The Art of Employee Engagement:

How to Inspire and Reignite Your Teams



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Leaders who seek to chart a path through unprecedented change may find their teams uninspired and detached. Here's what's happening and how to refuel the fire.

The modern workplace is transforming at a dizzying pace. Norms and best practices—which once remained constant for decades at a time—now change by the year, driven by shifts in technology, macroeconomics, social norms, and policy. Since the pandemic, the world of work has undergone disruptive changes, including the popularization of remote and hybrid work, that have proven to endure in many industries. At the same time, the workplace has experienced a series of short-lived pendulum swings and fast-growing trends, such as policy shifts and rapidly evolving AI technology, that continue to create uncertainty.

Confronted by so much dynamism, leaders are challenged not only make sense of it all but also to uncover opportunities amid the chaos and lead their teams to new levels of achievement. Try as they might to rev up the organizational engines and seize the moment, they find to their dismay that their teams have checked out.

For leaders, improving engagement presents a high-stakes puzzle. Those leaders who get it right will raise overall performance, improve culture, and succeed in retaining their best talent. Those who don't solve the puzzle risk underperformance, undesirable attrition, and brand damage—negative trends that can be difficult to reverse.

According to **Gallup**, U.S. employee engagement has stagnated at the lowest level in over a decade: Only 31% of U.S. workers are actively engaged at work, while 17% are actively disengaged. The question is, how can leaders inspire those shifts?



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Disengagement, while often subtle, can be corrosive. Gallup's **2026 Global State of the Workplace** report revealed that $10 trillion in global GDP was lost due to low engagement in 2025. In industries like technology, where layoffs are on the rise, employees may stay in their jobs at high rates but may also disengage emotionally and creatively. Workplace trends like "The Great Stay" and "quiet cracking" spoke to employees' tendency to remain in their current roles, even when they felt uninspired by their work. In the newest iteration, dubbed "job hugging," **75% of workers** reportedly plan to remain in their roles through 2027 to weather the unpredictable storm.

The constant strain of uncertainty, rapidly evolving technology, a lack of growth opportunities, and having to do more with less have caused employees to mentally and emotionally check out—costing businesses billions.

Against this backdrop, employee engagement has become a pivotal driver of organizational effectiveness. It's no longer enough for employees to simply clock in and out. As more rote tasks are completed with the help of technology, leaders need teams that can really show up, bringing the creativity and ingenuity that foster innovation and a winning culture. To bring their best efforts to work, team members need to feel a sense of purpose and belonging—and they need to believe they can achieve growth.



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A Systemic Problem Requires Systematic Solutions

One thing is certain: Today's leaders cannot leave engagement to chance.



A skilled manager may create pockets of strong engagement within a large organization, even as the rest of the workforce languishes. The key is to systematically foster an environment where employees are not just present but are genuinely invested in the organization's mission. This requires comprehensive leadership models—the creation and use of a common language, for example, and putting development programs and measurement systems in place—that bring everyone along, at every level of the organization. Creating true engagement requires nothing short of a cultural transformation.

Engagement is not just about job satisfaction or happiness at work. It doesn't necessarily develop because team members have a best friend at the office or even because they like their boss. It's about the emotional and psychological commitment an employee feels toward the organization. Engaged employees don't just show up—they show up with purpose and heart, inspired to make an impact.

Leaders who tackle the problem of engagement should themselves feel a sense that the work they're doing matters. Engagement is not only central to your company's success or failure; it's vital to quality of life in society at large. While **U.S. labor productivity** saw modest increases in the first quarter of 2026, **thousands of executives** are now reporting that artificial intelligence may not be having the productivity impact they'd hoped for. While much remains in flux, it's becoming clear that technology alone isn't enough to sustain productivity—much less amplify engagement. Both initiatives hinge on your people.

When leaders take a proactive approach to engagement—by focusing on the areas directly within their influence, rather than fixating on what's outside of their control—they can re-energize their teams and successfully navigate them through disruptive change. For those who succeed, the reward is not just a more productive workforce, but a happier one.

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To understand disengagement, HR and business leaders must examine its root causes within their own organizations.

The common culprits of disengagement, according to Gallup, are rapid workplace disruptions, communication breakdowns, and broken performance management practices. Contributing factors include burnout, poor-quality management, and a lack of clear goals. New diagnostic tools and processes can help you understand what's happening in your organization.

Utilize Pulse Surveys

Improving engagement requires you to monitor employee sentiment and take action on feedback. These surveys provide leaders with insights from team members who can submit comments anonymously, fostering honest input that might not otherwise be shared. They also allow for tracking change over time, highlighting improvements or backsliding.

