

Leadership for Engagement

This guide presents supervisor behaviors that can help you increase your employees' satisfaction and engagement at work and build a strong organizational climate. As a supervisor, you have a great impact on the engagement and climate of your team. There are a lot of factors that contribute to employee engagement and organizational climate. Research shows that there are three *High Impact* supervisor behaviors that play a major role in driving engagement, satisfaction, and a really positive work experience:

1. **Build Relationships and Trust**
2. **Support Employee Growth**
3. **Recognize and Value Employee Contributions**

The way you think and feel about your employees is critical to effectively carrying out these behaviors. We call this *mindset*. This guide presents strategies and considerations for adopting an *employee-focused mindset* to make you a more effective leader.



Adopt an Employee-Focused Mindset

Your mindset is how you think and feel about yourself and the world around you. Your mindset often drives your leadership behaviors and actions. For example, if you genuinely care for and appreciate your employees, you are more likely to acknowledge and express your appreciation for their contributions.

On the other hand, it is possible to adopt behaviors that are inconsistent with your underlying mindset. For example, it is possible for a leader to behave in a way that outwardly demonstrates appreciation for employees, such as acknowledging employee accomplishments, but be of the mindset that the employees' contributions fell short in some way. In cases where mindset is inconsistent with behaviors, mindset usually comes across; employees can generally tell when expressions of appreciation and care are not genuine.

Self-Focused or Employee-Focused Mindset? When we have a mindset that is focused on ourselves, we tend to see employees as resources whose purpose and value is solely their contribution to the mission and helping us achieve our own goals and objectives. When we shift to an employee-focused mindset, we see employees as people with purpose and value beyond just accomplishing the mission; who balance their lives with their dedication to the work. With an employee-focused mindset, we recognize the impact that we have on employees, and we consider ways to help them achieve their goals to ultimately further the mission.

Adopting an employee-focused mindset requires three steps:



See Employees as People. See employees as people rather than resources to get the job done. Acknowledge employees' individual needs, goals, and challenges.



Provide Support. Engage in supportive and caring behaviors that help employees address their needs, meet their goals, and overcome their challenges.



Practice Self-Accountability. Recognize that you have an impact on others. Assess how your efforts match your intent to see and help others.

1 Build Relationships and Trust

Strong workplace relationships are a huge driver of employee engagement. People want to feel a sense of connection with their co-workers and their managers. Building relationships and trust with employees is critical to fostering engagement. Three ways you can build better relationships and a solid foundation for trust include talking frequently with employees, empowering them, and providing support. Please note that for organizations with bargaining unit employees, supervisors should ensure all labor relations obligations have been met in accordance with law and existing collective bargaining agreements.

Talk Frequently

Have recurring one-on-one discussions with your employees. In these meetings, focus on:

- Sharing information on work status and issues
- Jointly problem-solving issues
- Discussing strategies for prioritizing workload
- Asking questions to facilitate better understanding
- Providing instructive guidance
- Providing constructive feedback
- Recognizing accomplishments
- Discussing opportunities to develop skills

Employee-Focused Mindset

Regardless the size of their role, problem or objective, do I listen to everyone with the same level of respect and curiosity? Do I stay focused and in the present moment so that I can understand what is being said?

Empower

Empower employees to perform their job and provide input into decisions that affect their work. Some approaches for empowering employees include:

- Involving employees in decisions that affect their work
- Bringing employees to management meetings
- Giving employees autonomy to perform their job
- Asking employees to present their ideas for solving a problem before offering advice or solutions
- Providing opportunities for employees to improve work processes or solve problems on their own
- Offering ways for employees to become fully capable in their jobs (e.g., on-the-job training, partnering with others, detail assignments, etc.)

Employee-Focused Mindset

How do I provide employees with the necessary opportunities to become fully capable in their jobs? How do I provide ownership, responsibility and control to my employees in their jobs?

Support

Provide resources and flexibility to help employees accomplish work, reduce stress, promote health, and achieve work-life balance. Ways to provide support include:

- Setting clear expectations, establishing reasonable timeframes, and giving employees what they need to accomplish work
- Setting fair and manageable responsibilities for each employee
- Linking and explaining the importance of employee's work to a larger purpose (e.g., organizational mission, team goal, etc.)
- Soliciting and implementing process improvement ideas
- Learning about each employee's professional and personal challenges and offering guidance or support

Employee-Focused Mindset

Do I consider my role and responsibility for each employee's success? Is my own measure of success based on what I do or what gets done collectively by the team?

