

CHAPTER 5: STEP ONE, MEASURE IT

If you want something to improve you need to measure it. This is true of employee engagement, too. Now, if your company is already running an annual engagement survey and you're getting a report on how your team is doing, that's great. Just skip this chapter.

But let's assume you have no idea of the current engagement level of your team. Having a feeling about it doesn't count. You need a number. You need a specific number that you can then look back on to see if your engagement efforts are working or not.

In every one of my companies I would do an engagement check every six months.

Most companies either don't measure engagement at all, or they do a survey every two years. The big consulting companies will tell you to do one every year. I don't think that's enough.

The problem with doing them annually, or (Heaven forbid) every two years, is that factors outside of your control *might* impact the scores a bit (while you, as boss, are the primary driver, you aren't the only driver).

For example, if you do an engagement survey after laying off 20% of your company, that would negatively impact your scores. If you do an engagement check right after launching a major new product, or issuing big bonus checks, that might skew the scores in the positive. It's not that those results would be invalid, it just that you don't know if they are lasting. Thus, doing an engagement check every six months ensures that you see the big picture and nuances of the external events are smoothed out.

When it comes to actually measuring your team's level of engagement you have three options.

OPTION 1: HIRE AN ENGAGEMENT RESEARCH COMPANY

If you are a senior executive with a large extended team (say 100 people or more) and a decent budget, the right way to measure engagement is to hire an external company to administer an employee engagement survey.

Hiring outside experts means you'll get a tailored set of survey questions, detailed analysis including question correlations, and you'll be able to benchmark your own organization against their other clients in the database.

If you need recommendations for a companies that do this kind of work just email me at info@kevinkruse.com.

OPTION 2: DO YOUR OWN QUICK AND DIRTY SURVEY

Survey experts and HR professionals would tell you doing your own survey is crazy; leave it to experts. They'll tell you all the reasons why a "do it yourself" approach is flawed. But I say, if you can't afford to hire outside experts, doing it yourself is better than nothing. To administer your own survey, you'll want to sign-up for an online survey service like SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>) or Zoomerang (<http://www.zoomerang.com>). You can get basic services for free, or pay a little and get more functionality.

Using one of these online survey programs will enable you to create the survey, send it out to your team members, and to easily calculate the scores.

When you go to create your survey, you'll want to choose your question type. All questions will be a standard "Likert-scale" which means you are asking if people agree or disagree, using a five point scale.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

Now come the questions themselves. There are just seven of them:

1. I am extremely satisfied working in [insert your organization's name].
2. I rarely think about finding a new job in a different company.
3. I would recommend [insert your organization's name] to my friends as a great place to work.

4. There is frequent, two-way communication at [insert your organization's name].
5. [Insert your organization's name] provides me with sufficient opportunities for learning and development.
6. I feel appreciated at work.
7. I am confident that [insert your organization's name] has a bright future.

The first three questions measure current levels of engagement using methodology similar to how you would measure customer satisfaction. The next four questions measure the key drivers of engagement (i.e., communication, growth, recognition and trust).

You should send out the survey and give people two weeks to complete it. More time won't really increase the response rate, and less time means you might miss people who have taken a week's vacation. Make sure to remind people to take it if they haven't done so, and explain that you really do care about their results, and will share the results with the whole team.

To score the survey when it's complete, just run a summary report which will give you the average score for each question.

So, what's a good score?

In general, using a five point rating system, you should consider scores above 4.0 to be very good, between 3.5 and 4.0 as good, and anything below a 3.5 as bad.

I won a Best Place to Work in PA award with overall engagement scores around 4.2. One accomplished survey researcher told me, "*The rule of thumb is, 4's are great and if you see 2's you're going to start seeing people quit.*"

The biggest problems with doing your own surveys are the issues of confidentiality and anonymity.

Surveys should be confidential to get honest feedback, and using an outside survey company gives confidence to your employees that indeed it will be anonymous.

But when you do your own survey, even if you set it up to be anonymous, employees will rightly wonder if there isn't some way you'll be tracking their responses back to their individual email or IP addresses. There is no solution to this other than to tell your team that the survey is anonymous, and that you are just going to be looking at the average scores for each question to see how you can do a better job as a leader. It might help if the survey software is actually setup and utilized by an administrative assistant or even someone in another department.

OPTION 3: JUST HAVE A CONVERSATION ABOUT IT

If you have a really small team, say less than five people, doing a web-based survey might not be practical, and it becomes far harder to ensure anonymity. In this case, I suggest you just have a good old fashion conversation with your team.

This approach is also known as a "stay interview." Many are familiar with the concept of exit interviews—interviews conducted by HR when someone resigns to discuss what led to the departure. A stay interview is similar, but is designed to find out what will make someone stay in the company. A recent issue of *HR Magazine* (December 2011) shared the case of Burcham Hills Retirement Community which decreased turnover by 72% by implementing annual stay interviews with all veteran employees.

The idea is to literally ask your team members about their current levels of engagement and how they feel about the issues of Communication, Growth, Recognition and Trust. You shouldn't just hammer them with the verbatim questions while taking notes. Make it more conversational.

Also, this initial conversation is more about understanding their current perceptions about how things are going. You don't have to get into solving the problems (we'll do that later).

For example, when I took over leadership of a small four person non-profit, one of the first things I did was to have one-on-one conversations and asked them how they were feeling about things. I needed to know whether they were gung ho and fired up, or were they going to hand me a resignation letter within a few days.

An “engagement conversation” should be conversational. Let’s assume a manager is talking to a direct-report named Amanda...

Manager: So, Amanda, it’s really important to me that we’re all engaged at work and I want to really focus on our team’s engagement moving forward. Can you tell me how things have been going for you...how satisfied are you with your job lately?

Amanda: Things are OK. You know, some days are better than others.

Manager: Well it sounds like you’re pretty satisfied, but you aren’t jumping out of bed each morning thrilled to be heading into work. Do you think much about looking for a new job? Do you think things are going pretty well for you here?

Amanda: [Laughs] I’m not looking for a job, don’t worry. Things are OK.

Manager: But just “OK”. What if we had a job opening...would you tell your friends about it? Would you encourage them to apply?

Amanda: Yes, definitely. The benefits are great here, the people are good to work with. I’d recommend it.

Manager: How about the issue of communication? Happy with the level of communication on the team or can we be doing better?

Amanda: Well, I don’t want to be negative but I don’t think we really know what’s going on around here. It seems like projects pop-up with no notice, and we’re only told about our specific area...we never know the big picture.

Manager: What about learning and training? How do you feel things are going in this area?

Amanda: Can’t complain about that. Between the online courses, tuition reimbursement and new software training, I think we have plenty. Maybe just not enough time to take advantage of all of it.

Manager: OK. How about the area of recognition? Do you feel I and the company are recognizing your accomplishments?

Amanda: I’m not looking for that. I mean getting a thank you is always nice. I have wondered why nobody from our department ever gets recognized in the Presidents letter.

Manager: OK, last question. How do you feel about future of the company? How confident are you that we can accomplish our goals?

Amanda: I don’t even know what the company’s goals are. I just focus on what I need to do each day and figure the rest will take care of itself.

Manager: I understand. Well, we’ll be trying to make improvements in a lot of these areas and we’ll work as a team to brainstorm some things we can do. Thanks again for letting me know how you feel about all this.

Notice that the manager isn’t trying to solve Amanda’s issues or have a big debate about them. The purpose of a stay interview is to just gather information. You can come back later to discuss possible remedies.