



(Revised version/adapted from Harvard University Employee Engagement)

This toolkit includes **best practices** from the Corporate Leadership Council (CLC)¹ and supplemental information managers can use to engage their employees. You will also find **downloadable resources** that you can use to become a more engaging manager. You can support your employees' engagement and learning by sharing **related courses** and bringing these concepts into your daily management.

Building Employee Engagement

Appeal to the Head, Heart and Hands

Your role as a manager in engagement is to capture the discretionary effort of employees by doing all that you can to prepare employees to be successful. A useful metaphor that can guide your actions as a manager has to do with the desired outcome, stated in terms of head-heart-hands. In all of your interactions with your direct reports, seek to help them be fully engaged:

- **HEAD** — “I am mentally engaged in the work”
- **HEART** — I am emotionally engaged in the work”
- **HANDS** — “I am engaged in doing the work”

Catalyze Daily Progress and Remove Barriers

HBS Professor Teresa Amabile believes that our greatest motivator on the job is the ability to make daily progress on important work, which she has labelled *The Progress Principle*.² In her article, co-written with Steven Kramer, [The Power of Small Wins](#), Professor Amabile discusses the role that managers play in providing the resources and environment for daily forward progress. As a manager, you can help by removing barriers to progress when possible as well as by providing goals, resources, and support to team members to catalyze their progress.

Download this resource: [Progress Principle Tips](#)

Set Clear Expectations

Compared to other performance management activities, your ability to set realistic performance expectations has the greatest impact on employee engagement. To effectively set realistic performance expectations, you can have goal setting discussions shortly after performance reviews and when your direct reports rotate from one project to the next. Here are some questions that can help you think through the process of setting employee performance expectations:

- Are the goals relevant to the business?
- Is the scope of the goals appropriate?
- Are there too few or too many goals?
- Are the goals coordinated with others' goals?
- Are the goals results-based and measurable?



¹ Corporate Leadership Council, *Best Practices to Engage Employees*, 2009.

² *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work*, by Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer, HBR Press, 2011.

Engaging Conversations

Make Connections to the Organization

By explaining the connection between employees' individual jobs and the organization, you can greatly increase employee satisfaction with their day-to-day work. An analysis of over 300 different ways to motivate employees found that this is the best way to increase the effort they put into their work. To connect your employees' work to the organization, you have ongoing conversations with employees throughout the year. Three critical pieces of information to communicate to employees during these conversations include:

- **“Who We Are”** — The organization's goals and strategy, how the organization operates, and what senior leadership hopes to achieve.
- **“Why We Exist”** — The organization's mission and vision and why the organization's strategy and goals matter.
- **“How You Help Us Succeed”** — How the employee's role helps achieve the mission for which the organization exists.



Give Feedback and Ask for Feedback

As a manager, part of your role is to provide regular feedback to your employees. There are many opportunities to provide feedback to your direct reports without taking significant amounts of time away from your other activities. Remember to ask your employees for feedback as well.

One helpful formula for providing feedback is the Behavior plus Impact model (plus Alternative Positive Behavior in cases of constructive criticism); stating the behavior, its impact, and possible alternatives helps to ensure that the feedback is grounded in observation and contains specific suggestions for improvement. The more you practice using this formula, the more it will feel natural to you when giving feedback.

Be a Coaching Manager

Most employees want to make a difference in the workplace and to have a voice, a say in how the work is done. As a manager, you act as a coach to your employees to bring out their best while developing their skills. The [GROW Model](#) is a simple framework for structuring coaching conversations. You can help your employees to establish a **goal**, examine the current **reality**, explore **options**, and decide what they **will** do.

Joseph Weintraub³ defines this type of coaching as “an ongoing dialogue with the goal of increasing learning and improving one's ability to perform effectively now and in the future”. This approach uses open-ended questioning combined with listening to lead employees to think about situations differently and to be open to new ways of acting all with the intent of bring out their best.

³ Joe Weintraub, *The Coaching Manager*, Sage Publications, 2011.

Career Connections

Recognize Strengths

Acknowledging performance strengths in formal reviews has one of the greatest impacts on employee performance. Managers can improve employee performance by up to 36% this way, because they are formally reinforcing performance-enhancing behavior.

