

Top 7 Leadership Traits for Engaging Employees

By Randy Goruk



Improving their quality and effectiveness constantly challenges company leaders who strive to improve productivity, minimize turnover, and retain the best available talent. Studies show most employees don't quit *companies*; they quit *managers*. This underlines the fragile relationship between employees and their managers and supervisors.

Although the statistics fluctuate slightly from study to study, in American companies today, it's common to find that:

- 40 percent of employees lack loyalty to their current employer
- 74 percent of employees don't feel happy and fulfilled in their jobs
- 55 percent of employees believe management practices need to change
- 53 percent of employees say they're not committed to staying with their current companies

Based on 30 years of successfully leading teams, business units, and organizations, I've identified the top seven leadership traits that, when followed, can lead to successful transition from managing the business to leading the business. Master them

and watch productivity and employee engagement—as well as your own job enjoyment—improve markedly.

1 EARN RESPECT BY SHOWING UNWAVERING CHARACTER AND AUTHENTICITY

Exceptional leaders consistently demonstrate their true character in their words, actions, and behaviors. People want to work for someone they trust and respect—qualities that are earned and essential to organizational success.

How do you earn trust and respect? By meaning what you say and doing what you say you'll do as you: maintain a high level of integrity, tell the truth, act with consistency, make clear decisions, show fairness in decision-making, embrace diversity, remain humble, give credit where credit is due, respect the rules, and avoid hypocrisy. This tall order adds up to being authentic in your leadership. Above all, do the right thing for the right reason.

2 BE A TRUSTED MANAGER AND LEADER BY SHOWING YOU GENUINELY CARE

To achieve maximum results requires getting the most from all

members of your team. Genuine caring earns their loyalty, which is critical to everyone's success.

How do you demonstrate you care? By paying attention to your employees both professionally and personally. Being aware of their career goals and helping them achieve them show employees you have a sincere interest in them. Take time to help them improve their performance through mentoring either directly or through a mentor you appoint.

Employees like to be challenged in their jobs. The key to that is understanding the importance of their roles in the company. How can you ensure they're fully engaged and can see a future for themselves? By doing your best to put the necessary tools and resources in their hands. Then, give them constant encouragement to perform their jobs well.

That involves providing a safe, healthy work environment that takes into account their need for work-life balance. Cultivate a positive culture by hiring candidates whose values align with the organization's values.

3 ENGAGE YOUR TEAMS THROUGH STELLAR USE OF COMMUNICATION

Good management requires

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employing a variety of communication strategies. Exceptional leaders are masters at finding stellar communication techniques appropriate for each situation. Becoming stellar begins with consistently being a great listener. It requires paying attention to the body language of others and knowing how to interpret it. Hear, see, feel, and know what's going on around you.

In your presentations, share information that's appropriate, provides valuable updates, and include wisdom from experts to emphasize points. Employees don't appreciate surprises; be sure to communicate company plans, expectations, and consequences.

Maintaining open communication requires you to be available, letting all stakeholders know your schedule and giving access appropriately to your employees. In addition, you delegate tasks by sharing both the relevance and the importance of each task to those responsible for carrying it out. Most important, ask great questions. They lead to meaningful conversations that produce desired outcomes.

You might use stump speeches and leverage technology to deliver clear, concise, and consistent messages. For a personal touch, send personal notes of appreciation while ensuring your acknowledgments are genuine and sincere.

4 BECOME A PROBLEM-SOLVER AND PROBLEM-AVOIDER THROUGH FORWARD THINKING

As an aspiring leader, you have a need to constantly think forward about how to achieve the short- and long-term desired outcomes for the company's stakeholders. That's how you become a great problem solver *and* problem avoider.

Be proactive. Focus on the problem or opportunities at hand and become exceptional at preparing for tough situations in advance. Be unbiased in your decision making and consider both your values and the company's values in all situations. Above all, prioritize your time so you can think through, solve, and avoid problems as great leaders do.

5 HONE THE DISCIPLINE OF MENTAL TOUGHNESS

You're constantly faced with a

myriad of stressful situations. This calls for relying on your mental toughness to deal with them. Your credibility is on the line!

Being mentally tough means you're not easily distracted and can remain clear and objective during times of turmoil. You have disciplined focus, can stick to the plan, and will improve productivity because you've eliminated time wasters. This allows you to deal with any conflict.

Mental toughness also allows you to maintain excellent work-life balance and prevent stress. You remain confident and consistent in your actions and decision-making. You don't take things personally or become offended easily.

6 TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR OWN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT—AND YOUR EMPLOYEES' TOO

You know that leadership development is an ongoing process that's critical to your short- and long-term success. Yet, with busy schedules, crucial deadlines, and tight budgets, formal leadership development training can be minimal. Don't abandon your own continuing education or professional growth.

You're responsible for your own professional growth and development as well as training, coaching, and mentoring your employees so they can grow professionally.

7 YOU MUST EMBRACE ACCOUNTABILITY—THE OUTCOMES ARE UP TO YOU

If those in leadership positions don't embrace accountability, no one will. Without accountability, enterprises can't thrive. That's why you need to hold yourself and others accountable for results, behaviors, and performances.

As a leader, can you accept accountability for all outcomes? It requires being results-oriented, committed to success, and driven with a focus on action.

In the process, you set realistic expectations while holding others accountable for their overall performance. Above all, by maintaining accountability, you believe that neither you nor anyone else is entitled to anything. ■

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