



Navigating Challenges:

An employee engagement toolkit for people leaders

How to Connect
with Employees in
Times of Distress

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How to Connect with Employees in Times of Distress

When natural patterns in our work and personal lives become impacted by a major event like the coronavirus pandemic, that disruption can introduce significant emotional and psychological distress. Seemingly overnight, there is an urgency to have access to trusted news sources and facts, and for employees to work from home to prioritize their health and safety. It also has a very personal impact on our core human needs for safety and security. Without addressing these fundamental concerns, it's difficult for organizations to run "business as usual."

So what do people need from their employer to remain happy, productive and successful during times of distress? The simple answer is: the same things they need all the time. People want to feel valued and confident about the future of their organization, as well as their place in it. They also want to experience a sense of belonging, trust their leaders, be clear on where they should focus, and have a sense of stability in their work.

Provide reassurance and demonstrate humanity

Employees also need to be reassured that their organization and leaders are prioritizing their safety and needs. This is where organizations can demonstrate humanity in a big way—designing policies that make it easy for employees to work remotely, minimizing business travel, and providing access to healthcare and resources, such as backup childcare.

Employees also have a heightened need to receive timely, accurate, and candid communications about what's happening and the impact it may have. Equally important, they need to feel empowered to express concerns and exert control where possible to protect against uncertainty.

How to Connect with Employees in Times of Distress

There are known ways for organizations to remain agile and resilient, and we recommend you continue building those habits:

- Frequently gather employee feedback on important topics
- Equip managers with insights that help them address people's needs
- Have regular team conversations about team needs and actions
- Have regular manager/employee conversations about individual needs and actions
- Take action on feedback in a way that improves organizational and individual success

In uncertain times, these habits help organizations and their leaders understand employee needs; assess employee perspective on the organization's strategy and actions; tailor their response to local and functional requirements; and make ongoing improvements to help keep people focused and secure during stressful times.

Embrace employee feedback, don't shy away from it

Checking in with employees, in live conversations with small groups and on a greater scale with employee engagement surveys (pulses), makes people feel heard and involved, and it gives leaders insight into what people need most during times of distress to help them be happier and more successful. If you're wondering whether to carry on with your previously scheduled engagement pulse, our answer is, "Absolutely." Here are some common questions we hear and responses we give regarding how to approach feedback in times of distress:

"We don't want to create extra anxiety by sending a pulse right now."

Employees are already experiencing anxiety. That anxiety is heightened when they have needs that aren't being met by their organization and no way of voicing those concerns. Providing an outlet and a follow-up approach helps battle anxiety by giving people an avenue to surface concerns and exert control by co-creating solutions that address their day-to-day work experience.

"We know we'll get negative feedback, so no need to ask."

While it is not uncommon to see negative feedback in times of uncertainty, we have also seen many instances of positive feedback, in large part due to the confidence and support employees feel in the time of crisis. Look at employee feedback, specifically employee engagement pulse results, as a starting point to determine where to invest time and resources to continuously improve.

"We are already too overwhelmed with questions and feedback."

We can't possibly ask for more."

Many employees go out of their way to make their voices heard, but many more do not. If you are only listening to the employees, leaders, or HR

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business partners who are best at advocating for themselves, you won't have a representative view of what's happening in your organization, and you're at risk of focusing your response strategy in the wrong places. Additionally, employees' needs during times of distress can be very "local," so providing managers with access to insights on their people exponentially expands the number of leaders who are ready to help.

"We don't want to ask for feedback if we can't fix it."

While it is true that some employee concerns cannot be resolved, missing out on actionable feedback that increases the success of your crisis strategy is much worse. Employees respond positively to candid responses about what can and cannot yet be addressed. Ways to mitigate this concern include:

- Encouraging ACT conversations at the team level so employees can see the results for their team and collaborate on focus areas. This also helps employees to see if their suggestions were shared by others or a one-off.
- Explaining the rationale behind where the organization has chosen to focus, or not focus, efforts.

