

**PRNews**

THE BOOK OF  
**EMPLOYEE**  
**COMMUNICATIONS**  
STRATEGIES & TACTICS

# Boost Employee Morale and Impact Company Operations via Engagement

By Autumn Manning

Public relations can often get a bad rap in pop culture, but in reality, PR professionals are some of the most innovative, creative and determined people in the modern workforce. PR practitioners spend ample time strategizing integrated campaigns, writing persuasive content, and creating meaningful relationships with the media to assure the right news is delivered to the right people.

At the same time, recent data shows not all PR professionals are completely satisfied with their jobs. The survey showed that both executive leadership and their employees gave job satisfaction and organizational culture a “B-” grade, citing “an open communication system” and “enhancing interpersonal skills to enrich relationships and teamwork” as key ingredients to becoming happier and more fulfilled at work. Essentially, PR professionals want to feel connected and engaged with one another, and with their organization’s mission and culture as whole.

Employee engagement and recognition strategies have proven to quickly and effectively combat feelings like these, and in ways that are beneficial to both employers and employees. Here are some tips for effective employee engagement to help build culture, boost morale and retain top talent in public relations:

## Use Brand, Design & Physical Space

Walk into the Chaotic Moon office in Austin, Texas, and you’re instantly overwhelmed

with a sense of “cool,” so much so that you’re questioning if you’re cool enough even to be there. As much as we’d like to believe that space doesn’t matter, we spend a minimum of 40 hours a week at the office, and it’s important that it “feels good” to be there.

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To retain top talent in PR, it’s imperative that employee workspace is conducive to interconnectivity and contemplation. Open space concepts and group meeting areas encourage thoughtful conversation, idea sharing and open communication. The good thing about this strategy is that office designs that are conducive to collaboration and productivity are often the cheapest.

Consider these ideas when thinking about in-office engagement and communication:

- Buy your furniture from **Ikea** and **Overstock.com**
- Pick accent walls for a splash of color
- Rip the carpet up and stain cement floors
- When painting, think of the wall as your billboard

## The Constructive Feedback Framework, Explained

### 1. Get In the Right Mindset

Before delivering feedback, leaders should clarify the message they intend to deliver. By identifying the specific information that needs to be communicated, leaders can ensure they focus on what's important, eliminating extraneous "noise" from the conversation.

### 2. Focus on the What, Not the Who

It isn't necessary to editorialize the characters of your team members. When giving feedback, leaders should seek to address and improve specific elements of behavior rather than attempting to point out the problematic traits of an individual.

### 3. Give Specific Examples

While leaders should refrain from naming names or repeating hearsay in feedback meetings, they should point to specific examples of the behavior they're trying to address. This specificity will give team members a clear picture of where they fell short and recognize an opportunity to improve.

### 4. Explain the Impact

Team members may not necessarily recognize why certain behaviors are problematic. They might not understand how important their role on the team is. Specifically inform them of how their behavior impacts them, their team and the organization as a whole.

### 5. Pause

When providing feedback, it's important to

create a dialogue rather than talking "at" team members. Remember to pause, to check for understanding and to let team members speak. Additionally, leaders should make sure to listen for any questions or concerns team members may have.

### 6. Outline Next Steps

Feedback conversations remain somewhat impractical if a course of action isn't taken to address what is discussed. Leaders and team members should work together to determine actionable steps to take to deal with the issues covered in the critique, and all stakeholders should retain notes to keep them on track. In addition to forming an action plan, it is a good idea to determine ways to measure progress toward the outcome of the intended feedback.

### 7. Follow-Up and Follow-Through

After implementing the action steps determined during the constructive feedback meeting, leaders should casually check in on the progress of the team member. Leaders should use follow-up conversations to address any questions or needs their team members have; they can also use this time to remind them of upcoming milestones, and to give positive feedback so that team members know their improvement is being actively recognized. Naturally, if more corrective intervention is required, leaders should gently share that feedback as well.

## Promote Trust and Eliminate Hierarchical Barriers

A **Plank Center** study [[bit.ly/2fo3rSa](http://bit.ly/2fo3rSa)] showed another major contributor to job dissatisfaction in public relations is a "lack of trust" in an organization—data showed that a significant gap exists between leadership and their employees' perception of job satisfaction, performance and engagement.

Public relations and agency culture can permeate a feeling of internal distance due to

its natural, hierarchical structure, and agencies can especially benefit from initiatives that eliminate these kinds of barriers. If you sense a divide in your organization, consider flipping traditional company structure on its head to ensure every employee is treated the same, with equal amounts of respect. Imagine an office culture where there's no emphasis on heavy titles, or where executives sit in the same type of desk and chairs as the employees.