Establish Engagement Platforms

Organizations looking to improve engagement must also leverage platforms that offer education, analytics, and actionable recommendations. Engagement and performance platforms enable teams to coalesce their efforts around important goals. By investing in a platform to align your teams on common goals and progress, you'll help to create opportunities for wins that empower employees and invite them to make an impact. To execute effectively, it's essential to narrow the team's focus by clearly identifying what must be done outside of the daily whirlwind. Otherwise, nothing else you do and achieve really matters.

Keep Score

An important part of the discipline of engagement is keeping score. People and teams behave differently when keeping score, and the right type of scoreboard motivates teams to win. Leaders can also leverage tools like Slack or Microsoft Teams to keep teams regularly focused on goals, giving a place for team members to highlight achievements and for managers to regularly offer praise and words of encouragement.

Identifying the most important priorities and tracking progress can help leaders know whether the overall company goals are being met. Other metrics offer more granular clues about the success of the communal effort. For example, employee Net Promoter Scores (eNPS) measure team-member advocacy. Declines in voluntary turnover rates signal higher engagement. Tracking productivity metrics can reveal whether innovation or collaboration is taking place. Sharing such metrics transparently reinforces trust and demonstrates progress.

Leaders can use such measures to diagnose problems and then identify "winnable games" that can drive higher engagement scores. When teams decide which activities have the greatest impact on the goal and track their progress, they'll be inspired to take ownership of their contributions in a more meaningful way.



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What To Do When Engagement Is Low

A recent FranklinCovey survey revealed that employees who ranked in the top 15% in practicing the *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*® were also highly engaged at work.

When employees take a proactive approach and focus on what they can influence rather than what they cannot (Habit 1), they experience less overwhelm and burnout. Similarly, when they define a clear vision of success and create actionable plans to achieve it (Habit 2), they counteract feelings of futility—a key driver of disengagement.

However, leaders play a critical role in defining success clearly for their teams.



Research reveals that only 15% of employees know their organization's most important goals, which signals detachment and a lack of clarity—certainly engagement killers.

When leaders communicate organizational goals and work with their teams to define and align around the most crucial initiatives, they can empower their direct reports while reducing burnout. Rather than spinning their wheels or throwing things at the wall to see what sticks, teams clearly understand the goals, the expectations, and their impact; this sense of purpose can keep burnout at bay.

By giving teams ultimate accountability and maximum visibility into how their efforts contribute to these most important outcomes, leaders administer the antidote to one of engagement's biggest killers: futility. Instead, teams feel like they are playing a winnable game—and that the work matters.

A key component of ultimate accountability involves keeping score—tracking the team activities that contribute to achieving the group's goal. Using a scoreboard to track progress changes the level of energy we bring to any effort, including hitting goals at work.

But it's not all about tracking a team's activities. Leaders also need to hold themselves to a high standard of effectiveness. Rather than allowing unclear goals or weak performance management to manifest in disengaged teams, leaders must invest in their own development. By holding regular 1-on-1s, fostering a culture of feedback, and navigating change with their teams, leaders can bridge the gap between management and employees—establishing a foundation of trust and purpose within the organization.

After completing FranklinCovey's *6 Critical Practices for Leading a Team*® course, managers report a 15% increase in satisfaction with leadership development opportunities.

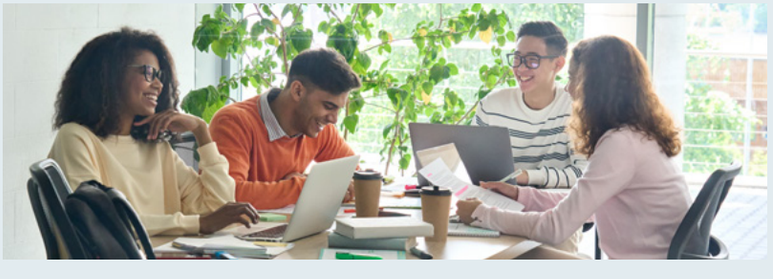
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Practical Steps for Today's Leaders

For leaders seeking levers that they can pull to boost engagement, here are some practical tips.

Promote Purpose

Deloitte reports that 86% of Gen Z workers and 89% of millennial workers say that having a sense of purpose is important to their overall job satisfaction. A team member's purpose need not be grand or overly ambitious; it doesn't require your company to single-handedly tackle global warming or eradicate poverty. This purpose might be to improve customers' shopping experience or increase efficiency in a commercial construction process. Defining purpose requires leaders to communicate the organization's mission clearly—including why it matters in a way that connects individual contributors to a bigger "why" behind the work.



Ask yourself:

1. Does my team really know what the purpose of our work is?
2. Do they know our most important goals?
3. Do they know how to attribute their work to our overall goal?