Tips to maintain an engaged remote workforce

Since many employees and managers may be experiencing remote work for the first time, consider other forms of technology that facilitate connection:

- **Encourage face time.** Yes, it may not be in person, but ask employees to turn their videos on with video-conference technology to get "face time."
- **Encourage the use of designated communications channels.** Teams, Slack, etc. help employees collaborate, share questions, and recognize each other. Try encouraging managers to post a question in a team channel each day: "What's one thing we can do to better support each other right now?"
- **Consider technology that facilitates meaningful conversations.** For example, using technology for manager and employee conversations helps drive consistency and quality so employees are connecting on important topics on a regular basis.
- **Offer resources to help your team continue to learn, grow.** Remote work shouldn't mean the end to all learning and development opportunities. Offer courses that add value and enrichment to the work and the experience your employees are having.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach for organizations, so it is important to ensure that your unique needs are integrated into the design of your strategy. Our advice is to make sure you're always addressing the people side and the business side, as both are critical as your organization faces challenging times.



Seven Tips to Communicate with Your Employees in Times of Distress

What's different about how you communicate with employees during periods of uncertainty? The answer is more straightforward than you think. Your people's needs change, so your feedback and communications must adapt.

During challenging times, people want to be reassured that their organization and leaders are prioritizing their safety and needs. This heightens the importance of timely, fact-based, and candid communications about what's happening and the impact it might have. Conversely, people want to express concerns and exert control where possible to mitigate feelings of uncertainty.

This is an opportunity for organizations to demonstrate people-centricity in a big way—designing policies truly centered on the needs of people at work.

At Glint, we approach the world of work with a people-centric philosophy—essentially that organizations win or lose based on the strength of their employees' happiness and success. While there are many articles circulating to help your organization think about business continuity planning, risk prevention, and more, let's explore seven ways that you can take a people-centric approach to employee communication, especially in times of distress.

Seven Tips to Communicate with Your Employees in Times of Distress

1. Put individual safety and security first

In times of uncertainty, we often see that whether employees believe that leaders care about their well-being has a bigger impact on engagement than usual. Employees don't expect leaders to have all of the answers, but they do want to believe that their well-being is important to leaders as the leaders make decisions on behalf of the organization. Some more tangible ways you can do this: encourage remote work and be flexible with sick time to help people address personal situations and stay healthy, while preventing the spread of illness to other team members. In practice, this may mean giving vulnerable populations, such as people with known health issues, paid vacation days.

2. Get leadership out front with consistent messaging

Leaders can provide clarity, build confidence, and steady the organization in times of uncertainty. Support leaders with fact-based information from reputable health sources, such as The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization, a thoughtful plan, and crisp points to convey a sense of control and competence.

3. Keep communication channels open

Create well-coordinated internal and external communication plans with clear expectations for action. Share timely facts, actions to take, and changing work requirements (e.g. reporting into work, new schedules, adjustments to travel policies, etc.). Describe how different communication channels should be used, and give people opportunities, such as an employee engagement pulse survey, to provide input on the effectiveness of the organization's strategy and actions.

4. Conversations are key

A pulse survey is merely an input to the most important activity in the feedback and communication process: conversations. Conversations are even more important in times of uncertainty. Support managers with fact-based information and centralized resources so they can have meaningful conversations and maximum flexibility to address personal challenges. Enable managers to share their learnings and get their questions answered.

5. Centralize communications and resources

Summarize policies and instructions in one place, and include information about healthcare coverage, benefits (e.g. backup childcare), Employee Assistance Program services (EAP), time-off information, travel treatment, etc.

Seven Tips to Communicate with Your Employees in Times of Distress

6. Make it easy to work

Would considering remote-work options help alleviate some of the distress? Support your teams with the right tools to adapt to any change in the environment. This could include reallocating funds to laptops, investing in virtual meeting tools, expressing new meeting norms, etc. There are many resources available for helping employees shift to remote work and helping remote teams work effectively. LinkedIn Learning has also unlocked free courses to support employees through this time.

7. Learn from this experience and prepare for next time

Use employee feedback as one input to assess the effectiveness of your organization's response. The future will inevitably bring additional challenges. As you navigate the immediate challenge, conduct after-action reviews to determine what worked well and what needs to change for next time.

