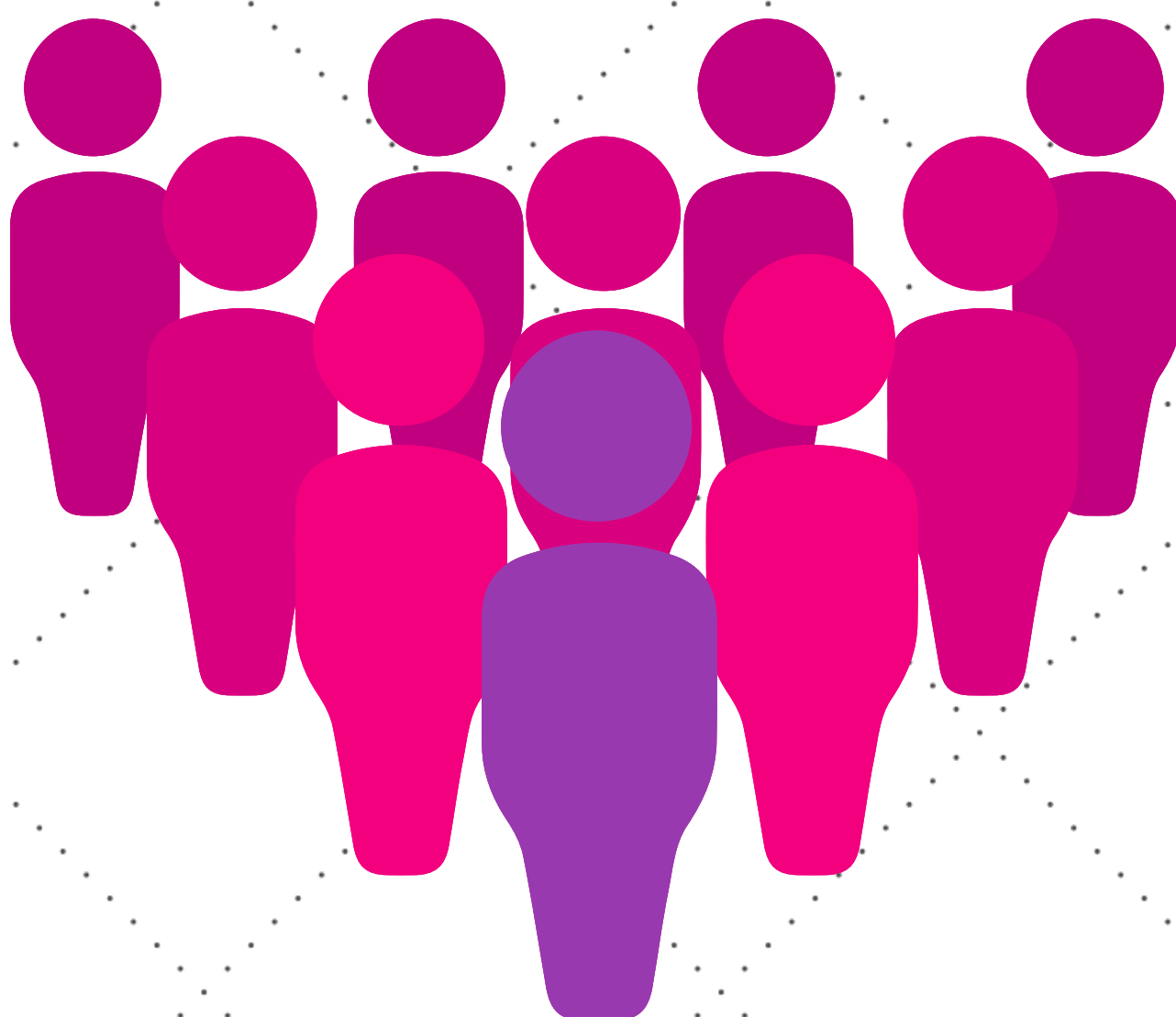
# 10 Ways to Help Employees Build Positive Relationships

1. Take company field trips during the work day so people can socialize and get to know each other.

2. Train everyone on how to give constructive feedback.

3. Schedule time on your calendar to specifically give positive feedback, so you don't forget.

4. Ensure your performance evaluation forms require listing accomplishments and positive skills.

5. Serve as a role model by encouraging your staff to give you feedback too.

6. Do a community service project as a group.

7. Be transparent – there's a lot of things you don't share with your employees that you probably should.

8. Encourage your CEO to give "state of the union" speeches at least once a quarter, if not once a month.

9. Hold "show and tell" meetings, where employees can showcase their work, or even something from their personal life

10. Do something crazy with your onboarding to celebrate your new employee, like performing an easily choreographed dance or singing a song.

# Environment

Environment also matters when it comes to engagement. The organizational culture has to be positive and promote thriving employees. I've written a book on my ten steps for changing organizational culture, called SEEKING CIVILITY: How Leaders, Managers and HR Can Create a Workplace Free of Bullying. Check that out for information on how to change your culture if you need.

