

How to Encourage Engagement Between Employees and HR

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People pros need to show employees that they care about their well-being.



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How can I encourage my company's employees to want to engage with HR?

I love this question. It speaks to a shift in the world of HR and, most importantly, how many HR leaders are currently looking to build, or rebuild, their relationships with employees. HR has historically gotten a bad rap. My heart still breaks every time I hear someone say that HR is a compliance function intended to serve an organization, not the people who serve it.

Even rebranding as the "people" team doesn't capture the new responsibilities HR pros have taken on to serve employees. Over the past several years, they've advocated for employee safety, flexibility, and meaningful benefits, including sabbatical leave, parental and caretaker benefits, and general support of employee well-being, all during a global pandemic. They've also managed layoffs, hybrid and RTO policies, employee engagement, and DE&I efforts. Exhausting, right?

To encourage healthy engagement with employees, we, as people practitioners, must show them that we care about their well-being and the role it plays in our organization's success.

In practice, I'd break it down into four steps:

1. Say it. Words matter. Similar to how saying, "I love you" can change a romantic relationship, saying (and meaning), "We care, we're here to support you, we need your help to better understand your needs" can change your relationship with employees. Use whatever phrasing feels natural, but make sure it's authentic.

2. Listen. The more employees feel their voices are being heard, the more they'll invest in their relationship with HR. Let employees know you're here to advocate for their needs by sending out a survey or going on a listening tour. Your questions may include:

"Do our policies and benefits feel employee-friendly? If so, What should we keep doing? If not, What would make them better?"

"What would make the HR team more effective?"

When in doubt, keep it simple. Ask them how they're doing or what they did over the weekend. And let them get to know you, too. Sharing that you're exhausted because your kid kept you up all night or that you just started a new series on Netflix can convey vulnerability and humanity.

3. Act. Be transparent about your priorities and how you're approaching them. For example, if employees have asked for additional health insurance options and there are cost limitations for your organization, let them know that budget is an issue but that you're exploring alternatives that meet their needs and share a timeline. Employees often care more about transparency than whether or not something can happen.

4. Follow up. Now more than ever, part of HR is PR: How you promote what you're doing, engage with your employees, and respond to their reactions [is] integral to the success of your company. Don't set it and forget it. Continuously seek feedback on what is and isn't working and keep the lines of communication open.

Not to pile on the pressure, but how you're perceived by your employees is helping to reshape how all of HR is perceived! So, on behalf of HR professionals everywhere: Thank you. Let me know how it goes by responding to this email.