Your organization is unique, so tailor your approach to suit your people's needs. Whatever your approach, remember to put people at the center. This is our opportunity to show up for employees with actions that demonstrate that we recognize their critical role in organizational success.



Employee Engagement 101



What is Employee Engagement

Understanding what drives employee engagement—and how to measure it effectively—helps organizations identify and meet their employees' needs at work.

When engagement is a key component of a company's approach to success, it can deliver high value to business and people-related objectives—from financial performance—to greater employee happiness, productivity, retention, and more. Understanding what drives employee engagement—and how to measure it effectively—helps organizations identify and meet their employees' needs at work.

Read on to learn about the benefits of employee engagement, what drives engagement, and how leaders can measure and improve employee engagement across the enterprise.

What Is Employee Engagement?

Employee engagement is the degree to which employees invest their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral energies toward positive organizational outcomes. Engaged employees are personally invested in their work, see a strong connection between their strengths and their role, and are more willing to contribute time and effort to their work—and the company's overall goals.

Employee engagement is a broad construct that encompasses many aspects of an employee's experience at work. In research, it has been found to overlap with other concepts, such as job satisfaction, commitment, involvement, and motivation. Employee engagement is often confused with job satisfaction, but the two are not the same. Job satisfaction simply indicates how much an employee likes their job, which can involve many factors, including the compensation, prestige, or location of the job. An employee may be completely satisfied, but not engaged enough to apply themselves to the job.

True employee engagement requires a deeper connection between the workplace and the employee's personal values, goals, interests, and motivations.

Benefits of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement benefits both employees and their organizations. Some benefits of employee engagement include:

Higher productivity

It's astounding how productive a truly engaged workforce can be. Research shows that nearly 40% of workers would work harder if they were happier in their role. When organizations focus on engagement, employees seek to accomplish more during their working hours, and the results speak for themselves: organizations with engaged employees outperform competitors by over 200%.

Higher employee retention rates

Highly engaged employees are less likely to leave, reducing attrition and increasing retention rates. In a year-long study conducted by Glint between 2016-2017, including 75 companies across 15 industries, and involving over 500,000 employees, employees who scored unfavorably on engagement were 5 times more likely to quit in the subsequent six months, and 12 times more likely

to quit in the subsequent 12 months of the survey. This large-scale study shows that engagement is not only highly predictive of future outcomes, but it can be a leading indicator 12 months in advance. Employees who are emotionally invested in their work (and in the organization as a whole) are more likely to stay, preserving valuable institutional knowledge that improves your organization.

Lower rates of absenteeism

Employees who are engaged in and motivated by their work are more likely to show up every day to get the work done. Companies with an engaged workforce experienced 40% less absenteeism than less engaged workforces. And it's no surprise that a lower rate of absenteeism translates to more productive teams and, ultimately, a stronger bottom line.

Better customer service

Excellent customer service is more important than ever. Customers are willing to pay as much as a 16% premium for excellent customer

service. When employees are invested in their jobs and in their employer, they are much more likely to be invested in the customers, too. Customer service relies on employee enthusiasm and positive attitudes, which is why companies with highly engaged employees see higher customer satisfaction ratings than companies with less engaged employees.

Increased revenue

When other benefits of employee engagement converge—greater productivity, higher retention, and higher job satisfaction—they translate into a healthy bottom line. Organizations with engaged employees generate 2.5 times more revenue than organizations with low levels of employee engagement. Organizations with an engaged workforce can even improve the organization's stock market performance.

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Drivers of Employee Engagement

In order to improve employee engagement, it's important to understand what motivates employees and drives them to be personally invested in their work. However, these drivers can vary across organizations, for different employees, and even change over time.

Often, employee engagement is driven by employees' desire for:

- Meaningful work
- Career growth
- Empowerment
- Belonging
- Recognition
- Leadership
- Fulfilling work relationships

Employee Engagement 101 : Drivers of Employee Engagement

As technology and other modern practices change the way we work, many of the traditional drivers of employee engagement have remained the same. But a modern approach to employee engagement requires thinking of these drivers in a more personalized way.

