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PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Reengaging Employees to Improve Performance

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Many employees feel overworked and overburdened while being underpaid and underappreciated. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought [awareness to challenges](#) in our business world. More and more employees are feeling distant from their work, without the proper leadership and skills to advance in their roles. This is unsurprising given the societal upheaval in the past few years, including the pressures of political and social divisions to the ongoing work challenges spurred by a global pandemic.

Unsatisfied workers are nothing new, but the scale at which the unrest is permeating the professional world makes it a critical issue. A [recent Gallup poll](#) found that “quiet quitters,” or those that have committed to doing only the bare minimum of their job requirements, account for at least 50% of the U.S. workforce, with engaged workers making up just 32% of employees. Though there is plenty of discussion about the problem being [fueled by Gen Z and younger Millennials](#), the problem emanates from the highest levels of organizations, with Gallup finding that only one in three managers are engaged at work.

The Importance of Employee Engagement

Engaged employees are critical to an organization’s success, but recent statistics highlight how vital engagement truly is. According to the Gallup poll, disengaged employees are estimated to cost U.S. businesses \$450 to \$550 billion per year, with highly engaged workforces averaging 21% greater profitability for their respective organizations.

It’s [been reported that](#), in a Stanford study by Jim Barron and Mike Hannon, companies with positive corporate cultures can experience a 682% increase in revenue over just 11 years, with employees who feel heard and appreciated being 4.6 times more likely to perform at their best. Thus, employee engagement is not just vital to a company’s image but is essential to a business’ bottom line.

Many business executives have forgotten a key management principle: Employee trust increases productivity, and increased productivity increases profits. This fundamental concept is all the more important given the rapidly increasing costs to recruit, train, develop, [engage and retain top talent](#).

But What Creates and Enhances Employee Trust?

In a Harvard Business Review article, it shares that leaders determined to conquer challenges in talent management could be surprised to learn that simply throwing money or perks at the problem isn’t the real answer. Instead, leaders must understand how to connect workers to the company’s mission and establish a [sense of purpose](#) in their work.

Companies that increase employee engagement can gain a competitive edge, and companies are finding that one way to sharpen that edge is by leveraging a novel approach known as [applied improvisation \(AIM\)](#). Let’s take a look at how AIM can ignite engagement in your teams.

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What is AIM?

AIM is a scientifically based, [experiential learning process](#) that can enhance individuals and their management competencies. AIM repurposes nine key “comedic” [improv principles](#) — awareness, connections, presence, initiations, agreement, vulnerability, simplicity, value and creation — for a business setting. It’s taught in professionally delivered workshops, and the results have broad professional benefits in leadership, emotional aptitude, team development, collaboration, innovation and communication.

In another Harvard Business Review article, Francesca Gino, an associate professor at Harvard Business School, wrote, “In my academic research, I’ve looked at many different types of teams, at a wide variety of organizations all over the world. The group that communicated best, with everyone contributing and learning, wasn’t in a corporate office park; it was in an improv comedy class.” Engaged employees are imperative for a business to be successful, and AIM can enhance a wide array of [management](#) competencies. So, why is AIM so powerful at building employee engagement? Let’s explore some of the benefits of AIM in the workplace.

- AIM Builds Trust

Engagement is lost when trust is lost. Like the conditions that lead to a mutiny on a ship, an organization deteriorates when their workers lose confidence in their leaders. [Engagement](#) is intrinsically linked to trust. Improvisation can help build trust in a judgment-free environment that encourages employees to feel more honest and open. AIM teaches teams how to collaborate, effectively consider ideas and address and overcome challenges, improving trust among workers and senior executives. AIM activities, when directed by an experienced facilitator, have been shown to break down interpersonal barriers, enhance communication, heighten authenticity and diminish silo mentality. These benefits, among others, improve the level of trust among colleagues and between employees and management.

- AIM Increases Awareness and Appreciation of Others

Effective teams include individuals mutually aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and who work in tandem to achieve a common goal. No individual is perfect, and AIM effectively raises awareness of an individual’s capabilities and how they can be integrated into a team setting. This is critical for employee engagement because the proper utilization of skills can provide an individual with a sense of purpose and lead to pride in one’s work. Since [disengagement](#) is a natural result of feeling unwanted and unneeded, AIM teaches individuals how to complement each other, support each other and share credit to make everyone feel relevant and valued.

- AIM Ignites Enthusiasm

Dysconnectivity is the nail on the coffin in regards to engagement. Employees can lose interest in work when they feel disconnected from their role and their team. Improving employees’ [emotional intelligence \(EQ\)](#) can help individuals recognize their emotions, empathize with others and feel connected to their work and company. Emotional understanding is crucial in AIM, as solid relationships are needed to keep teams together and achieve shared goals. No team member is perfect, and when one’s skills and flaws are understood and accepted, there is a natural eagerness to work closer together. And when your people work together to accomplish meaningful objectives, enthusiasm can be organically produced.

- AIM Builds Camaraderie

We are social beings, and human connection is paramount to productivity. The average person spends [90,000 hours throughout a lifetime at work](#), equating to more than one-third of their lives. The importance of professional relationships cannot be overstated. [Collaboration](#) techniques, created and developed through AIM, strengthen the organization and an individual’s sense of belonging within that organization. When relationships are reinforced, work morale is boosted and overall contentedness increases. Crucially, even though AIM is typically taught in person, its lessons can benefit [hybrid and remote workplaces](#), with even long-distance relationships being vastly improved.

- AIM Instills Accountability

A great way to [increase employee engagement](#) is by reframing the concept to think about work involvement. An engaged employee is invested in work when there is a direct link between their tasks and the performance of their team or company. This begins with creating clear roles with a specific purpose within the organization. And to ensure accountability, management must follow through to ensure responsibility for accomplishing said goals. Without accountability, a team cannot function properly.

- AIM Promotes Career Advancement

[Soft skills](#) are vital to career advancement. It’s one thing to know how to do the task, but it’s another thing to be able to effectively communicate how and why. Techniques learned through AIM, such as active listening, can profoundly affect an individual’s career trajectory, providing them with much-needed [interpersonal skills](#) to quickly advance into managerial roles. Disengagement can manifest when workers feel trapped in their role. By instilling leadership, collaboration and communication skills to your people, they can gain the competencies to confront business challenges head on and make executive decisions. Enhancing their skills and capabilities can prepare them for future positions and give them a greater sense of purpose in their current role.

Conclusion

AIM’s ability to enhance vital competencies can help improve employee engagement. For management and seasoned workers, the increased sense of camaraderie, satisfaction at work and availability of professional opportunities all culminate to [boost engagement](#) and productivity. Bonuses and perks do not solely address the problem of making work more fulfilling. They only make the bitter pill of dissatisfaction easier to swallow. Increasing employee engagement can lead to happier, healthier and more successful workers, and all it takes is a little training.

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