

Building a more engaged workforce

6 ways employers are tackling employee engagement and communication challenges

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The employer-employee relationship is at a critical turning point.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic and its radical impact on the economy and the way we work, more employees are working away from the office than ever before.

While most blue- and gray-collar workers were already working away from desks, white-collar workers are now spending less time in offices and more time working from home. Those challenges come in addition to other circumstances that make it difficult to communicate regularly with employees: employees without company emails, employees who lack access to computers, non-English speaking employees, part-time workers, etc.

Today's way of working makes it harder for companies to engage and communicate with employees. Employers—especially small and midsize companies—must prioritize employee engagement and communication to avoid the productivity and cost losses that come with a disengaged workforce.

Employee engagement: The measured level of commitment, passion, and loyalty a worker has toward their work and company.

High employee engagement starts with strong internal communication. Without consistent, effective, and relevant communication that reflects the company's culture and values, it's impossible to engage deskless and remote employees.

To get a handle on rapid turnover rates and to improve employee retention, employers need tools to help them measure engagement and improve communication. Once they have the right infrastructure, they can deploy strategies to improve workplace culture and increase employee engagement.

Let's dive into the challenges employers currently face around employee engagement and communication—and how they can solve them.

FIGURE 1

Engaged employees are better for business.

For the first time in more than a decade, the percentage of engaged workers declined in 2021. According to Gallup, just over one-third of employees (36%) felt engaged at work, and 15% were disengaged—in other words, actively working *against* the company's mission.

An earlier study found that only 56% of deskless workers in the US feel connected to and engaged with their employers, while an incredibly high 84% of deskless workers say they don't get enough direct communication from top management. Only 10% feel strongly connected to their companies.

Unengaged employees cost their company an estimated 18% of their salary. In a company of 100 employees with an average salary of \$50,000 each, the cost of their disengagement is almost \$1 million annually.

Given these statistics, any organizational strategy to improve employee engagement will improve productivity, making employee engagement a smart investment (see Figure 1).

Teams scoring in the top quartile on employee engagement saw the following benefits compared with bottom-quartile teams.

10%

higher customer loyalty/engagement

23%

higher profitability

18%

higher productivity (sales)

14%

higher productivity (production records and evaluations)

18%

lower turnover for high-turnover organizations (those with more than 40% annualized turnover)

43%

lower turnover for low-turnover organizations (those with 40% or lower annualized turnover)

