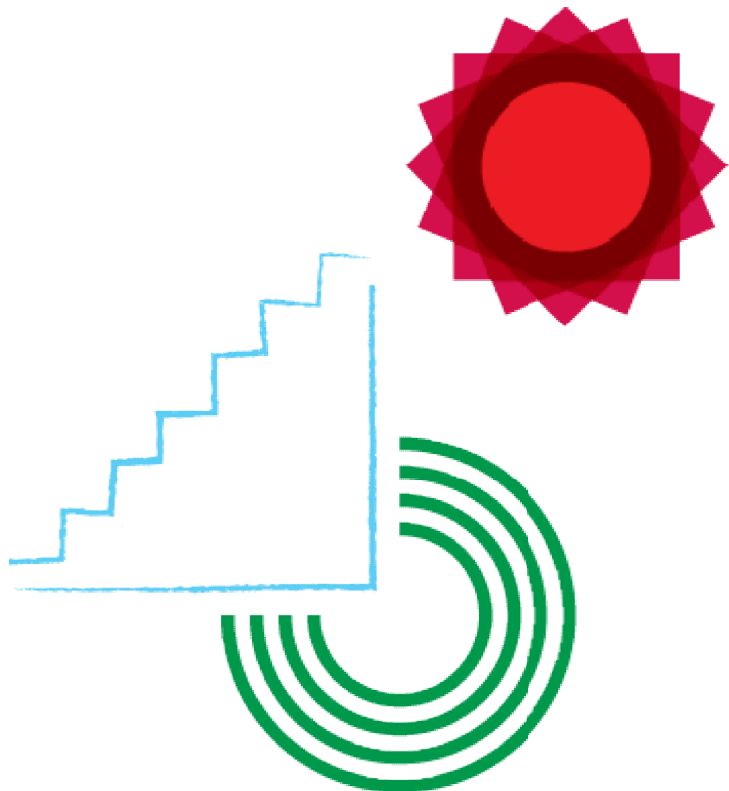




ENGAGE
FOR
SUCCESS

ESTABLISHING EMPLOYEE VOICE IN YOUR BUSINESS

20 Hints and Tips from Engage for Success



ESTABLISHING EMPLOYEE VOICE IN YOUR BUSINESS



20 Hints and Tips

1. Share business information with employees

To build an employee voice it must be informed. You will only gain meaningful input and ideas from your employees if you share information on how to improve your business. How you do this will depend on your business, you could provide regular performance updates through the channels you have available - for example – notice boards, posters, email or TV screens, hold regular face-to-face business updates where employees can ask questions and you can share information - consider alternative channels for employees who work remotely or cannot make the meeting.

2. Essential building blocks of employee engagement

- Information sharing - sales figures, weekly communication updates.
- Managing performance – Key Performance Indicators, Annual performance review, clarity on required behaviours, clarity on what is required, give employees space to show initiative, encourage ideas and acknowledge good ideas openly.
- Leadership - consistency, be clear about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours
- Recognise that your employee's experience is only as good as their manager.

3. Encourage ideas from employees

Invite employees to complete a postcard with ideas - for example - what they can do to improve their performance, what their team can do to improve performance and what the wider business can do to pursue its strategy.

4. Encourage feedback and ideas from employees

Options that you can consider to encourage ideas from employees include:

- a feedback link in internal newsletters or on the intranet
- posing a monthly question to invite views and stimulate discussion
- giving managers an agenda for team briefings inviting employee questions and feedback
- providing training or guidance to help managers seek and handle feedback
- holding regular focus groups that seek feedback from a cross-section of employees

- creating specific days during which employees can come and talk to senior managers
- conducting surveys with your employees, using a core set of questions each time
- establishing a suggestion scheme for employees
- creating a spot prize to recognise a particularly innovative idea or business improvement
- celebrating all productive ideas that employees have suggested - however small



5. Evaluate employee ideas

When you receive ideas from employees try to evaluate them in a fair way. By setting up an evaluation process you will add transparency for employees and build their confidence to submit ideas. The process you need will depend on the size of your business and the amount of feedback you receive. You might be able to manage the evaluation process personally. If you have a larger business you may need a scheme administrator, and an evaluation team made up of representatives from across your business.

6. Creating evaluation criteria

Evaluation criteria you could use to help you evaluate employee ideas:

- cost reduction
- generating business income / increasing market share
- improving customer service or relations
- improving the working environment or work/life balance
- enhancing the reputation of the business
- improving decision making or reducing risk
- improving working practices/processes

7. Use technology to improve employee voice

Every business has a range of channels it uses to communicate with employees. These could be internal notice boards, blogs or networking sites - which can all help employees share views, knowledge and ideas. When deciding what is right for your business, you could consider asking your employees what would help them in their work and use technology to celebrate ideas, feedback and improvements that come from collaboration through tools and channels. Create and communicate clear guidelines and policy on the use of technology - including the accessing of networking sites and use of language - and addressing any misuse of them.

8. Employee forums

Many businesses use employee forums to seek ideas for improving business performance. Different approaches work for different businesses, you could establish an employee board with rotating membership where ideas can be sounded or set up an employee taskforce to look at a key business challenge or topic.



