

Being an Engaging Manager

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Become a more engaging manager

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Introduction

Managers are the crucial link between every business and its employees. A manager who motivates, challenges and supports team members can inspire them to give their best - improving business productivity and performance.

There is no typical manager - every individual has their own strengths, weaknesses and personal style. However, there are some core characteristics demonstrated by engaging managers.

This guide provides best practice on what makes an engaging manager and practical ideas to help you put this into practice.

Welcome new employees

Employee engagement can start before a new employee joins. It is important for managers to connect quickly with them - the quicker employees become settled the quicker they will start contributing.

New employees should know what to expect and what is expected of them. There are many ways new employees can be welcomed, including:

- inviting new employees to join any employee parties or major events - for example - away days
- sending new employees a welcome pack including information about their new role
- briefing employees to recognise new employees and welcome them
- making sure the basics are set up and ready before employees come in - for example - desk, phone, email,

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business cards

- walking every new employee around the workplace - or at least their department - so they get to meet new colleagues
- asking colleagues in other teams or departments to drop by or send a note to introduce themselves
- introducing a buddy scheme where an existing employee helps a new employee settle in and answers any questions
- establishing a formal induction programme to help new employees understand the business' purpose, structure and culture

In a welcome pack for new employees, you could consider including:

- a letter from you welcoming them
- introductory information about the business including brochure or other marketing materials, your strategic narrative, any sports or social clubs or any other workplace benefits
- specific information about their role, including their job description, an organisation chart, any material about the team they will join
- logistical information, for example location maps, canteen information

Get to know individual employees and communicate with them

It is important that managers have good relationships with employees. If a manager knows and understands an employee as an individual they will be able to better motivate them. This could be done through:

- taking an interest in team members' interests outside of work

- making time for informal discussions outside work discussions - for example - catch-ups over coffee or at social events
- regularly visiting or holding conference calls with any employees based in different locations or satellite sites - by making sure you are in contact they will know they are involved and supported
- holding social events before or after business meetings helping you get to know individual team members and colleagues get to know each other - for example - monthly breakfasts or lunches after meetings
- holding social events for family and friends - for example - annual parties or open days

Managers also need to communicate with employees and give them the chance to share their views and to contribute to defining the business' goals. You could consider:

- holding regular business update meetings with a set date, time, location and agenda to brief employees on business developments, answer their questions and discuss team objectives and activities - [download guidance on holding business update meetings \(Word, 183KB\) - Opens in a new window](#)
- sharing ideas suggested by colleagues or examples of good practice you have seen within the team to recognise the individuals and inspire others to follow suit
- holding regular team Q&A sessions during which employees can come and talk to you about any issues or ideas - for example - at lunchtime discussions or surgery sessions

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- posing regular team challenges, asking for views and encouraging team members to collaborate on ideas
- responding to feedback received by acknowledging suggestions or concerns, explaining your view - whether you agree or not - and involving employees in developing actions to address emerging issues
- talking to individual employees on a regular basis to check their understanding of objectives or key issues and inviting them to raise any questions or concerns they haven't discussed
- responding regularly and honestly to employee feedback, taking action on issues identified and sharing the steps you are taking so that employees know that their voices are being heard
- giving employees the power to make decisions - this could involve giving each employee a budget or other resources to achieve their work objectives
- providing regular, open and honest feedback on individual performance to help employees understand how they are progressing and motivate them to continually improve their performance in line with their objectives and business goals
- encouraging supportive behaviour and challenging inappropriate behaviour contrary to accepted values or standards
- directing employees more firmly when needed to deliver the level of performance required

Focus and support employees

The way managers shape the roles of employees and oversee their work has a huge effect on individual well-being, commitment and performance. To help you support employees you could consider:

- discussing job design and responsibilities with employees - employees who have input into shaping their work are far more engaged than those who are simply given tasks to get on with
- creating compelling objectives linked to business goals so employees understand how their work and performance directly contribute to the strategy
- giving employees the freedom to carry out their work in ways that suit them without being micro-managed

Coach and develop employees

Managers need to help employees identify solutions to issues they encounter so they keep developing their skills and confidence and have clear development paths. Below are some ideas to help you make this a core part of business culture.