Professional development programs are

another great way to show an investment in each and every employee in order to close the divide between upper management and junior staff. Try implementing a “PR University” program to train new staff on topics like media relations, content marketing and press trip planning. Don’t forget to include even your highest leadership in these initiatives, too, to unite your team as a collaborative and cohesive unit where no one is above another.

### **Use Constructive Feedback as a Springboard for Engagement**

In public relations, team collaboration and interconnectivity are key to foster a culture of open communication and constructive feedback, and ensure that fresh, innovative ideas are always flowing.

Successful PR leaders must remember that each member of their team plays an important role in their organization’s success and that each brings a unique set of skills, perspectives and strengths.

When used the right way, feedback is an excellent engagement strategy that can help your team assess strengths and weaknesses. Understanding this will allow you to leverage team strengths, while also allowing leaders to intervene and direct support to where it’s needed most.

### **Implement Quality of Life and Time-Saving Rewards to Help Leverage Long Hours**

From balancing a plethora of accounts to meeting deadlines and producing the best possible work for clients, PR professionals spend hours upon hours at their desks, with weekly work time clocking in close to employees in medicine or law. When it finally comes time to relax, employees may feel they haven’t had close to enough time to unwind before it’s already time to head back to the office. Quality of life and time-saving rewards

can help enhance your employees’ time outside of work, so that they remain refreshed, fulfilled and consistently ready to perform their best.

Rewards like free grocery delivery or laundry service for a month, or the opportunity to come in late for a week can be the small boost your staff needs to keep team morale thriving. Or maybe your employees work for clients that often host major announcements or events on the weekends—in this case, rewards like a half-day off to hit the spa or catch a movie will help your team take back the weekend and come back refreshed and ready to produce awesome work.

### **Give Your Team Purpose Through Participation in Wellness and Corporate Social Responsibility**

In public relations, it can be difficult to find a happy medium with work-life balance, let alone prioritize health and wellness on a daily or weekly basis. By incorporating employee wellness initiatives into your organizational culture, your team will feel appreciated, respected and motivated to give their best to the job.

**Smith Brothers**, a communications agency based in Pittsburgh, Penn., understands just how stressful the agency environment can be and has transformed its company culture by making health and wellness a priority within the office. The team embraces a healthier lifestyle by sharing health and wellness success stories, new workout tips, and healthy meal and juice recipes, which they include in their weekly emails to the team.

Here are three things you can do to boost morale and culture through wellness initiatives:

- Organize a team to come up with ideas for the rest of the staff. Having a health committee will help you push forward and organize those awesome ideas.

- Keep wellness top of mind by sharing best practices with your team on a weekly basis. Include some health tips in your weekly newsletter to the team or the dashboard in the break room.
- Encourage people to share their big wins with the team. Hearing your coworkers' success stories will encourage more people to hop on the healthy bandwagon.

Alternatively, rewards that go hand in hand with corporate social responsibility give employees more meaning at work through service to the community. Public relations practitioners often serve clients across a variety of industries, and rewarding employees with a day off to volunteer or donate to the organization that means most to them is an excellent way to give employees individual meaning and purpose through their hard work.

### **Align Employee Behavior With Company Values to Foster Positivity and Inclusion**

As is the case with many industries, public relations can become very internally competitive. While all PR professionals are pushed to produce high-caliber work for their clients, they are also in competition with their colleagues to move up within an organization. This is natural, of course, but preventing this behavior from becoming too saturated within

your team's culture will help foster a more engaged, positive and motivated staff as a whole.

For example, in weekly or monthly staff meetings, try implementing a program where one employee passes on an award to a peer with an explanation of why they deserve it. Or consider hosting an annual peer-to-peer award ceremony during a company party where everyone votes on someone who was most aligned with core company values throughout the year. In an industry that can instinctively feel highly competitive, bringing your employees together through consistent peer-to-peer recognition will work wonders for boosting team morale.

### **The Bottom Line**

Creating a culture of appreciation and investment might seem like a “nice to do” and not a “have to do” for your team when so many other day-to-day items can easily stand in the way. But the benefits of implementing a culture of effective engagement, rewards, constructive feedback, and professional development truly outweigh these obstacles. And in an industry that thrives on creativity and the consistent exchange of ideas, assuring employees feel recognized and appreciated has never been so important. ■

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