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How to gain leadership buy-in for employee experience initiatives

10-step guide to sustain workplace culture

Employee experience is an investment in people and people are the business

Top leaders understand the value of employee experience in setting their organizations apart. According to McKinsey, companies with strong employee experience often see 16% more engagement than those with a negative experience. More engaged teams lead to benefits like increased job satisfaction and innovation, according to Gallup. However, while investing in employee experience is a win on paper, encouraging leadership to take part or offer valuable resources in employee experience solutions can be a hard sell.

Yet employee experience solutions create a connected culture, support your people and impact your business's bottom line. According to Gallup, companies with disengaged employees cost the global economy US$89 trillion, or 9% of global GDP in 2024.

33%
more revenue seen by organizations with strong work cultures.
—GALLUP

Key areas of your culture work together to create a connected, impactful employee experience.

> Leadership development
> Organizational culture and branding
> Employee recognition
> Learning and development

Investing in employee experience is investing in your business. But how can you get your leadership on board? **Keep reading for a step-by-step guide** to gaining leadership buy-in for a more connected employee experience.

1 Establish benchmarks

A connected culture means investing in all aspects of employee experience. But without key benchmarks to focus on, your organization can't show the impact of these solutions. Start by reviewing accessible data to find out exactly where your organization currently stands and where you hope to move the needle.

How metrics drive strategy

These insights help you prioritize your initiatives. For instance, a low promotion rate or low employee retention can signal a need for leadership development. Your current employee satisfaction score or customer satisfaction rate might be a result of a lack of workplace appreciation.

It's important to help leadership understand the important context of these data points, and what it could mean for a more connected workplace.

Important data to gather

> Employee engagement rate
> Number of employee recognitions sent and received
> Participation/attendance for learning and development initiatives
> Employee retention/turnover rate
> Promotion rate
> Employee satisfaction rate and/or eNPS
> Customer satisfaction rate
> Internal communication open rates

2

Make the business case

In times of economic stress or uncertainty, companies often cut HR and employee programs first. But that's a mistake. When employees feel appreciated at work or that their growth is supported, they're 45% less likely to turn over or leave to find new roles, according to Gallup.

The cost of getting new hires up to speed

Forbes says employee turnover costs $11 billion in lost productivity in the U.S. Getting a new teammate up to speed in their new role and team takes an average of three to six months. Higher retention rate signals a happier workplace and increased job satisfaction.

What could an investment in employee experience reap in lower hiring and turnover costs for your company? What could it mean for productivity and performance? Examine the numbers and find out. It'll make a strong addition to your business case.

EXPERT TIP:
Track your investment

Each company has their own cost-to-hire. It might be time sourcing and interviewing candidates or money spent onboarding new team members.

Show results like employee growth or performance reviews. Share the wins while sharing the process to craft the full context for your leadership.

$11B is the cost of lost productivity caused by employee turnover in the U.S.

3
Tie everything to business goals

Leaders are often already aware of issues with the company culture that drive dissatisfaction, disengagement and turnover, but they might not be aware of potential solutions. They also might not be aware of how those negative cultural attributes drive business issues like poor customer service, low productivity and decreased innovation.

Culture investments are business investments

Strengthening your recognition program can influence productivity and performance. Engaging employee messaging and branding retains employees and attracts top talent in a competitive job market. The right leadership development or learning programs can build employee loyalty and innovation.

**EXPERT TIP:
Craft the narrative**

Work with leadership to understand their goals and challenges to frame the need for an employee engagement solution. It builds trust, so all parties understand how you're measuring success.

Use a narrative-driven approach to also empower each role in the part they play.

4 Gather and share employee feedback

Demonstrate the behaviors needed for a successful connected culture by sharing employee feedback. When crafting your plan, gather feedback like employee sentiment or job satisfaction to determine initiatives and priorities. Use this information to emphasize the need for a new employee experience initiative.

The power of open-ended questions

Give employees an opportunity to share candid feedback through open-ended questions or discussion prompts. Ask about their thoughts on workplace appreciation, company pride and career growth opportunities. These activities show the importance of employee recognition, employer branding, and learning and development respectively.

Getting a true grasp on employee sentiment builds trust between all levels of the organization. Employees feel heard and managers can act on data that directly impacts their team members.

Methods for gathering employee feedback

> Employee engagement surveys

> ENPs

> Exit surveys

> Online reviews

> Performance reviews

> Focus groups

> One on one interviews

> Suggestion box

5 Define success

Showing leadership the expected ROI keeps your team accountable for the results. Give leadership a data-backed narrative about how your program will impact work culture, the timeline of its launch, the benchmarks you'll track and what success will look like.

Expand how you gather feedback

You may find that you'll need to implement additional feedback loops like pulse surveys or one-on-one interviews to track metrics. Many organizations only gather employee feedback once per year in an employee opinion survey, but that's not often enough to track these changes effectively. Adding tools like pulse surveys can fill the gap and give you greater insights, without adding survey fatigue.

EXPERT TIP:
Use data to prove the need

Data builds buy-in, from manager-level to executive-level. Consider the cost of turnover. Knowing exactly how much it costs you to rehire for a role can motivate executives to your your program.

Recruitment Costs
+
Training and Onboarding Costs
+
Lost Productivity
(New Hire Salary × Learning Curve Duration)
+
Customer Service Impact

=

TOTAL TURNOVER COST

6 Seek out internal champions

It's easier to earn leadership buy-in if you have people from across the organization advocating for a connected culture.

A great way to engage champions is by empowering their voices. Host focus groups to gather their ideas on improving your employee experience. Then use their feedback to create initiatives to give them some ownership over your plan.