Personal development plans

Create personal development plans for each team member. Make sure these plans have clear links with individual roles, team activities and corporate goals. Give employees the opportunity to try new areas of work and develop new skills in line with this plan.

Open discussions about goals

Encourage team members to be open about their ambitions. By doing so you can help them feel their ambitions are compatible with the business.

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Everyday coaching

Encourage team members to discuss challenges they encounter so you can help them understand the issues and decide on a course of action.

Informal opportunities

Create on-the-job development opportunities - for example - shadowing employees in different roles or working alongside colleagues in other teams. This can help people understand more about those roles and improve their interaction.

Mentors or personal managers

Give employees career mentors to help share experiences and encourage their development - this could be someone who joined in the same position a few years ago.

You could also consider introducing a personal management system to provide care and support.

Internal transfers

Be willing to let employees move around the business. This can help individuals develop new skills and experiences that will benefit the business as a whole. If you try to hold people back it could undermine the engagement and enthusiasm of others within the team.

Handle feedback from employees

Seeking and responding to feedback from employees is vital to building a strong relationship with them. The way managers handle feedback has a major influence on employee engagement, trust and confidence.

Try to keep the following points in mind.

Actively listen

If someone gives you feedback let them raise their point. Don't cut across them. If their point is long winded, help conclude it by rephrasing it as you have interpreted it.

Body language

When receiving feedback the way you behave is as important as how you respond. Maintain open body language and keep eye contact.

Understand the other person's perspective

Try to see the issue from their point of view. Try to understand why they are concerned and don't be judgemental.

Don't let one person dominate

Explain that dominating behaviour is disruptive and agree to discuss the issue with them in more detail afterwards.

Don't rush to respond

Take a moment to consider what has been said and form your response - rather than giving a quick response you might regret.

Be calm, clear and concise

If you find yourself waffling in your response, stop. Don't pretend to have answers if you don't know them - but commit to finding out and responding.

End on a positive

Find a way to end on a positive note. Sum up any agreements you have made. Check

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that everyone has the same understanding. Be positive where possible and highlight any next steps.

Recognise employee performance

To help motivate employees you need to show genuine appreciation for good work and recognise the improvements they make. Here are some steps you could take:

- say thank you - it is a powerful way of recognising someone's contribution and motivating them to keep performing
- use internal publications, a note round the team or a poster to celebrate an individual's success and to show employees their commitment and effort are appreciated
- if you have an intranet create a bulletin board or forum so employees can thank colleagues for their efforts and help with key issues
- give spot rewards for specific contributions or tasks where employees have exceeded all expectations - for example - this could be a personal reward relevant to their interests outside work
- establish an award scheme so employees can nominate colleagues for their work and the way they have helped drive the business forward
- host social events when you achieve key milestones or targets to thank your team or teams for their work
- hold celebrations for employee's personal milestones or significant life events

Improve your performance as a manager

Engaging managers keep improving their own performance by seeking views and feedback from the people they work with. Here are some steps to consider.

Ask your team

Ask your team members for their views on your management style and effectiveness. For example, ensure evaluation forms or cards are always available after any briefings or presentations you have given - [download a template post-event feedback form \(Word, 196KB\) - Opens in a new window.](#)

Approach your own manager

Managers should proactively ask their manager for feedback against their objectives. You could also use a 360 degree feedback approach so that formal reviews include feedback from team members.

Explore management styles

Explore your own strengths and weaknesses to help you improve your management style and encourage other managers to do the same. Your workplace may have its own approach for this, or you could use external methods - for example psychometric tests.

Set up a mentor system

Ask more experienced management colleagues to act as mentors for new managers. This helps them learn from experience and allows them to seek advice on any issues. Alternatively, you could consider hiring an external coach.