Beyond the organizational culture, the worksite itself has to promote production and engagement. Of course, Google is a well-known example, with its work pods, steakhouse, and sleek interior design.

And while you may not have the budget for an in-house restaurant, you can certainly afford a can of paint to make your taupe walls more exciting. I promise, taupe doesn't get people excited about their work day.

# 7 Action Items For Creating a Positive Work Environment

1. Redecorate! If your walls are gray, perhaps a new coat of bright paint is in order. If your cubicle walls are gray, perhaps an employee competition for the most creative cubicle space is in your future.

2. Hold monthly discussions about different topics, such as what a positive workplace means to employees, or on topics such as professionalism, civility, customer service, etc.

3. Provide opportunities for people to collide and hang out, like throwing a few bean bags in a designated space, or offering beer on Friday afternoons in the kitchen

4. Visit a local "best place to work" award winner to find out what tips you can borrow.

5. Ask each employee to create a 20 second video about how they live your corporate values.

6. If employees have no idea what you mean by living the values, then revamp your values into something employees believe in.

7. Create a culture committee focused on driving your culture.

# Trust in Management and Leadership

It makes sense that in order for an employee to be engaged they have to believe in their management team and in their leaders. Employees have to trust that the leaders make good decisions and that leaders are sharing what they know. They have to feel supported by leaders, and they have to believe that managers are giving them everything they need to do their jobs well.

As an example, let me tell you about my friend and his bagel debacle. Everyone received an email from the Director of HR that she was going to start bringing in bagels every Monday. The following Monday he didn't eat breakfast because he thought there would be a bagel waiting for him at work. There wasn't, and there never have been. Bagel Monday has never been mentioned again.

My friend said he was really annoyed – he now had to work Monday morning without any breakfast. The following Monday he got a little more annoyed, and every Monday for a few months the bagel debacle stuck with him. It wasn't that there were no bagels, it's that he'd lost trust in the Director of HR.

If bagels can damage engagement like that, think about how much it is damaged when something that matters happens (or doesn't, as the case may be).

# 7 Ideas to Build Engagement in This Area

1. A training program for managers on how to "do" performance management, including setting clear expectations and coaching performance and behavior.

2. Offer mentor/protégé programs to provide the opportunity for "underlings" to build relationships with leaders.

3. If you're going through any big change, send out a weekly email with updates, responses to questions and rumors, and asking for input.

4. Create an employee council who can serve as a non-managerial bridge between executives and employees. Encourage them to meet with the executive team monthly.

5. Ask employees if they have what they need to do their job effectively.

6. Include leadership in onboarding much, much more than you are.

7. Apologize when you make a mistake.
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# Professional Development

Plain and simple, adults have to grow. So part of building employee engagement means offering opportunities to get training, to learn from each other, and to be innovative and try new things.

Stagnant is fun for no one, and it won't help your organization increase its market share. Unfortunately, OfficeVibe, an organization building apps and software to help you build employee engagement, reports in their State of Employee Engagement report that 57% of employees believe they don't have any career advancement opportunities.

(Side note: Their report is "alive" so you can see numbers in real time – pretty cool.)

# 7 Action Items to Help Employees Get Their Learning Fix

1. Create a lunch n' learn schedule for each department. Ask each department to pick a topic and train the rest of the company on it. It could be customer service, a process that department uses, something related to your core values, or something totally random.

2. Create a book club and meet once a month to discuss the book of the month.

3. Encourage employees to work with non-profits to gain experience.

4. Charge each department with a goal that is a little outrageous and reward them if they achieve it.

5. Encourage employees to take webinars – there are free ones ALL OVER the internet.

6. Offer budget for professional associations, and even personal courses too.

7. Organize matrix-teams for problem solving - a matrix-team is made up of one person from each department. At their meetings, each person can share one problem or challenge their department is facing, such as reaching a goal, or one problem or challenge they are facing personally, such as a difficult co-worker or trouble implementing a new process. The others can then provide solutions and ideas.

# Rewards & Recognition

Finally, of course rewards are part of building employee engagement. Rewards could be anything from a thank you to an increase in compensation or a bonus. OfficeVibe's State of Employee Engagement report finds that 65% of employees don't feel like they get enough praise.

## 7 Ideas for Rewarding Employees

1. Ask your employees how they want to be rewarded so you can give them what they value.
2. Write a handwritten thank you note.
3. Celebrate employee work product - if someone does something great, make it a teachable moment at the next staff meeting. Recognition and training all in one.
4. Make sure the connection between performance and the resulting rewards are crystal clear.
5. Send an email to the whole company about an employee's success, and do it often.
6. Take out an ad in the employee's professional association newsletter or in your local newsletter, and share the employee's success publicly.
7. Create advancement opportunities through giving more responsibility. So even if your company is too small to offer promotions, increasing responsibility for employees can feel like a reward if the responsibility is meaningful.

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