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# How Leaders Impact Employee Engagement

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Steve is the cofounder and CEO of Awardco, a fast-growing rewards and recognition company.

Employee engagement increases productivity, loyalty and profitability while it lowers turnover and absenteeism. Engaged employees can transform a business and heavily influence the success of a company. What leaders need to remember is that engagement is not the sole responsibility of employees themselves. Leaders and managers play a huge role in how engaged, or disengaged, employees are.
Through creating a culture of support, inclusivity, value-driven work and recognition, leaders have the responsibility of empowering engagement in their organizations.

**Ways Leaders Affect Engagement Levels**
Saying that leaders affect employee engagement levels isn't enough—there's evidence to look at:
• When employees feel that their work has a purpose, they are more engaged. However, a measly "22% of employees strongly agree that their leaders have a clear direction for their organization."
• The highest driver of engagement is whether employees feel their leaders genuinely care about them. But "only 28% strongly agree that leadership genuinely cares about their health and well-being."
• 76% of employees who have empathetic managers are very engaged at work. However, a whopping 52% of employees say leadership empathy is disingenuous.
• When leaders make genuine employee recognition a priority, employees are 40% more engaged. But over 80% of employees say they don't get enough recognition at work.
Leaders are extremely influential when it comes to employee recognition. When they create purpose-driven work, show genuine care and empathy, and recognize employees for their efforts, engagement levels will soar.

**3 Ways to Improve Engagement**
With the above knowledge in mind, I want to share some actionable strategies that have helped my own company increase engagement. Here are three ideas leaders can try.

**1. Ensure Employees Feel Like Individuals**
When people feel like cogs in a machine, engagement plummets. On the flip side, when people know they're cared for as unique individuals, they'll be much more engaged. Everyone has unique personalities, goals, wants and needs, and here are some ways to reinforce that at work:
• Give genuine and personalized recognition for employee efforts.
• Celebrate both personal and professional milestones with employees and offer fitting rewards.
• Offer as much flexibility as possible to be more empathetic and understanding of employees' personal lives.
• Support employees in learning and developing the new skills and responsibilities they're interested in.
With these strategies, leaders set a tone of trust, support and care which increases engagement for many employees.

## 2. Build A Health-Focused Culture

Company culture cannot be an HR initiative only. Leaders and managers are foundational to creating a culture where employees feel valued, appreciated, supported and included. Features of the best cultures include:

• Inclusion of different people and ideas
• Support of employee challenges
• Open and honest communication
• Rewards for those who put in effort
• Respect of different opinions
• Fun for everyone

Ironically, focusing on a results-driven hustle culture is the opposite of an engaging culture. Engaging cultures naturally produce results by focusing on a healthy employee experience.

## 3. Prioritize Value-Driven Work for All

Even if companies have a healthy culture, and employees know that they're cared for, if people don't know why their work matters, engagement usually won't improve How Leaders Impact Employee Engagement

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This process starts from day one and continues through one-on-ones and regular check-ups. Clarifying expectations from the very beginning, and keeping that clarity as employees gain more responsibility, is vital. Also, connect employees' work to the company's mission, goals and values. This way, employees know why they matter.

**Leaders Are the Foundation of Engagement**

While the final decision on whether employees are engaged does lay with employees themselves, leaders create the framework that allows for engagement to exist in the first place.

By supporting employees as individuals, creating an employee-focused culture and allowing for value-driven work, leaders can see employee engagement noticeably rise... Leaders must help employees internalize and understand the impact of the work they do each day.

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