

Beyond employee engagement

A guide to enhancing productivity
and performance



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// COVID-19 is creating a paradigm shift that is realigning every system in every industry across the globe at once – in an instant.

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Since the beginning of 2020 day-to-day activities have changed dramatically. Schools have shuttered, remote work has risen, and jobs have been cut.

The already rapid pace of business has taken a jolting and unanticipated shift that is requiring intensified focus on financial survival, business operations, public health, and civic duty — all at once.

// For many businesses, it's like 10 years of change, packed into one year. //

Necessarily, company leaders are hustling to implement new operations, like empowering remote workers, setting up remote technology solutions, and writing new corporate policies.

HR professionals may find themselves in a place of unprecedented opportunity — and responsibility — to implement changes for more cohesive, diverse companies, with more effective team management and greater employee engagement.

Teams will look to discover ways to monitor, track, and improve employee engagement through surveys, one-on-one conversations, and more.

But what else can we do to inspire workers to find passion and productivity in their jobs? In this short guide we explore ways in which people teams can drive greater employee engagement in a post-pandemic world.

We start with a question:

What can People Ops do to better support employees in today's changing world?



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STEP 1

Strengthen Top Talent

Current events may have shaken standards in hiring, recruiting, and professional development, but it's only underscored the need to keep top employees.

Businesses can't afford to lose top staff, especially in times of crisis. If there were any engendered aspects of appreciation among the many interconnections between employees, business leaders, and work circles, invested staff will re-strengthen those ties as they seek greater security in their jobs, teams, and communities.

Here are new ways to engage top-talent:

- **Tap into the desire for stability to increase their roles and responsibilities.**
 - In what ways can HR departments bring top employees into strategic decision-making?
 - In what ways can top talent grow in their roles, and in what ways can people managers advocate for professional development?
- **Tap into the desire for integration to foster greater teamwork.**
 - How can top-talent lead departments and teams to greater integration?
 - Who are natural leaders in your staff who can help advocate for the values of your business?

- **Tap into the desire for community to foster deeper care about the business' health.**
 - In what ways can top talent facilitate greater connection with customers, suppliers, co-workers, and community?
 - Are there any connections among your staff that could help your business discover underserved or overlooked solutions for your business?



Measure employee engagement with **Zenefits' Employee Engagement Surveys.** Measurable, trackable, and action-oriented insights to keep your company focused on what matters: its people.

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STEP 2

Build Diverse Teams

Diversity in the workplace leads to positive impacts on innovation, and has even been shown to be a marker of competitive advantage in business.

// 67% of job seekers consider workplace diversity an important factor when considering employment opportunities, and more than 50% of current employees want their workplace to do more to increase diversity.



Yet while the benefits of diversity are clear, there are also important challenges. In her book, *Political Tribes*, Yale Professor Amy Chua says we are hardwired to be suspicious of others. In other words, there is biological programming built into each of us that makes us cautious of others to protect ourselves. It takes conscious effort to rise above our programming and be the change we want to see.

But for those companies who choose to focus on diversity and inclusion efforts, the crisis such as COVID-19 and later the racial inequality riots, could be a positive catalyst for change that alters our thoughts and actions.

How?

First, the talent pool has widened. Unemployment rates shot up to 14.7% in April 2020 before falling back to 13.3% by May 2020. Simultaneously, much of the working world quickly onboarded remote work policies, making a person's whereabouts less important for their employability. Then, civil unrest prompted by the killing of George Floyd has quickly put conversations regarding diversity and inclusion in the workforce at the tops of agendas across boardrooms.

TO BUILD DIVERSE WORKFORCES:

- Focus on hiring from diverse backgrounds
- Cultivate a culture of acceptance and inclusivity
- Celebrate employees who offer counter ideas

YOU MAY ALSO WANT TO CONSIDER FRAMEWORKS FOR CROSS-FUNCTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES ACROSS YOUR ORGANIZATION:

RISK MANAGEMENT	AWARENESS	SYSTEMATIC	INCLUSION
You are to prevent D&I related risks.	You are advocating for D&I and communicating why it's important. Driving employee engagement.	Creating systems around hiring, operations and markets to serve a wider audience.	It's part of the DNA of the company. Internal and external advisory boards.
LED BY HR	LED BY HR, SUPPORTED BY LEADERSHIP	CROSS-FUNCTIONAL PARTNERSHIP	DRIVEN BY EMPLOYEES AND CUSTOMERS

SOURCE: GLOBEWOMEN.ORG



Do your employees feel included? Do they feel like their voices are heard? Using **Employee Engagement Surveys** is a quick way to learn how employees feel.

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STEP 3

Manage Underperforming Employees

Experts estimate 75% of the workers are going to want to remain working from home after state and federal restrictions are lifted, which could cause its own set of problems.

Remote working and non-traditional in-office work arrangements could cause underperforming employees to shrink back and become “invisible.” It’s a challenge for people managers to “see” what is invisible. Often team members feel the impact of underperforming employees first. It can become an awkward situation.

When people are part of a highly functioning team, the team dynamic regulates and encourages underperforming employees. This may be lost in more disparate team orientations, if not focused on.