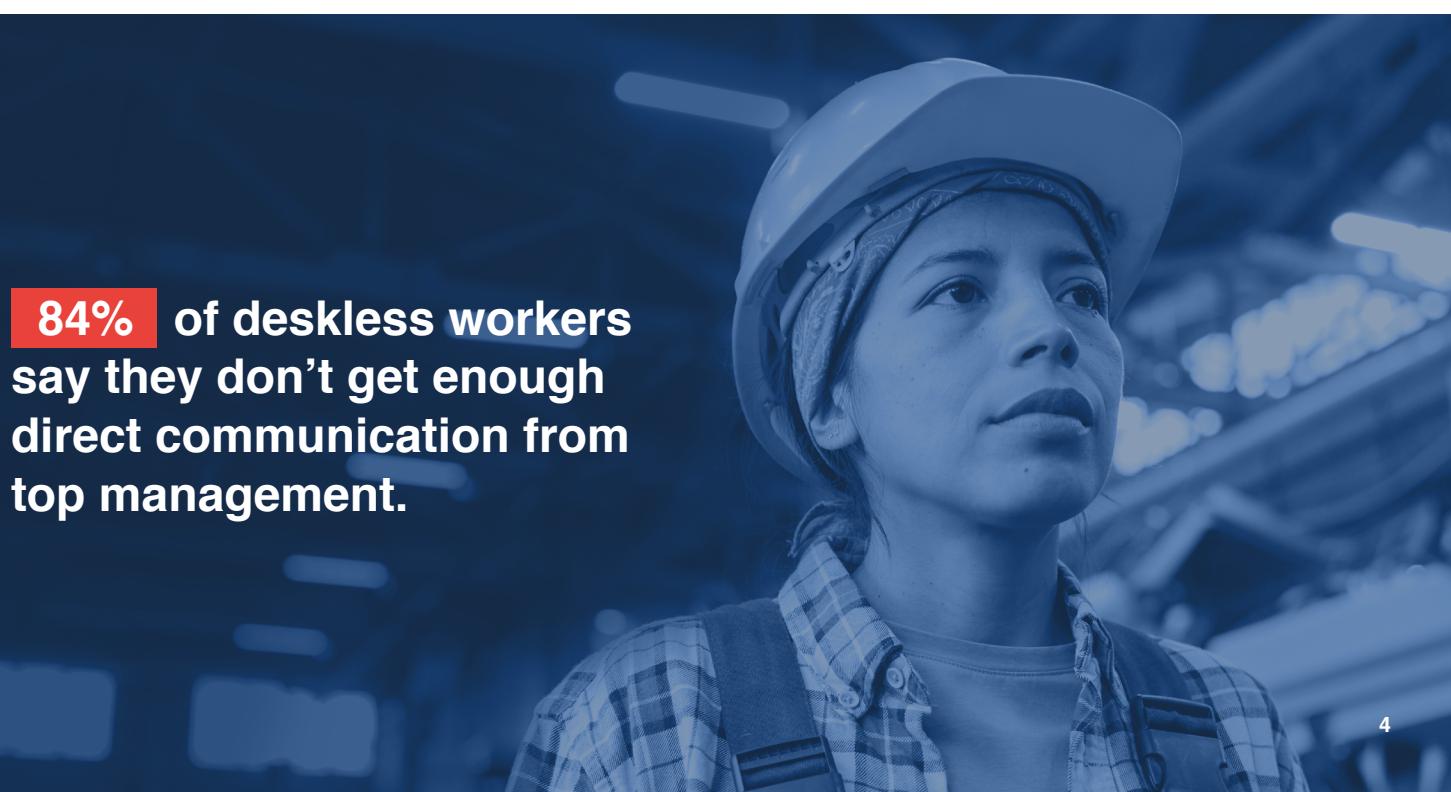
Source: Gallup

Small and midsized companies face unique employee engagement and communication challenges.

While small and midsized companies have the greatest appetite for talent, their resources for talent planning aren't nearly as strong. These companies are less equipped to identify poor engagement and often lack the resources to act.

One AchieveNEXT study found that only 18% of midsize companies have dedicated benefits managers—and those that do aren't necessarily focused on day-to-day people issues. Small companies are even less likely to have adequate staffing.

This lack of staffing leaves them unable to address talent strategically, creating a vicious cycle: if they struggle to retain employees, and also have too few resources to hire new talent, then any remaining employees will become more burned out and less engaged, leading to more turnover.

A photograph of a woman wearing a white hard hat and a light-colored safety vest over a plaid shirt. She is looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is blurred, suggesting an industrial or construction setting.

84% of deskless workers say they don't get enough direct communication from top management.

The good news: high employee engagement is achievable.

Employee engagement is not a reflection of the people currently on the team, but rather a measure of the experience organizations, managers, and team members create. Building a culture of engagement requires strategy and planning.

Gallup noted that those organizations whose employee engagement trended upward actively practice proven fundamentals: senior management involvement, communication, upskilling managers, and accountability.

Despite having small HR staff, small and midsize companies are well positioned to pioneer the future of employee engagement. *Because* these companies have a smaller team and a leaner management structure, smaller companies can often have an easier time encouraging implementing employee engagement and communication best practices.

Their relative flexibility means they have more involved senior managers, fewer communication layers, more opportunities for advancement and upskilling, and theoretically, greater accountability.

Small and midsize companies have an advantage over large companies when it comes to creating better employee engagement. They just need the right strategy—and the right tools—to execute.

- What's next: tips to improve employee engagement and communication

6 ways companies can improve employee experience

1

Start by understanding employee engagement

As the saying goes, you can't fix what you can't measure. The very first step to improving employee engagement is knowing where the company is succeeding—and where it's falling short. Data from employee survey results can help create a fuller picture and show leadership where to act first.

2

Make information accessible to everyone, everywhere

Employees need easy access to the information that helps them do their jobs well and use the benefits they've earned. If they aren't able to easily access benefits information, training, company resources, etc., they won't use it. It's as simple as that.

This is especially the case for deskless blue- and gray-collar workers, who aren't at a computer all day and are unable to check company email (if they even have one). These workers especially need to be able to access this information on the devices they use regularly. Additionally, employees who speak foreign languages also need to be able to access resources in their preferred language.

3

Provide employees more opportunities to connect

Employees who don't check their emails or are out in the field all day need a way to feel tied into the company. If a company wants to communicate a message, email might not be the way to go: with the average person receiving more than 100 emails per day, it's easy for important information to get lost. Companies need a way to reach employees wherever they are (e.g. text alerts) to provide them with engaging, relevant content they'll actually read and remember.

4

Create fun and engaging internal content

The way people consume information has changed; internal messages need to keep up. Traditional learning management systems are too formal and clunky. Short video content recorded on a smartphone can spread a message quickly in a format that employees are already familiar with.

This could look like:

- A welcome message from the CEO sent to all new hires
- A safety information video accompanying a weather closure announcement
- Open enrollment updates to share with a spouse

5

Celebrate great news

Fostering connection within the company extends beyond trainings and alerts, such as celebrating birthdays and work anniversaries. Did the sales team win a new contract? Did an employee just have a baby? Teams can share this information via text or email—however employees prefer to be communicated with.

6

Ask for feedback

In the same way, employers can easily ask for feedback via surveys. This could be as casual as asking where the next team outing should be, or as important as what employees think about a possible new benefit or wellness offering. Asking for feedback helps with that specific issue, and response rates also offer insights into employee engagement.



The employee engagement platform for small and midsize companies

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