



Creating an Engaging Company Culture

How benefiting employees benefits a business

Employee engagement is trending! The business world is buzzing with articles, advice and suggestions on how to increase levels of employee engagement — even Simon Sinek is giving Ted Talks on the topic.

Before delving into the what, why and how, let's first reflect: As children, we were constantly asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Who among us actually replied, "When I grow up, I want to show up to a meaningless job, punch in, punch out and make just enough money to get by"?

Most of us would passionately reply with "fireman," "baseball player" or "president," among other occupations. We showed a level of engagement as we spoke glowingly of what we wanted to become. We shared details about a profession and role that motivated us and would get us excited to go to work every day.

What is Employee Engagement?

Employee engagement is all about

how much an employee cares about the company they work for. Are they emotionally committed to the goals and success of the company?

Ask yourself: Do your team members truly care about your company? Are they emotionally invested in your company's success, or are they simply punching a clock? To me, employee engagement means a team member shows up to work each day as their best self. They add value and seek to achieve their company's mission by doing a great job.

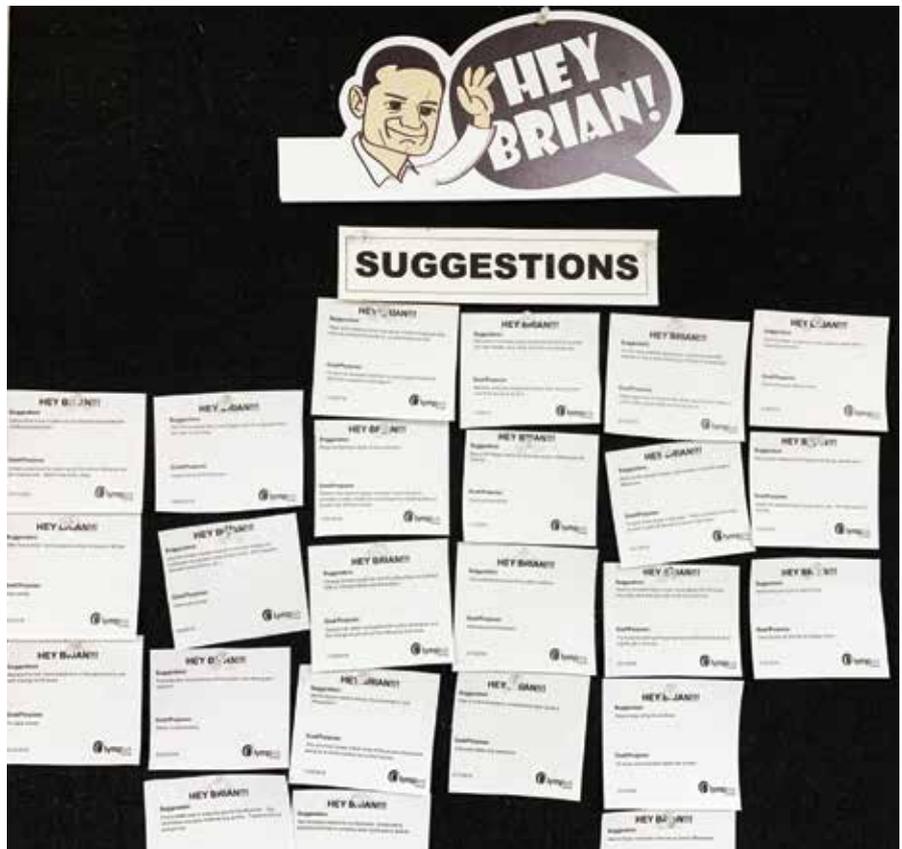
Engaged employees do not simply "do their job." They use their skills to drive change, help support others and play an active part in helping a company achieve great things.

Peter Drucker famously said, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast," yet we spend countless hours on strategy, evaluating the latest print technology, reviewing software options, evaluating markets and discussing pricing. How much time have we really spent focused on our culture

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By Brian Adam, President and Owner, Olympus Group



and developing high levels of employee engagement?

The statistics are shocking. According to a recent survey by Gallup, two-thirds of our employees are not engaged. This means two out of three employees are not helping drive their company's results. They are not bending over backwards to help land that big account, and many of them are simply clocking in and clocking out, merely going through a daily grind.

Multiple studies have demonstrated that companies with high levels of employee engagement outperform their competitors with lower levels of engagement. While it may seem obvious that employees who care about their jobs and actively seek to achieve their company's mission deliver better results, I'm sure there are skeptics out there. In case you're a numbers person, Gallup believes that unengaged "checked-out" employees cost the U.S. economy \$605 billion annually in lost productivity. If your employees or co-workers are "checked out," you are at a competitive disadvantage.

I am by no means an expert with specialized training in employee engagement. In fact, I like to think that I use engagement as a way to make up for my lack of technical skills and creativity, and my inability to develop meaningful innovation. I am a 40-year old living in

Milwaukee, Wisc., and I run a large-format printer specializing in dye sublimated fabric graphics. We are an old school printer — in business since 1893 — competing in the same hyper-responsive, price-sensitive print markets as many of you. We face many of the same challenges: Limited resources, intense competition and challenging lead times.

But when it comes to building a solid corporate culture, I feel we've made significant strides. More than one-third of our employees are engaged and truly care about our success. Our company has tripled in size in the last 10 years, which I attribute to the people we have and the culture we have created. Our employees are engaged, care about our company and as a result, have been able to do some pretty amazing things.