TO SUPPORT A HIGHER LEVEL OF TEAM PERFORMANCE AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT, MANAGERS CAN LOOK TO:

- **Create clarity and connection.**
When assignments are given, pause and review, ask direct reports for feedback. How does your part in this project contribute to the team’s success? To a better customer solution? To a more positive community relationship?
- **Encourage accountability.**
How does meeting or not meeting deadlines affect the continuity of the project? How does being prepared help or hurt the client or the team? Discuss these impacts in one-on-ones.

- **Engage and ask for commitment.**

Check-in with remote and in-office employees regularly. If people feel overwhelmed with online meetings, ask: Do you prefer more or fewer meetings? More or fewer one-on-one interactions? Then inquire: If the team supports these working preferences, how will that enable you to make a greater contribution to the group?

- **Continue to tie back to bigger goals.**

It is reassuring for employees to understand their part in the whole. Keep the conversation going. Mark the calendar to follow up in a week to re-engage, reinforce, reward, and redirect.



Performance management is a key part of professional development. Make performance management easy, scalable, and professional with Zenefits.

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STEP 4

Make Every Communication Matter

As the world of work changes, many companies are scrambling to fill the unknown with urgency and meetings.

// **Positive communication patterns put in place now will be building blocks for the future.** //

Not just Zoom, whose stock price rose more than 100% amid pandemic ripples, but all kinds of communication: Slack, Outlook, Gmail, MStTeams Google Meet... employees are in information and technology overload.

People managers who soften to the human aspects of the pandemic situation, will build trust with employees who are just figuring out how to navigate this time professionally and personally. And business leaders will have the opportunity to change the way communication happens in their company.



“Over Communication” is not an answer. Remote employees may feel the need to be seen and heard, in order to keep their job. This can result in excessive emails, gratuitous commenting, or unnecessary thumbs-up style replies.



“Meaningful Communication” is an answer. With systems, habits and ways of thinking turned on their heads, there is a longing for authenticity, trust, relationships, verifiable facts and being prepared. There is an uptick in receptivity to practices that embrace stability and honor connections.

TO BUILD MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES FOCUS ON SOME SIMPLE RULES:

- **Pause and think.** Is what I have to say valuable, does it contribute to the team, does it create a better solution for the client?
- **Determine.** What is the most appropriate communication tool? Is it a video call, a telephone call, an email? Does the entire group need the message or should the information flow from one person to another?
- **Be honest.** Does your communication focus on verifiable facts? Does it present the truth?
- **Close the loop.** It's frustrating to communicate a request and hear nothing back. Make it a policy to close the loop. Closing the loop requires requests to be acknowledged in a timely manner. Even if the acknowledgment says, "Received. Will have more info on Friday," the loop is closed and a commitment is made.
- **Promises matter.** If a promise (commitment) is given to complete work by a certain day/time, the promise should be kept. Policies to encourage the keeping of promises build an atmosphere of trust.
 - State the date and specific time for when projects are to be completed.
 - Confirm the necessary requirements.
 - Ask if this request can be completed. If the answer is no, renegotiate. If the answer is yes, all parties can consider it a commitment.

- **Words matter.** Being meticulous with written and spoken words has increased in importance in a remote-work culture. Establish guidance and policies around communication:
 - Re-read communications before they are sent.
 - Make communication free from ambiguity.
 - Convert pronouns to nouns– Rather than say, “They think it will be done soon,” say, “Darnell and Justin think the 4th quarter estimate will be done by Thursday.”
 - Delete unnecessary fluff.

Initially, meaningful communication guidelines may seem like an added burden, but over time, meticulous language will help employees clarify their thoughts and focus on what is important to the business.



Connect meaningfully with all staff with **Zenefits’ People Hub**. It’s your handy little communication portal to get company news, announcements, new policies and more. Anytime you push a notification, employees can receive it on their phones.

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STEP 5

Reconnect to Purpose

The unexpected nature of COVID-19 has had a reverberating impact on both individuals and companies.

Out of the blue there are new questions to ask.

- *Will our customers continue to buy?*
- *Will our suppliers come through?*
- *Can we manage our cash flow?*
- *How will we manage our staff?*

Unknowns in the world, lead to unknowns in business. In this unpredictable environment, our connection to each other, the planet, customers, suppliers, and the community is brought into sharp focus.

For HR professionals, connecting staff to a greater purpose is one way to reassure employees and communicate authenticity to the community. Greater purpose has been shown to increase greater engagement of staff.

We're bonded by the shared experiences of global pandemics, civil unrest and mass protests, and a call to make change be it for public health or greater inclusion. Perhaps for the first time in our careers, employees, HR departments, and business leaders will be rowing together in the same direction. So:

- 👍 **Think about your purpose.**
- 👍 **Communicate it to employees.**
- 👍 **Build it into daily routines.**

As business leaders, we all have an opportunity to create greater engagement, more team cohesion, more diverse thinking, and ultimately more appreciated people.

We're living at a tipping point. Let's engage and tip in the right direction.





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