



The Employer-Employee Contract of Old is Broken—But Not the Relationship

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The employee-employer contract of old may be broken, but the relationship isn't. [Barry Pokroy](#) explores ways organizations and leaders can deal with discomforts of change in the workplace and start building the authentic human connections needed to retain top talent and attract even more.

One of the many societal shifts fuelled by the pandemic revolves around the way people now view employment and the role of work in their lives. While good pay and benefits were once sufficient incentives to land great employees, today people want jobs that allow them to both earn income and enjoy a high quality of life—on their terms.

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This [shift in the employer-employee contract](#) is something employers need to understand and accommodate if they hope to attract and retain top-tier employees. To do so, however, organizations and leaders must first undergo a mindset shift and then identify ways to forge an *authentic* human connection with their people.

Here are three key approaches for achieving this goal:



1. Harness the power of emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence—or emotional quotient (EQ)—is, in many ways, the toolkit for human connection. It underpins everything we do—how we behave, make decisions, manage stress, and regulate emotions. It impacts our ability to adapt to new situations and emotionally manage the discomfort of change.

In many ways, strengthening your EQ is like strengthening a muscle—you need to work at it. When you exercise it regularly—in the right way—you enhance your self-awareness, or your ability to understand your emotions, leverage your strengths, manage your weaknesses, and recognize the impact of these things on your performance and relationships. Leaders with a strong EQ are better equipped to control positive and negative emotions, rein in impulses, and adapt to new situations.

At the same time, a strong EQ sharpens one's awareness of others, allowing you to recognize the emotions, strengths, and weaknesses in your people. These skills allow you to better empathize with others, understand the intentions behind their words and actions, and adopt management practices that best suit individual needs—all of which make it easier to attract, engage, and retain people.

2. Engage in meaningful dialogue

Most people respond better to [relational conversations](#) over transactional conversations. So, if you're looking to forge a stronger connection with your people, it can be helpful to collectively remember that behind every transaction is an individual.

This can be challenging for many leaders who have traditionally been required to manage processes over people. To overcome this mindset, organizations would be well-served to help their managers and leaders strengthen their “person-centric” leadership muscles—and better understand the connection between human engagement and successful process execution.

One way to do this is by making a point of understanding each employees' *why*. Once you understand [the things that motivate them](#), whether work or life, it can be easier to engage in conversations that truly connect with each person, identify opportunities to meet their workplace expectations, and take care of their overall well-being. In return, employees will be more inclined to work productively and help your organization meet its goals.

3. Prioritize active listening

Today, if you hope to engage and retain top people, it's important to meet their needs—and that means taking time to understand what those needs are. This involves asking intentional questions that drive relational conversations, and actively listening to the answers.

Intentional questions allow managers and leaders to get to the root of an employee's *why*. Some examples of intentional questions include:

- in what ways would you like to see changes in your workday, week, month, or year?
- why are those outcomes important to you?



- if you could come close to your ideal work environment, what would that look like?
- why is that important to you?
- what would impel you to leave the company?
- what makes you stay?
- how do you feel on Sunday late afternoon/evening about coming to work on Monday?

Active listening involves validating the answers to these types of intentional questions—not agreeing, but simply confirming you understand from both a content and emotional perspective. At the same time, it allows you to use the information to strengthen the human relationship and, by extension, your organization.

Apply lessons learned

Embracing a collective, people-centric mindset shift involves integrating all three of these behaviours into your organizational culture—from top to bottom.

To understand what that might look like in practice, consider the example of the CEO who wanted to motivate his staff to return to the office. The CEO planned to speak at a company-wide town hall to encourage his reluctant employees to “return-to-normal”. The trouble was, he wasn’t quite sure what to say—and saying the wrong things could create a greater divide between him and his people.

When he came to us with his challenge, we suggested that he first dive deeper to explore his own needs—specifically, why it was so important to him to have everyone return to the office. Next, we invited him to engage in meaningful dialogue with his employees, to understand why they felt differently. After asking intentional questions—and actively listening to the answers—he had a better grasp of the shift that had occurred in his workforce throughout the pandemic and was in a better position to adapt his mindset accordingly.

In the end, he was able to find a solution that was more aligned with his workforce—and resulted in a happier team and enhanced productivity overall.

This is just one of the many stories we have heard on how employers are dealing with discomforts of change in the workplace. The employee-employer contract of old may be broken, but the relationship isn’t. In most cases, it comes down to a shift in mindset—assessing self awareness, engaging in meaningful dialogue, and utilizing active listening to retain top talent and attract even more.

Employee Retention: The Power Behind Emotional Connection

How to place meaning at the heart of the employee-employer relationship. [Read more](#)



Our Contributors

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