9. Creating an employee forum

If you create an employee forum have a clear remit for the forum with clear terms of reference understood across the business. An effective way of creating terms of reference is to involve the forum members in defining them. Creating clear responsibilities shows you are keen to work with the forum and that the employees involved have important responsibilities which may include:

- proactively seeking views and feedback from employees in their area of the business
- identifying progress and communicating these
- running employee focus groups to seek views and opinions
- presenting and reporting to managers on relevant feedback from their area of the business

10. Align employee voice and collective voice

The involvement of trade unions and union and non-union employee representatives can provide a collective voice for all or part of your workforce. Information and consultation requirements apply to all organisations with at least 50 employees. Trust, cooperation and information sharing are essential to the employee voice and the collective voice. Your approach to employee and collective voice should support each other.

To align your collective voice with employee voice, you could:

- invite union and non-union representatives to presentations on business progress and performance before these briefings are given more widely to your employees
- invite representatives to become involved in meaningful discussions on a broader range of business topics beyond those formally agreed
- ask representatives to canvass their colleagues on ideas for improving your business or responding to a particular challenge
- invite representatives to presentations on the results from employee surveys and ask them to work with you on plans to address any issues

11. Employee engagement champions

Identifying employee engagement champions in different departments or teams can help identify and share examples of employee engagement in action in their teams. They have a key role linking managers with the ideas and experiences of employees.



12. The role of employee engagement champions

The role of champions can be as narrow or as broad as you like. You could ask them to focus on one particular issue or you could give them a broader remit. The scope of the role is up to you but there are some key aspects such as helping share information and key messages about the business with colleagues and identifying feedback or issues from employees and feeding these back.

13. Harnessing different perspectives

When developing your business 'story' see it from different angles, typically from the viewpoint of the employee, investors, the external stakeholder community and the customer. Ensure your themes are relevant to each audience but that they are consistent from one to the other – certain issues must be emphasised for different target groups.

14. Supporting employee engagement champions

Champions need information and guidance to help them in their role. This will also help you ensure shared understanding and consistency of approach across the business. Some core steps to consider are a briefing pack for each champion, a short training session or workshop and if you have an intranet create a private section where champions can liaise with each other and share experiences, questions and good practice. In the briefing pack you could include a letter from you explaining the importance of the role and thanking them for taking it on, a summary sheet on the importance and benefits of engagement, a summary of the activities and a copy of the business' strategic narrative.

15. Create a feedback culture

At the end of each team meeting ensure that each person in the room gives feedback to each other, this should be against agreed criteria that are relevant to the group. The feedback should be very short to allow time to explore any issues that emerge. Questions should revolve around whether behaviours are being adopted and the culture developed that the organisation needs. Peer group feedback can be extraordinarily powerful.

16. Observe engagement in your organisation

A highly engaged team should be something you recognise emotionally. To know what you are aiming for, you have to see it in practice. Is there a department that delivers all the potential of all of its members? If you find one look closely for what differentiates them from the rest of the company? Can you identify systems, habits, protocols that have been installed to keep achievement levels high without draining the employees? Spend time with them – observe what works and what doesn't.



17. Find the truth-tellers

Identify a handful of colleagues at different levels whom you trust to tell you what is really happening on the front line, even if it is bad news.

18. Running employee focus groups

Preparation

- seek a broad cross-section of employees, within available timescales and resources
- seek eight-ten people for any workshop (no more than ten)
- make sure that no participant has their manager or direct reports in the same workshop
- ensure every individual's manager is contacted in advance to explain why the employee's participation is important to the business
- send each participant a short brief in advance of the workshop, explaining the purpose and importance of the session
- agree the role of the facilitator

Logistics

- the group should not last more than an hour (anything more is a disincentive for people to attend/participate)
- timings for each section in the agenda are indicative (but, overall, you should stick to the hour)
- the facilitator will need one or two flipcharts to scribe the themes and feedback that emerge
- the room must be well-lit and well-aired to encourage attention and participation
- make sure some refreshments are also available (eg tea, coffee, soft drinks)

19. Employee voice survey

There is no set format for an employee survey. This guidance sets out best practice examples for creating an employee survey that you can tailor to suit your business needs.



	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Leaders actively seek my views and ideas on the business				
I feel leaders take my views seriously				
I am confident leaders will act upon feedback I give them				
I get an honest response from leaders to any questions I raise				
I feel safe challenging the way we do things here				
I feel safe challenging leaders on their views				
My manager asks for my views and ideas about our work				
I feel my manager takes my views seriously				
I feel I can raise any issues or concerns with my manager				
I get an honest response from my manager to any questions I raise				
My manager seeks my views when making decisions about the team/our work				
I am encouraged to speak openly and frankly				
I am confident my manager will act upon feedback I give them				

20. Focus and support employees

To help support employees you could consider:

- discussing job design and responsibilities with employees - employees who have input into shaping their work are far more engaged than those who are simply given tasks to get on with
- creating compelling objectives linked to business goals so employees understand how their work and performance directly contribute to the strategy
- giving employees the freedom to carry out their work in ways that suit them without being micro-managed
- giving employees the power to make decisions - this could involve giving each employee a budget or other resources to achieve their work objectives
- encouraging supportive behaviour and challenging inappropriate behaviour contrary to accepted values or standards