The drivers of employee engagement are often impacted by many factors, including:

Company Culture

Company culture encompasses the values and behaviors that shape the organization and exemplify “the way things get done around here.” Culture has a huge impact on employee engagement drivers and levels, and both engagement and culture are influenced by the prevailing leadership and management practices within the organization. For example, at an organization known for innovation, engagement drivers may relate to an employee’s ability to speak up or share new ideas. Alternatively, an organizational culture driven by operational efficiency may have engagement drivers related to collaboration and execution.

Industry

If you ask managers in two different industries what drives engagement for their employees, you may end up with two completely different lists. For example, an employee at a nonprofit may need the work to be meaningful and tied to community goals in order to be engaged. On the other hand, an auto worker

may prioritize workplace safety and relationships with colleagues. Like company culture, an employee’s engagement drivers are influenced by the industry they are in and colleagues they are surrounded by.

Depending on the industry, there may be different opportunities for employees to get involved and become more engaged with their work. Industry conferences, trade shows, and webinars provide opportunities for employees to sharpen their skills, make new connections, and demonstrate their proficiency in wider circles.

These activities may look different in each industry, but they all serve to motivate employees to learn more, showcase their skills, or form stronger relationships with their peers—all of which have a major impact on employee engagement.

Job function

An employee’s specific job function can greatly impact what motivates them.

For some employees, meaningful work is motivation in and of itself. The meaning of work is personal to each individual employee and can be difficult to measure, but it’s a key part of inspiring employees to do their best work. Employees who are intrinsically motivated by their work feel they are serving the greater good or helping to achieve larger goals.

Other employees may be motivated by growth and changes in their job responsibility. Giving an employee

greater latitude in their role, allowing them to work on different projects that are more aligned with their interests can motivate them.

For other employees, it’s not the job function itself that affects engagement, but how they interact with others in the course of work. They want positive relationships with colleagues and managers, a healthy work-life balance, job security, or something else entirely, that isn’t tied to their work duties. With that in mind, managers should pay attention to how the specific duties of the job impact engagement for some employees, but not all.

Career path

Career goals—and progress toward them—is another factor that contributes to employee engagement. Depending on the career stage a certain employee is in, they may be motivated by different things.

For example, employees who are younger in their careers may prioritize competitive compensation and strong leaders who help them improve their skills. More seasoned employees may place more emphasis on strong relationships with colleagues or flexible work arrangements that suit their schedules. Employees who have experience in other companies or industries may be more driven by relationships, work culture, and autonomy than their peers.



How to Identify Drivers of Employee Engagement for Your Organization

The drivers of employee engagement vary from organization to organization and employee to employee based on a wide range of factors. Drivers also change over time alongside changes in management, culture, or external factors.

A modern approach to employee engagement requires understanding what drives employees—even as they shift. A people success platform—a platform that offers a holistic view of the employee experience—is the best way to measure and monitor these drivers at scale, and in real-time.

Within a people success platform, an effective employee engagement solution delivers information instantaneously and on-demand, rather than a massive annual data dump. It can help organizations identify the drivers with the most impact on engagement for the organization, as well as drivers unique to specific managers and teams. For example, Glint's Driver Impact Report enables companies to understand what drives engagement for specific groups by combining attributes (e.g., job level and location) of critical populations.

How to Measure Employee Engagement

Given the impact employee engagement has on an organization, how do you measure it and communicate its impact?

Many organizations rely on annual or semi-annual surveys to gather employee engagement data. This process typically requires a significant time investment to create, disseminate, analyze, and identify and communicate the findings of these surveys.

With this approach, it often takes weeks or even months to get survey data back. And that's not even the complete process—organizations, teams, and managers still need to discuss the results and take action. With this latency, new trends often develop before organizations have time to discuss the ones identified in the last survey.