The following includes some of my tips, tangible things that can be done to improve your culture and increase your employee engagement levels. The best part is most of these require little-to-no financial investment, nor do they require an advanced degree. They're simple enough that a small printer from Milwaukee was able to accomplish them.

Give Employees a Voice

For an employee to feel engaged they

must be heard. You must give them multiple avenues to share feedback. This includes suggestion boxes, town halls, 360 reviews, anonymous surveys, GEMBA walks/Management by Walking Around, and one-on-ones. I advise doing them all!

Encourage your team members to complain and share what's annoying them. While it's never fun to hear bad news, it's better than the alternative of being unaware of the issues facing your organization.

The key is to give your employees the opportunity to share feedback through a variety of means — give them a voice! Here are some things we do:

"Hey Brian!" Program

We developed a suggestion program where we offer financial rewards for employee feedback. We encourage them to share suggestions, complaints, gripes, feedback and ideas on how we can make Olympus more rewarding. Every other week, we randomly select an individual to receive a cash reward. At the year's end, we give a larger reward to the suggestion that had the most value over the entire year, recognizing that individual in front of the entire company. Our goal is to get several suggestions, which we post anonymously in our newsletter and lunchroom. We also respond to every single suggestion — even if we choose not to take action.



Since starting this program in 2013, we have received 2,000 suggestions that have resulted in more than \$50,000 in savings. More importantly, our team members feel like they have a voice, and we certainly have received some wacky suggestions:

- Buy real estate on the moon
- Flood the grass in the front of the building and create an ice skating rink
- Install a green roof with live goats on it

While we didn't implement any of these "out there" ideas, we did follow up on each one, and I like to think the wacky suggestions brought a smile as others read about them in our lunchroom or in our newsletter.

Exit Interviews (with Current Employees)

After an employee has been at Olympus for a year, I sit down with him/her and ask a series of questions similar to what one would expect in an exit interview. The answers have been extremely revealing, helped me get to know my team members better and exposed me to blind spots. I ask employees:

- What does Olympus do well?
- What do you enjoy most/least about your job?

- What can Olympus do to improve?
- If you could make one change about your job, what would it be?
- If you owned the company, what's one thing you would do differently?
- Do we have any dumb rules?
- How can I help you do your job better?
- What benefit or perk do you enjoy the most?
- What benefit or perk do you wish Olympus offered?
- If you won the lottery, what would you do with the money?

Roundtable Lunches

I invite employees to join me for lunch (everyone loves a free meal). I ask only that they bring their ideas, suggestions and complaints, and that they speak up. We eat lunch and discuss whatever is on their minds. It's a great way to discover any circulating rumors and get a pulse on general sentiment from our team members. The feedback and levels of engagement are invaluable.

Show You Care

To have a truly engaged employee, a company must demonstrate that it truly cares about that person. (You can't pay lip service to this — you actually have to care.) Ask employees how they are doing and mean it — listen and care about their response.

People do not want to be treated as a number, a full-time equivalent or just part of the head count. Show your employees you care by giving back; humanize your company.

If a company is successful, it's on the blood, sweat and tears of the employees working there. Engaged employees expect to (and should be) rewarded, and paying more is not the only way to reward and recognize team members.

At Olympus, we try to do a lot of little things to demonstrate that we care. Most of these are simple, inexpensive and don't take a lot of time. Here are examples of things that work for us.

- **Recognizing birthdays.** I keep track of our 200 team members' birthdays and personally wish them a happy birthday.
- **Recognizing employees' kids' birthdays.** We send all of our employees' kids a birthday card with \$5 in it. Imagine the surprise of our new team members when their kids get a card and money in the mail.
- **Fun/Culture Committees.** They're

given a budget and encouraged to come up with ways to make Olympus more fun.

- **Monthly Birthday Treats.** Once a month, we bring in treats for our entire team. It's a simple, relatively inexpensive gesture that our team members love.
- **Employee of the Month.** We request nominations from all team members and recognize all nominees, not just the winner (you can never have too many pats on the back). I write a personal note with a cash reward for all winners.
- **Graduation Gifts.** These are given to employees' children graduating high school and eighth grade.
- **Year-end Awards.** We make up awards to recognize our best team members publicly with rewards and fun trophies (e.g., Scrap Commander, Mr./Ms. Responsiveness)
- **No Interest Loans.** We created this program to help employees in times of need
- **Scholarship Program.** We annually award \$8,000 to an employee's child or grandchild.
- **Cultural Events** celebrating our team's diversity.
- **Chili Cook-offs and Bake-offs** with trophies for the winners.
- **Employee Welcome Baskets.** Leave your newest team members with a memorable impression demonstrating you care on their first day.

These are just a few quick ideas. I am truly passionate about employee engagement; I care about people and I love sharing. This October, I will share even more tips and best practices at PRINTING United, when I present at the Apparel Decorators Luncheon: Tips to Turn Your Corporate Culture into a Competitive Advantage on Thursday, October 24, from 12:00 PM to 1:30 PM. I look forward to seeing everyone!

Brian Adam is President and Owner of Olympus Group, headquartered in Milwaukee with facilities in Orlando, Fla.; Denver; and Grand Rapids, Mich. Olympus is a large-format digital printer specializing in dye sublimated fabric graphics for trade shows, retail point-of-purchase, interior décor and the sports-event markets. Brian is obsessed with corporate culture and has been recognized by Glassdoor as a top 25 CEO to work for in the United States.