



*An excerpt of a blog by [Insperity](#).*

## 5 ways your managers might be fostering low employee engagement

### 1. Erratic expectations

Good managers convey consistent expectations to their employees. Those expectations must be realistic, clear and concise.

But sometimes a manager is lenient one day and tough the next. Or when an employee finishes a project, they change the scope and ask the employee to start over. It's not just a matter of steadily raising the bar but treating the same employee behaviors differently at various times.

For example, an employee may turn in the same report every month with little response from the manager. Then, one month, the manager critiques it closely without acknowledging the change in expectations.

Lacking predictable expectations, employees often become disengaged because they don't know how to prioritize their efforts. This kind of response can lead to employee disengagement.

The key to maintaining consistency is communication. While there may be times when that report requires little feedback from you, it's important the employee knows why.

Expectations can change. Goals can change. The requirements of the organization can change. These need to be communicated to the employee; that way, they gain understanding.

Tell them frankly when you are aware of changes. Let them know this is what changed and why we have to adjust. Solicit their feedback.

The more you can get employees involved in the process of change, especially around expectations and goals, the more success you'll have getting them on board in a timely fashion.

## 2. Favoritism

It's human nature to enjoy working with some employees more than others. You're going to get along with certain people better than you get along with others.

But similar to having erratic expectations, sometimes managers give a different response for the same behavior from different employees due to personality preferences.

For example, when two employees ask their manager what they know about a piece of company news at separate times, the manager shares more information with one than the other.

Whether it's heavier praise or lighter critique, inconsistent responses can create an unfair environment - a real injury to employee engagement.

The way you manage through this is to make certain that you're being consistent. Consistency is always going to be key to make sure you don't appear to have favorites. And perception is important, even though it may not match the reality. You may think you're not playing favorites, but appearances may suggest otherwise.

If you're consistent with everybody, if you share information with one the way you share it with all - barring confidential matters - employees will come to understand that you're not doing things covertly and your leadership is above board.

## 3. Micromanagement

This is a challenging area, particularly with people who have a high need for control as they tend to struggle with micromanagement. Such employees may feel that you don't trust them, that you don't think they either have the acumen or the ability to do the job effectively.

That can lead to disengagement and the employee may eventually shut down and lose interest in their job if your managers insist on controlling every detail of their work.

Supervisors who micromanage may in fact be convinced that no one can do the job better than they can. They may feel overwhelmed by team performance expectations. This can make them feel insecure and cause them to place unnecessary pressure on their employees.

The bottom line is micromanagement can foster low engagement. It prevents not only the employee from being fully engaged, but also the manager, who winds up spending too much time on supervision and not enough on developing employees.

Micromanagement is slowly exiting the workforce because the generational needs are different.

For example, where baby boomers typically want to check the boxes, millennials tend to be more hands off in their work styles. Good managers learn their employees' traits and lead accordingly.

Remember, micromanagement is also a lack of communication. By not conveying clearly what's required, the manager can become too hands on. And that is a well-beaten path to employee disengagement.

## 4. Distractedness

Some managers have the opposite problem. They're too engrained in their own responsibilities and come off as aloof.

Distracted managers often ignore their employees. As a result, employees end up working in silos, disconnected from their team and the rest of the company. They lose sight of how their day-to-day work is contributing to the company's mission and goals. They may feel a lack of purpose and therefore lose motivation to put forth any extra effort.

As a leader you must model the behavior you want from your employees. If you want them engaged, you have to be engaged.

You can't be all over the map; you must be steady and stable. If you're consistent in that regard, it's less likely the distractedness is coming from something you may or may not have done.

If the distractedness is coming from the employee side, it's your job to determine the cause. Internal or external? It could be family matters, health or any number of factors. You must find out before it can be effectively addressed.

Never forget that you shouldn't expect something from your employee that you aren't delivering yourself.

## 5. Burnout

If your employees seem disengaged and overworked, it could be because your managers are.

And the converse is also true. If your managers live a balanced life, then their employees likely will as well.

Even when over-worked managers encourage their employees to be balanced, their advice may not be taken seriously. Also, managers who send weekend emails, or don't use vacation days or workplace perks generally have employees who feel pressured to do the same.

This puts your managers and employees at risk of burnout.

Again, it comes back to communication. Have conversations with your employees, ask them how they would like to be managed. A manager's style can ebb and flow within the parameters of individual preferences and remain effective. And without triggering burnout.

There will be times when a project requires extra work. There are also times when saying no is an option. As long as all parties understand the arrangement, it can help ward off burnout and disengagement.