Advocacy training leads to stronger buy-in

You can also train them in best practices for communication and leadership techniques. Provide materials like talking points and internal communication channels so they can share ideas. These advocates not only help you create a stronger plan, but also stir up its excitement and, later on, adoption.

Look for champions with leadership skills

Have highly engaged teams and can share learnings about what works

Have low-engagement teams and want to see improvements

Are currently champions for employee experience programs

Are leaders who advocate for employees at all levels

Are employees who want more ways to get involved and lead cultural change

7 Share success stories

Make a stronger case by gathering additional internal or external data or consulting with your champions and figuring out compelling ways to effectively tell your story. Are there data-backed examples you can reference? Are there case studies that show a successful employee experience's impact?

How to find great examples

> Join HR or people operations groups online
> Look at similar companies in your industry
> Invite people in your network for coffee chats
> Sign up for HR newsletters
> Read business or HR news sites for success stories

$11M+

saved by improving retention of new associates

(ITA Group client success story)

8 Outline your path forward

Having a clear, detailed plan in place for making and measuring progress helps know exactly what you will roll out, when it will all happen, and how soon you'll see progress. Show leadership a compelling path forward, and they're more likely to get onboard.

Outline program specifics

> Expected budget with a detailed breakdown of costs and resources
> Expected timelines for rolling out every stage of the project
> Benchmarks for success
> Potential roadblocks and what you plan to do to address them
> How often you'll report on progress and success

EXPERT TIP: Start small

If you're struggling to get leadership immediately on board, consider pitching something small to start. A pilot program can build momentum for bigger changes, especially once leaders see that those changes are feasible and successful.

But even small programs need to have that careful road map and accountability built in to make the most of that momentum. And it's helpful to have a plan in place to immediately expand it once you've earned buy-in.

9 Empower leadership

Incorporating tools at your manager's disposal gets leadership involved and is part of your program's success. Proactively get them on board and set them up for success with any resources so they can make or measure changes.

Involve managers from the start

This might include ways for management to track participation in training courses or examples of crafting effective employee recognition. Share internal data or feedback captured from your employee experience initiatives and what it means for the next stages of growth. Connect them with your internal champions. Also, ask and receive feedback from leadership to make your program stronger.

EXPERT TIP: Build trust

Empowering leadership builds trust and collaboration. It shows you value their contribution. And it means each team has a stake in the program's success.

> HR teams support business goals.
> Executives get insight into what matters to team members.
> Managers lead by example by engaging in the program

10

Communicate progress

Learning and development (L&D) programs are opportunities to grow and nurture talent, which impacts retention and loyalty. Employees feel that sense of purpose and workplace happiness. They feel supported and are more likely to refer a friend or past colleague to roles in the organization, which boosts the employer brand.

Leadership development helps higher ups with their approach to people management, empathy and decision-making, driving team's motivation, not to mention confidence. Engaged managers see the value in employee recognition and lead the way with shoutouts, which drives performance and employee happiness. Happier teams mean higher employee engagement, which means increased company pride.

A connected culture impacts all aspects of an employee's experience

Whether it's an L&D program, a leadership development initiative or a recognition tool, these solutions make your employees or managers agents of change. They have an opportunity to grow and really impact your organization's culture and brand.

**EXPERT TIP:
Track growth**

To assess a program's efficacy with your employees, track and report progress to the leadership team and stakeholders.

10 Communicate progress (cont.)

Track success for each employee engagement program

Leadership development

> Promotion rate

> Performance reviews

> Employee turnover/retention

> Sales revenue

> Customer satisfaction

> Productivity levels

Employee recognition

> Sales revenue

> Customer satisfaction

> Productivity levels

> Alignment to core values

> Participation in recognition programs

Organizational culture and branding

> Workplace trust

> Company pride

> Employee referrals

> Brand awareness

> Quality of hires

> Time to hire

Learning and development

> Employee engagement

> Completion rates

> Post-training performance

> Employee retention

> Productivity

You should already have a framework for this based on your plan and the metrics and tactics you chose to use, such as employee lifecycle data, engagement surveys, interviews or pulse surveys.

Use the same framework at intervals, like 30-60-90 days after launch, to track initial launch success, then commit to routine check-ins to continue to grow your program. Be sure to also gather qualitative feedback close to launch and, later on, at intervals. This helps you find the "why" behind some key metrics too.

Sharing progress not only helps leadership understand the program's success but also how your team will work to iterate and grow the initiative.

Map out your engagement program pitch

How can you set yourself up for success when pitching a more connected culture strategy to your leadership team? The key is tailoring it to your unique company, employees and leadership. The list below outlines the most important elements you need to identify and answer in order to earn leadership buy-in.

1. Establish existing benchmarks
> Determine data points you want to track overtime
> Gather metrics on current employee engagement

2. Make the business case first
> Determine cost per hire
> Determine average time to onboard
> Determine employee turnover rate

3. Tie everything to business goals
> Track productivity or performance
> Track employee loyalty
> Track employee referrals

4. Gather and share employee feedback
> Determine methods for gathering employee feedback
> Determine open-ended questions

5. Define success
> Outline how often you'll gather feedback and data
> Determine any benchmarks to stay on track

6. Seek out internal champions
> Get all of HR onboard first
> Find cross-organizational leaders and influencers
> Gather feedback from your advocates
> Onboard and train champions

7. Share success stories
> Research best practices
> Gather relevant case studies
> Chat with thought leaders

8. Outline your path forward
> Outline expected timeline
> Outline expected budget and needed resources
> Determine potential roadblocks

9. Empower leadership
> Determine tools or resources for leadership
> Develop leadership survey

10. Communicate progress
> Determine benchmarks for each facet of connected culture
> Outline how often you'll gather feedback and data
> Create a communication plan to share results

Invite leaders and team members to be agents of change in your company culture

Contact us to learn how.

ita group.