

Connecting Heads and Hearts to Engage Employees

Leaders in behavioral health have a responsibility to create a culture of connection for staff who put their whole hearts into taking care of others.

Gallup reported that **70%** of US workers are not engaged at work¹.

The impact of a disengaged employee is correlated with:

- Decreased employee satisfaction
- Poor customer service
- Decreased productivity
- Burnout, absenteeism
- High turnover, recruitment challenges
- Negative organizational reputation
- Decreased revenue

The more engaged your employees, the better your ROI.

Watch the self-care trap for your employees

Leaders need to take an active role in making space for these practices. We cannot ask employees to manage their self-care without also taking responsibility to decrease stress by promoting autonomy and control over one's work.

Ask: **What can I do to help?**

What do you need to be able to thrive in your work?

While many leaders are aware of the stress and workload of staff, we need to help solve challenges together and trust employees to determine what they do and how they do it.



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2019 Denver Business Journal

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Find a place for joy in the workplace

The **Institute for Healthcare Improvement** highlights the importance of joy in the workplace². A focus on joy is a step towards creating safe, kind places for people to find meaning and purpose in their work so there is a culture of connection and mental wellness.

- 1. Celebrate wins.** Have fun with celebrations. Ring a bell when you finish a project. Email a meme. Write a thank you note. Find ways to remind staff how much their work matters.
- 2. Give high fives.** The sincere and instant recognition associated with a high five can be unexpected and lead to a quick connection with a co-worker that may lift their mood.
- 3. Build team connections.** Set aside one hour a month for game time. Schedule walking supervision. Be willing to laugh together. Showing our true selves (regardless of title) goes a long way toward engagement.
- 4. Ask candid questions.** What makes for a good day for you? What makes you proud to work here? What's working well?
- 5. Honor milestones.** Acknowledge birthdays & work anniversaries with small tokens, cards, gratitude greetings.



The Leadership Responsibility for Culture

Building an engaged culture takes time and an unwavering priority focus on the importance of people. Leaders actively working to shift their culture benefit from applying **change theory**⁴ to push forward the mission and strategy of engaging employees and putting people first.

UNDERSTAND the need for change. An engaged workforce is a competitive advantage, improves quality of care, and revenue. But you can't change what you don't understand. What is your current turnover rate? How are the reviews on Indeed.com? What do staff surveys tell you about the current culture?

ENLIST a core change team to focus on improving employee engagement. One leader can't do this alone. Human Resources, the Executive Team, clinical leaders and champions on the front lines can all participate in leading change efforts.

IMAGINE the vision and strategy you want for your culture. What will an engaged culture look like? What steps will you take (and invest in) to get there?

MOTIVATE for change by communicating a sense of urgency and explaining the vision thoroughly before any action is taken. You will only succeed if you are patient, persistent and trustworthy in your pursuit to build a culture of connection.

COMMUNICATE clearly, consistently, often and in multiple ways. Employees need to know this is not a fad or temporary focus for the organization.

ACT to align organizational practices with the vision and strategy that prioritizes employee engagement. Think of how you recruit, hire, reward and recognize staff, as well as how you supervise day to day and ensure your leaders have presence and a commitment to their peeps.

This presentation is primarily based on two articles I wrote for the Denver Business Journal:
<https://www.bizjournals.com/denver/news/2019/05/01/4-ways-for-leaders-to-take-the-stress-out-of-work.html>
<https://www.bizjournals.com/denver/news/2018/05/23/finding-a-place-for-joy-in-the-workplace.html>

¹ <https://news.gallup.com/reports/199961/7.aspx>

² <http://www.ihl.org/resources/Pages/IHIWhitePapers/Framework-Improving-Joy-in-Work.aspx>

³ <https://www.studergroup.com/hardwired-results/hardwired-results-01/rounding-for-outcomes>

⁴ <https://www.nhcchq.org/wp-content/uploads/ExperiencePoint-Change-Theory-primer.pdf>

Connecting Leaders with Supervisees

The number one reason employees leave an organization is because they have a poor relationship with their supervisor. Staff deserve a leader who is approachable, authentic; to have the tools and equipment to do their jobs well; appreciation; clear processes, and opportunities for professional development³.

The Studer Group has an Evidence-Based Leadership (SM) framework to guide leaders on how to support each employee as an individual using a standardized set of questions. Here are a few examples:

1. Build relationships.

How's your family? When's your next vacation?

2. What's working well for you?

3. Tell me about a meaningful connection you made with client, community partner or co-worker.

4. What tough questions can I answer for you today?



The Kindness of a Leader

Dr. Sanjay Gupta calls for **compassionate directness** when communicating our expectations and giving honest feedback using warm, open dialogue. Dr. Brené Brown wrote in *Dare to Lead*: "**Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind.**" A genuine conversation-- about good things or hard topics—demonstrates kindness to employees that creates psychological safety to get work done.

Don't be afraid to show staff how much you care.

Employees are the heart of any business. Knowing that a leader genuinely cares about their staff is a stress reliever and key way to engage employees in their work and the organization.