Here's how we gave more responsibility to managers

Become a more engaging manager

Westlakes Engineering is an independent civil, structural and architectural design consultancy, established by Andy Hooper. In 2008, Andy realised significant changes were needed to help the business grow. As MD, he had the majority of responsibility for people and management. This flat structure, which worked very well in the early years, had started to show strain as the business grew quickly and reached 16 people.

Trust managers

Andy realised he needed to create a new structure that gave managers more responsibility and support for driving the business forward and motivating the wider team. His first step was to appoint his six most senior employees to be directors in October 2008. This was to give them decision making responsibility and ownership for different areas of the soon-to-be restructured company.

Hold workshops

Andy organised a series of employee workshops, involving shop floor workers and senior managers, to explain why re-organisation was essential and seek views on how to make it happen. As a result, employees felt engaged with the new structure while feeling valued and trusted by their employer.

Inspire and equip managers

Following these workshops, managers clearly understood their role within the business, felt equipped to play their role in engaging people and felt supported by employees who understood how they fitted in. The organisational change has worked, as Westlakes Engineering expanded in 2009, despite a difficult year, with morale and motivation remaining high.

Here's how we created more engaging managers

KPMG firmly believes that its quality of service and commercial success is intrinsically linked to how well it manages its people. The firm also understands that managers are the platform for developing and inspiring staff and it has established a strong focus on management within the business.

Create a specialist role

In 2005 KPMG created a new role - People Management Leader - and appointed and trained 500 primarily senior client-facing managers to the role.

A People Management Leader is given accountability for the management and career progression of a group of individuals within the business for up to 18 months. Once this period ends, another senior manager takes on the responsibility.

Give employees a mentor

With the People Management Leader system, every employee has someone to turn to for coaching and support and for any questions relating to career development and direction. People Management Leaders can also act as a two-way communication channel for employees on broader business strategy.

Create an open and engaging culture

The People Management Leader role raises the status of people management within the business and fosters a more communicative culture. When the recession hit and difficult decisions had to be made, the platform of openness and trust made the necessary

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introduction of commercial flexibility simpler. Employees were engaged and hugely supportive during the downturn and 85 per cent volunteered for reduced working weeks or partly paid leave in an effort to avoid redundancies.

Here's how we empower our people

Metal Assemblies - formerly West Bromwich Tool and Engineering - produce pressed metal components for the automotive industry. Its managers help ensure that the business' 120 people feel motivated, valued and primed to protect important customer relationships - especially valuable as the industry has been hit hard by the recession.

Trust employees

Managers empower their operators to help work out the best way to produce the required number of parts per hour. Employees are encouraged to think beyond their own role - decision making is delegated and all employees are encouraged to take new ideas to their team leader.

Crucially, managers have been encouraged to consider the relationship they have with each individual carefully to help them get the best from their team - actively identifying working arrangements to help accommodate people's life circumstances.

Give employees ownership

Stuart Fell, owner of the business, says "Through our managers we give our operators ownership of the process and articulate the role they have played in our results. We have continued to get it right for our customers precisely because of how our

employees have bought-in to the organisation's aims and ambitions and taken personal ownership of them. Our empowered workforce can respond to client demands more quickly than the competition".

Here's how we help managers to listen

In 2007, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) became the third largest government department including the Courts Service, Tribunals Service and the Prison Service. Management recognised the link between employee engagement and performance and its potential for the newly merged organisation.

Enable managers to listen

Managers are encouraged to address priority issues at both corporate and local level by listening to staff views and taking action.

The process starts with Leadership into Action sessions organised through the JusticeAcademy, the MoJ's corporate learning team, for senior managers to understand employee survey results and agree priority themes for action.

Some 250 Results into Action - or Listen to Improve - facilitators have been trained to support managers to understand and present results, listen to their teams and agree actions.

Also, workshops on interpreting survey data and information are available on the JusticeAcademy e-learning portal, including know-hows on topics such as engaging your

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team, top tip and learning nudges.

Empower employees

Managers are spurred on by the 140 or so Engagement Champions from across MoJ who bring things to life on a local level. This has led to opportunities to share successes and challenges faced. As a result, employees have an opportunity to make a contribution and be involved in planning and taking action.

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