

## What does “engagement” look like?

These days, in the world of HR and Talent Management, “employee engagement” is a hot topic. Although the idea of engagement certainly isn’t new, the term is definitely being used and sometimes misused a lot!

With growing trends around new approaches to performance management, the concept of keeping employees engaged is a big focus for many organizations. So what exactly is engagement, and why does it matter? If people are getting their work done each day, isn’t that enough? The short answer to that question is, nope! Simply put, employees who are not actively engaged impact the bottom line. To better understand why, take a look at how Gallup defines the three different types of employees based on their engagement level and imagine the impact they have on the overall success of the organization:

- **Engaged** employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.
- **Not-Engaged** employees are essentially “checked out.” They’re sleepwalking through their workday, putting time – but not energy or passion – into their work.
- **Actively Disengaged** employees aren’t just unhappy at work; they’re busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day these workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.

Chances are you’re thinking about your own team and which of the three categories the majority falls into. The majority may seem pleasant and happy enough with perhaps one grumpy outlier. They all do their work, chat, participate in the annual chili cook-off and seem to appreciate free-bagel Fridays, so most of them must be engaged, right? Unlikely! According to a recent [Gallup Survey](#), only 32% of U.S. workers were engaged in their jobs in 2015. Meaning that those

seemingly amiable employees who are “getting their work done” are likely not engaged and in turn not producing to the highest level, despite the free bagels on Friday.

So why such a large number of workers who are not engaged? There is extensive research around the science of engagement and many variables that can impact an employee’s level of engagement, but one consistent factor that shows up in engagement studies is the link between lack of feedback and disengagement. People WANT and NEED to know what’s working and what’s not, so even feedback that may be perceived as “negative” is better than no feedback at all. The absence of consistent communication and feedback is the same as telling an employee, “What you do is not that important so you really shouldn’t care either.”

This is the same reason that traditional performance management processes are falling short. In most companies, feedback around performance only happens in a formal setting and revolves around a singular review focused on past actions and behaviors which has little to no impact on the achievement of organizational goals.

In order for individuals to feel like what they are doing adds value, which in turn impacts their level of engagement, they need to have clear expectations, know how they are doing against those expectation, have development opportunities, and have channels of communication and feedback not only with their managers but with peers as well.

Since it is not always easy to “see” engagement, and not all companies conduct engagement studies or surveys, an easy step to take toward increasing engagement among your team is to focus on improving the channels of communication and feedback. Employees like to know what's going on, who's involved, how they can help and how they're doing on a regular basis. Being able to give and receive real time feedback, view progress, achieve rewards and have

a forum for goal communication will keep employees interacting each day and engaged in their work. Whether you're a manager or an individual contributor on a team, you can make an impact on engagement by letting someone know how their work is making a difference, and hopefully, in turn, someone will do the same for you.