It is also critical to include the right type of development constructive feedback in formal performance reviews. So while emphasizing employee strengths, complement this with constructive feedback that employees can respond to and act on through targeted, specific guidance.

Reward Performance

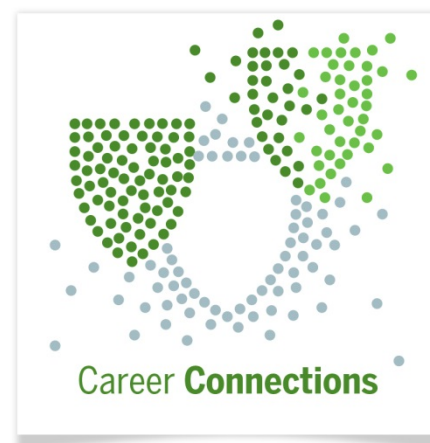
Non-cash rewards, (e.g., a public acknowledgement or a low-cost perk) can motivate employees as much as cash bonuses in some cases. For non-cash awards to effectively increase employee effort, follow these three steps:

- **Thank the Employee** — Express your gratitude; it is key to recognize and appreciate your employees.
- **Describe What the Employee Did** — Ensure the employee understands why they are being recognized so that they are more likely to repeat the behavior in the future.
- **Explain How the Employee's Action Added Value** — Describe how the employee's action helped you, the team, or the organization.

Provide Development Opportunities

Showing employees that you are fully committed to helping them advance their careers requires a dedicated effort. This is best done by helping employees create development plans that are achievable and build their skills for future positions. Achievable plans focus on on-the-job development activities. Below are six different types of on-the-job development opportunities you can discuss in development conversations:

- **Access to Best Practice** — E.g., shadowing a coworker, working with a recognized expert
- **Scope Expansion** — E.g., increasing amount of responsibilities, filling in for a manager temporarily
- **Change and Adversity** — E.g., working in a situation with rapidly changing circumstances, handling a crisis at work
- **Challenging Relationships** — E.g., working with people with contradictory and competing views, working with people from other business units, functions, or locations
- **Persuading and Teaching** — E.g., persuading senior managers to take a difficult action, teaching coworkers how to do a component of their jobs
- **Making Difficult Decisions** — E.g., making a decision with potential risk, making a decision outside area of expertise



Embracing Change and Innovation

Be Inclusive and Communicative about Change

It is much easier to keep people moving through transition and to manage change if leaders can describe clearly the journey people are on. Employees want to be aware of the bigger purpose and picture and included on the larger plan, so clear communication of the “four Ps” is crucial to employee engagement⁴:

- **Purpose** — Why are we doing this? What is the problem this will address? What are we trying to accomplish? *If people have a clear sense of purpose, they can endure more confusion than they could otherwise.*
- **Picture** — What is the outcome going to be like? How is it going to work and what is it going to feel like? *Giving people a vivid picture of what you are trying to create is the vision needed to keep them going. Without it, the final destination is unclear.*
- **Plan** — People need to know the path to getting to the destination or they will not have confidence that the organization can get there. *A step by step plan helps people keep confident (they know the means to the end).*
- **Part** — You have to give people a meaningful role to play. *Their commitment to making the change work depends on how much they feel they are part of the change.*

Be Open to Ideas and Encourage Innovation

Employees feel like they have the most impact on the organization when you create a work environment that encourages innovation and openness to new ideas. In this work environment, new ideas are not only suggested, but the best ones are actively managed and implemented. For employees to suggest valuable and feasible ideas, you can share your understanding of business challenges before they begin brainstorming ideas. Encourage them to do the following four activities to better solve business challenges:

- Clearly articulate the problem
- Identify the problem’s root causes
- Define success
- Understand conventional solutions and their limitations

Articles

- [“The Progress Principle”](#) by Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer
- [“Leading Change”](#) by John Kotter
- [“Decoding Resistance to Change”](#) by Jeffrey and Laurie Ford
- [“The Innovators DNA”](#) by Clayton Christensen, Jeffrey Dyer and Hal Gregersen
- [“Employee Motivation”](#) by Nitin Nohria, Boris Groysberg, and Linda-Eling Lee
- [“Discussing the Undiscussable”](#) by William Noonan



⁴ William Bridges and Susan Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2009.