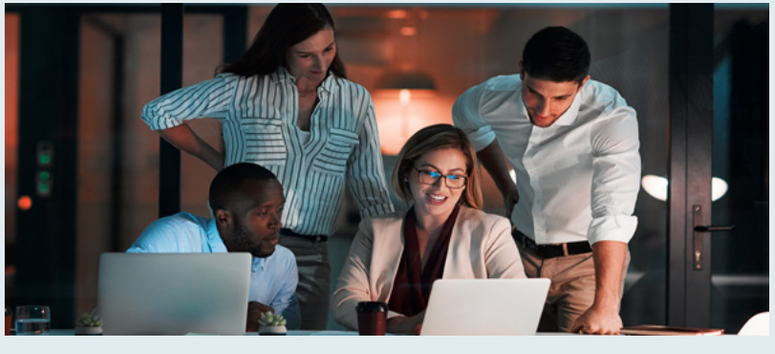


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Practical Steps for Today's Leaders (cont.)

Invest in Development

Stagnation breeds disengagement. Offer opportunities for upskilling, cross-functional learning, and mentorship across the entire organization; this ensures that everyone speaks a common language. Front-line managers, in particular, often need the most care and support, as they often are in an official leadership role for the first time. Leaders of leaders also need to develop their skills and mindsets, as they have an outsized influence on the organization.



Ask yourself:

1. Do we invest in our teams?
2. Do we invest in our leaders?
3. How do we see those investments pay off?



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Practical Steps for Today's Leaders (cont.)

Build Trust

An oft-cited **Harvard Business Review study** indicates that 58% of employees trust strangers more than their bosses, so fostering trust is critical. Regular feedback and authentic communication can bridge this gap, reducing isolation and improving collaboration. Leaders who extend trust in smart ways will find that their colleagues may respond with high levels of motivation, wanting to live up to the trust given to them. Conversely, when workers become suspicious, guarded, and disengaged, they generate a trust deficit that can lead to a decrease in productivity and an increase in costs.



Ask yourself:

1. Have we engaged in any behaviors that may have caused a trust deficit?
2. How do we know we've created a high-trust environment that allows teams to innovate and thrive?

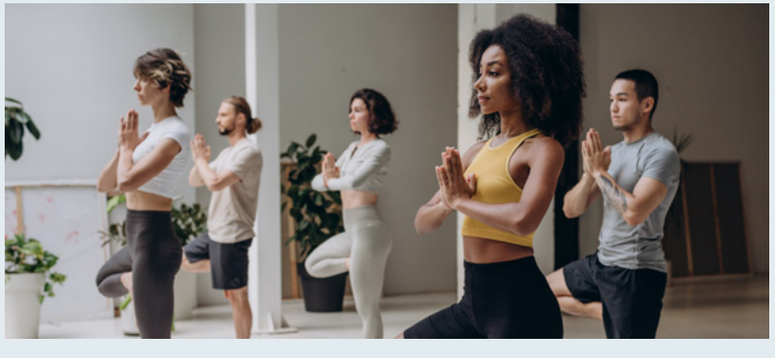


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Practical Steps for Today's Leaders (cont.)

Model Self-Renewal

Work-life balance is paramount to any organization's effectiveness. Burnout typically has a number of contributing factors, including unreasonable workloads, confusion surrounding expectations, low trust, and poor communication. But even after leaders have put in the work to fix those problems, they also need to model and renormalize the habit of renewal for their teams. Whether through self-development, quality time with family, or a simple morning meditation, both leaders and teams will find that taking time for renewal pays off at work by decreasing stress, prioritizing balance, and promoting creativity, collaboration, and innovation.



Ask yourself:

1. Do I model self-renewal so my team recognizes its importance?
2. How can I take time for renewal and encourage my team to do the same?



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Master the Art of Employee Engagement

Looking ahead, the future of work will demand a human-centered approach that promotes adaptability, resilience, and compassion. By leveraging time-tested leadership skills, leaders can build cultures of trust, purpose, and engagement. In doing so, they ensure their organizations are places where employees don't just work, but thrive.

In our 40 years of research and development in the areas of leadership, culture, and strategic execution, disengagement has become more commonplace—but it's not inevitable. We understand the challenges both leaders and team members face, particularly during periods of change and uncertainty.

By aligning teams around meaningful purpose, investing in employee development, building trust, and modeling self-renewal, today's leaders can reinvigorate and prioritize their people to promote engagement, productivity, and positive behavior change at scale.

FranklinCovey's world-class learning solutions—delivered Live-Online, On Demand, or Live In-Person—are designed to build exceptional leadership skills, enrich your culture, and help your teams execute your most important priorities amid disruption.

For additional information about how we can help your organization, email us at **info@leadershipresources.my**

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