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Sylvia Vorhauser-Smith, Contributor
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How the Best Places to Work are Nailing Employee Engagement

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[Research](#) shows four out of 10 workers are disengaged globally. In the U.S., the situation is worse. According to the latest [State of the American Workplace Report](#), 70 percent of U.S. workers don't like their job, creating an environment where many workers are emotionally disconnected from their workplace and less productive than engaged counterparts.

HR leaders bang the employee engagement drum with good reason; employees engaged in their work are likely to be motivated, to remain committed to their employer and to stay focused on achieving business goals and driving the organization's future. Disengaged employees can drag down others and impact everything from customer service to sales, quality, productivity, retention and other critical business areas.

Beyond salary, psychological and social fulfillment can determine which employees are motivated to stay, perform, and contribute to organization success. Companies that nail employee engagement understand that motivating high performance and aligning talent with business strategy requires getting to the heart of what matters to employees.

Fostering a culture of engaged employees

So what engages employees? The drivers differ region to region and person to person, but employee engagement is largely about social connections happening in organizations and aligning work experiences with employees' cultural needs. For example, research shows North American and Eastern European workers place high priority on financial rewards in relation to how satisfied they are at work, but elsewhere it's about simple connections and involvement – meeting the more altruistic and basic human needs of feeling connected and being an important part in something bigger.

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I am the Senior Vice President of Research at PageUp People. I am responsible for driving thought leadership in the field of human capital management for global organisations facing cross border expansion and growth. I have more than 25

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What works varies by industry, location, company size, and how much money and resources the organization has to invest into developing its culture, and its value and philosophy around employee engagement. But there are factors that all highly engaged workplaces have in common. How do [the best places to work](#) succeed at employee engagement?

They understand what employees are thinking – Using employee engagement surveys are just one of the ways the best companies get a pulse on their workforce. Others like Recreational Equipment ([REI](#)) use social media to get intimate with employees. Its online “company campfire” offers associates and executives the ability to share their thoughts and participate in lively debates and discussions. More than 4,500 of its 11,000 employees have logged in at least once since it was launched last year– demonstrating that having a voice matters to engagement.

They create an intentional culture – [Google](#) has created an environment for employees to thrive that goes beyond stocking its kitchens with free gourmet food and on-site laundry service. Its corporate culture is one of the reasons it is consistently ranked a great place to work. [Google](#) [GOOG -0.24%](#) values the opinions of employees and hires new associates by committee. It communicates an environment of playfulness from whimsical doodles to [April Fool’s Day](#) jokes. [Facebook](#) is also overt about its culture, articulating its values on posters, in meetings and through other employee communications to ensure employee values align with the company.

They demonstrate appreciation for contributions big and small – [DHL Express](#) takes employee engagement seriously in the office, on the roads and in the air. It has an incredible culture of thanking employees, whether that’s through monetary rewards, honoring top performers at its annual Hollywood-style black-tie event or pinning notes of appreciation on the company corkboard.

They commit to open, honest communication – At [SAP](#), communication is core to the culture. Employees understand the “why” behind their jobs – what they’re expected to achieve and why it’s important to the greater good of the organization. Collaboration is valued and teams communicate globally to get projects accomplished. [Leaders](#) listen to employee feedback and encourage it.

They support career path development – Mentoring is a big priority at [M.D. Anderson Cancer Center](#). Its formal mentoring program helps employees develop professional goals and connect with colleagues. This commitment to growth at all levels – not just senior leaders – shows employees there’s a future for them.

They engage in social interactions outside work – [Cummins](#) has a commitment to the communities where it lives and operates. More than

The author is a Forbes contributor. The opinions expressed are those of the writer.

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27,000 [Cummins](#) CMI -0.97% employees worked on community service projects in 2012, a 63 percent increase over the 16,500 employees who participated in the company's Every Employee Every Community (EEEE) initiative in 2011. Participation in these events is a great way to strengthen relationships and adds an enjoyable social dimension to work. When colleagues feel connected, productivity improves.

They know how to communicate the organization's stories – [Southwest Airlines](#) has a reputation for outstanding employment branding. Being fast, fun and friendly is part of their DNA. Even those who don't work for the organization have the perception that it's an innovative, fun and cool place to work. A strong employment brand that offers clarity on the organization culture and what it stands for ensures that the right people are attracted to the organization and the wrong people apply elsewhere.

Having the right engagement practices powered by understanding the drivers most meaningful to employees can work towards creating a more motivated and high-performing workforce. Committing to an intentional culture that's open, transparent, and enables employees to thrive is important for retaining top performers. Whether it's participating in community events, celebrating coworkers or fostering more open communication, organizations that build a culture where employee involvement matters can nail employee engagement and create a great place to work.



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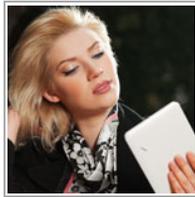
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