2 Support Employee Growth

Learning and development opportunities are critical to keeping employees engaged and growing in their careers. Enable meaningful opportunities for employees to reach their full potential by understanding and supporting their developmental goals and needs. Assess developmental needs by using powerful, open-ended questions to understand what is important to employees and their developmental goals. Then, identify ways that you can help them reach their goal. See page 5 for powerful open-ended questions to use in this discussion. The following considerations provide a structure for developmental discussions.

Clarify the Purpose

The developmental discussion should facilitate learning and growth, not evaluate performance. The ultimate goal is to learn what type of growth matters to the employee and promote forward action.

Employee-Focused Mindset

Is my primary intent to help this employee? Have I outwardly expressed my intent?

Explore Goals and Priorities

Facilitate understanding of the employee's goals and priorities with open-ended questions. Discuss obstacles, ways to overcome them, and identify resources that are needed to move forward.

Employee-Focused Mindset

How can I put the employee's goal as the primary focus during this conversation, not my own goal?

Discuss Options

Ask the employee for their ideas on how to accomplish their goal. Hold off on any advice until you have given time for the employee to tell you or think about their options.

Employee-Focused Mindset

Do I facilitate a conversation that puts the employee in the driver's seat?

Enable Action

Once options have been discussed ask the employee to decide on which option they like best and the action steps needed to move forward. Agree on next steps and establish a follow-up time to discuss progress.

Employee-Focused Mindset

Do I ask the employee what they need (e.g., resources) to accomplish their goal?

Powerful and Open-Ended Questions for Developmental Discussions

The purpose for asking powerful, open-ended questions is to facilitate a conversation that is focused on the employee. The idea is for the employee to tell you not only about their goals and priorities but also how they foresee the best way to accomplish them. Together, you will identify the best option for moving to action and how you can support them.

Explore Goals and Priorities

- How do you want grow?
- What is a priority for you?
- What is a short-term and long-term goal?
- Which competencies or skills do you feel you need to develop in your current position? How about for a future position?
- Why is this goal or priority important to you?

Discuss Options and Possibilities

- In addition to classroom training, what else is possible?
- What possibilities do you see for achieving your goal?
- If you had a choice, what would you do?
- What have you tried so far? What needs to be done next?
- What have you seen done by someone else with a similar goal?
- Who could you ask for additional ideas?

Coach and Support

- What obstacles do you think you will face? How can you overcome them?
- What strengths will help you reach your goal?
- Before tackling this goal, is there any knowledge or skill you need to acquire?
- How can you make this goal a bit more extraordinary?
- I have seen you accomplish something like this before - what did you do to get there?
- How might the goal get off track? How can you get it back on track?
- What is the most challenging part of this for you?

Enable Action

- What option do you like best for moving forward?
- What are the first three steps you need to take to make progress? When can you complete this action?
- What do you need from me to help you move forward?
- Who else can support you as you make progress towards this goal?
- I would like to continue to support you as you achieve this goal. When do you think we can meet again to discuss your progress?

Employee-Focused Mindset

These mindset factors can help focus the conversation on an intention to see employees and help them grow.

- Caring for and trust in others
- Less need for control and directing
- Enable others to have self-belief and responsibility for their growth
- A desire to help others grow and develop
- A belief that most people want to learn and grow

Recognize and Value Employee Contributions

There are many positive, free, and effective ways to show employees you value them. Aim to really see your employees by acknowledging their presence, and show that you value their contributions through simple acts of recognition:

- Deliberately recognize good ideas or insightful comments. For example, “That is a good idea. Let’s think about how we can do that.”
- Share the credit when something good happens and mention who made contributions to the overall success.
- In addition to sharing information, share how people contributed.
- When asked to review work, find one thing to positively comment on or to encourage more of (e.g., hard work, strong effort).
- Always say thank you to your team and individual contributors. For example, simply saying, “thanks for the update” can be enough.
- Give a shout-out when an employee has exceeded standards or expectations.
- Greet your employees both in-person and in written correspondence. Saying “hello” is a strong form of acknowledgement.

Simple Recognition

Each week, set aside 5 minutes to reflect on one contribution from each member of your team. Send a simple thank you message or mention contributions during a staff meeting. If you are not aware of any individual or team contributions, you may need to think about whether it is necessary to check-in and see how things are going.

Employee-Focused Mindset

- What do you value most in each of your employees?
- Do you see the potential for each employee to contribute in a meaningful way?
- Have you acknowledged and praised meaningful contributions?
- What is your impact?
- How have your recognition efforts contributed to the team’s ability to value each others contributions?