



Do we have employee engagement all wrong? Is the tedious annual engagement survey missing the mark when trying to gauge the pulse of an organization? In his latest article, Dave Stevens explains why most organizations need to rethink their current ways in order to truly connect with their employees.

---

Employee engagement needs to undergo a *connection* revolution.

## AUTHOR



Dave Stevens

Identified as a key differentiator in organizational growth, performance and innovation—the term ‘employee engagement’ has been on the corporate radar for more than three decades and it’s swamped with statistics. Statistics, though, only highlight the benefits of employee engagement, [they don’t create the experience](#). *The Gallup State of the American Workplace Report*, for example, reported 37 percent less absenteeism, 90 percent less turnover, and 28 percent less safety incidents in organizations with higher employee engagement scores. In the 2014 [Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends](#) research, 78 percent of business leaders rated retention and engagement as urgent or important, and yet nothing has changed. According to the [ADP Research Institute’s new Global Study of Engagement](#), the world’s definitive engagement study, 84 percent of workers are merely “coming to work” and are not contributing fully to their organizations.



Despite spending millions of dollars, many organizations are still missing the mark when it comes to actually engaging staff.

By creating an emotional connection with their people, organizations will naturally increase engagement—and here's why:

- an emotional connection creates psychological safety within teams
- it fosters trust
- it let's people 'be real' and vulnerable with each other
- it clarifies purpose and meaning

### **The pitfalls of traditional Employee Engagement**

Traditionally, the issue of engaging people involves the dreaded employee engagement surveys to assess the feelings, mood and overall engagement amongst employees. While useful for benchmarking, these surveys don't fully tackle the real issues. Part of the problem lay lies in the definition of an employee. As a skillset that earns a paycheck it's assumed that by addressing [hygiene factors](#) such as higher salaries, perks, modern office space and other incentives, organizations can build an engagement culture.

However, employees are increasingly bringing every part of themselves to work, whether they're being asked too or not. More than employees, they want to be seen as individuals. Like any relationship, if a person feels aligned in purpose and values then engagement follows as a natural outcome.

### **Future Trends**

The failure of employee engagement initiatives is often due to a lack of focus on the right factors. What the [ADP Research Institute's research shows](#) is that getting the most from your employees boils down to two things: teams and trust. Employees work harder when they believe in what they are working for and can do so collaboratively. Ultimately, employees must believe there is synergy between who they are, what the company does and how they can work in teams towards a common goal. A team member is 12 times more likely to be fully engaged if he or she trusts the team leader .

However, trust and teamwork are tricky concepts. They require more than hygiene factors. Simon Sinek, leadership guru and the best-selling author of *The Infinite Game* (2019), says "the way you build trust inside an organization is the exact same way you fall in love. You devote yourself to the care of another human being, sometimes at the sacrifice of your own interests." This is teamwork. Workers who say they are on a team are [2.3 times more likely](#) to be fully engaged than those who are not.

### **Why a 'Connection Revolution'?**

A revolution is a forcible overthrow of existing thinking. That's what needs to happen for meaningful engagement to occur. To attract and retain top talent, and get the best out of their people, an employee engagement strategy must build towards a culture of connection, purpose and trust that is genuine and worthy of admirers. Firstly, lose the word *employee*. It's redundant. Rather engage with like-minded people. When people are aligned in purpose, engagement flows. Secondly, let the surveys support the conversations and not the other way around. Trusting relationships are built on conscious dialogue, and these should be taking place regardless of any employee engagement initiatives. More and more we're seeing a hankering towards meaningful engagement. People want to feel they are part of an



organization they can believe in. The beauty of trust and connection, for organizations, is they don't require vast sums of money to acquire. They simply need to cultivate a culture of care and attention.

## Recommended for you

Do all of your employees have a voice on your team? [Find out.](#)

---

## Our Contributors

*Dave Stevens*

*Barry Pokroy is an Advisor with B. Riley Farber. Trained in clinical psychology, he has in-depth knowledge and experience in adapting the insights of psychological theory to the demands of the corporate environment. Barry can be reached at [bpokroy@brileyfin.com](mailto:bpokroy@brileyfin.com) or at [416.496.3079](tel:416.496.3079)*

---