

Building relationships: investing in people for organizational impact

People are looking for more than just a paycheck. They want purpose and meaning from their work. They want to be known for what makes them unique. And they want relationships, particularly with a manager who can coach them to the next level.

- Gallup's Perspective on Building a High-Development Culture Through Your Employee Engagement Strategy

Quick question: What's the most important asset at your business?

If you answered the employees, you're right. Humans do their best work when it is connected to relationships and the organizations where they work.

As leaders, it's important to cultivate our own relationships with employees because it helps us identify issues before they become problems, improves morale because employees feel valued, and can impact the bottom line through increased retention, better productivity, and lower absenteeism rates. A recent Gallup report* supports the idea that building good relationships with employees can lead to higher employee engagement.

So, how does a good employer go about building positive relationships with employees?

Here are a few ideas:

Know your employees on a personal level

Schedule routine, brief one-on-one meetings to learn how work and home-life challenges affect them. Find out what is important to each employee: spouse, kids, extended family, and pets; achievements and goals they are working toward; issues they are struggling with, such as juggling kids' schedules or supporting aging parents. This goes beyond problems they might have. It's good to know what activities they like, such as sports, music, art, or crafting.

Create a photo board

Post team photos and ask employees to post photos of their families, passions, and other reasons they want to prevent workplace injuries. It's a place to share hobbies and interests so employees can get to know each other, and leaders can get insight into what motivates them. Leaders should also post photos so employees can get to know them better, too.

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*Gallup's Perspective on Building a High-Development Culture Through Your Employee Engagement Strategy
<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/267512/development-culture-engagement-paper-2019.aspx>

Treat employees as individuals

Every employee is different, with varying abilities, skills, and goals. When you think about your employees, think about them as individuals, instead of seeing them as a combined group who all think the same way. Workers appreciate it when a leader acknowledges them individually. While a group thank you isn't a bad thing, it is much more meaningful when directed to specific individuals and their contributions.



Celebrate successes

One of the many ways to celebrate is to sponsor a group celebration when goals are met. Acknowledge employee participation in group or organizational success. Recognize employee contributions to safety culture and injury prevention during performance assessments. Some ways to celebrate include hosting a picnic or barbecue at a park, holding an onsite employee party, or offering employees a perk, like an extra paid day off.

Create opportunities for social interaction

Even if you don't have a success to celebrate, providing an opportunity for employees to get together outside of work is a great way to facilitate relationship building. Some ideas include organizing a hike, a bike ride, providing tickets to a sporting event, or having an offsite gathering at a local restaurant. You can create opportunities in the workplace by offering

regular work breaks and a space for employees to gather, like a comfortable break room.

Be responsive

Follow up every time an employee asks a question or has a request. Make sure you get back to the person with an answer. Maintain confidentiality when employees seek you out; sharing this information with other workers can undermine trust and make employees less likely to come to you in the future.

Be a good role model

If you require employees to wear safety glasses, make sure you wear your safety glasses. Leaders are always being watched whether they know it or not. How you act in the workplace sets the tone for everyone and can have an impact on how they act, too.

Maintain contact

Remember, your relationship continues when an employee is injured. Check in frequently and maintain good communication if an employee is not able to return to work or has returned and is working with restrictions.

Know the work environment

As the supervisor, you should understand your employees' work processes and the potential hazards in your workplace. Lead or participate in required safety inspections, safety assessments, and job hazard analyses. Use group problem solving to control or eliminate hazards. If you haven't done the work recently, shadow or fill in for an employee to experience the work.

Summing it up

Taking the time to get to know your employees and creating opportunities for social interaction is a great way to create a positive work environment for employees. This effort helps your business by taking care of its most important asset: the employees.

Written and electronic communication

Supervisors often communicate by email, texting, and websites. Find out the most effective way to communicate with your employees.

Here are the four key points for successful written communication:

1. Know your reader or readers.
2. Keep the writing simple.
3. Keep the writing positive.
4. Keep the writing accurate.

Remember that your reader can't see your facial expressions or hear the tone of your voice when reading your emails or reports, so you may need to explain your reasoning a little more to avoid confusion or misunderstandings.

Activity ideas

- On your own, track the number of times you are talking to your employees. Using that as a baseline, set a goal to increase the number of those interactions. Over time, these conversations will increase, building trust and establishing more solid relationships.
- In a group, talk about ways your organization promotes relationship building. Are there opportunities to improve?
- Create a photo board with pictures of all your workers and their families. Include a little bit about each one so others can see shared hobbies and interests.