Luckily, there are new and improved ways to measure employee engagement. Measuring employee engagement in today's world requires organizations to:

- **Collect data frequently:** Many companies have experienced the shortcomings of annual employee engagement surveys, and now opt for a “continuous listening” approach. This means administering a short survey (25 items or less), or “pulse,” on a frequent basis. This approach drastically reduces turnaround times for survey results and allows companies to collect near real-time feedback on trends that impact employee engagement.
- **Synthesize multiple data points in one system:** Organizations that rely exclusively on employee engagement surveys may miss some big-picture patterns and trends. The most effective organizations use pulse data alongside attrition, performance, and customer data to paint a complete picture of employee engagement. This allows the organization to predict things like increased attrition or decreased performance, giving managers a chance to address issues before they affect the entire organization.
- **Understand macro trends, act on a micro level:** It's crucial to digest information from all parts of your organization, bring in perspectives from different roles, locations, priorities, ages, career goals, and levels of experience. But keep in mind that what drives employee engagement for one department or one individual may be completely different from what drives engagement for someone else. A “blanket diagnosis” runs the risk of alienating certain employees or making them feel unheard. Managers should absorb insights from the entire workforce, but apply them to teams and individuals differently, based on what motivates them.

Employee Engagement 101: How to Measure Employee Engagement

- **Share data and create action plans with employees:** It's not enough for employees to simply fill out a survey; they need to feel their feedback is heard and used to make a difference. Managers should strive to be transparent with employees, communicate what is being measured and discuss strengths and opportunities. Consistently sharing these results contributes to a transparent culture where employees are comfortable giving feedback, and management is committed to improving results.
- **Use AI for pattern recognition:** Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming a wide range of business functions, and HR is no exception. AI and machine learning are built into the top employee engagement platforms. AI gives leadership the tools to detect patterns, gain insights, and proactively address issues related to employee engagement. Leaders should take advantage of advanced analytics and pattern recognition to measure and predict trends in job performance, customer satisfaction, and much more.
- **Turn qualitative into quantitative data:** Open-ended employee feedback is a crucial source of people data. In the past, companies spent weeks or months on end manually coding and compiling this feedback and pulling out important themes. Now, HR can employ natural language processing (usually within an employee engagement platform) for a more streamlined, data-driven view of open-ended feedback. Natural language processing, like Glint's Narrative Intelligence™, helps HR professionals organize and compile key themes in employee feedback in a fraction of the time.

With today's tools, it's easier than ever to leverage people analytics (analyzing data to assess the effectiveness of people practices, programs, and processes) to uncover critical insights and make purposeful changes. We can understand more about employees with smaller, more frequent pulses, and put AI and other advanced tools to work behind the scenes to quickly pull out rich insights. We can gather quantitative and qualitative data to truly understand how employees are feeling. Collectively, these technologies help organizations move from measuring employee engagement as historical analysis to predictive and even prescriptive people analytics.

How to Improve Employee Engagement

There's no one-size-fits-all solution for how to best improve employee engagement. As discussed earlier, what drives employee engagement depends on the organization's culture, industry, as well as an employee's job function, career path, and so much more.

However, there are a few best practices all organizations can consider when it comes to improving engagement:

- **Effective management practices:** Employees are more engaged when their leadership is engaged, transparent, and leading giving them in a clear direction. Management practices, such as departmental meetings with workers, formal and informal communication between supervisors and employees, or even frequent pulses, demonstrate that managers are invested in employees' success, too. Leaders and managers need to serve as models of the behaviors and practices they want to see practiced by their employees.
- **Relationships among coworkers,** and between coworkers and management: Fostering professional relationships among the various departments and management teams is a proven way to decrease attrition and improve engagement. When employees are comfortable with their peers and leaders, they are more personally invested in the work and more likely to be engaged. When teams work together seamlessly, employees, leaders, and the organization overall benefit from happier work lives and better performance.
- **Emphasizing communication:** Frequent conversations (for teams and one-on-one) are critical to learning about what drives and motivates employees. Conversations are a great opportunity for leaders to learn about and discuss potential problems or troubling trends, identify solutions and related actions, and celebrate key wins and accomplishments. To improve engagement, leaders should practice clear, honest, and transparent communication with employees.
- **Learning and personal development:** Employees are more engaged when they feel equipped and empowered to do their job, and learning is a big part of that. Make sure training is clear, well-structured, and ongoing to ensure employees have the information they need to perform at a high level. Consider offering on-demand training and continuous learning opportunities.

Employee Engagement 101: How to Improve Employee Engagement

- **Tools:** Simply providing employees with the right tools can help them increase their own efficiency and performance. For instance, self-service analytics tools can give employees more insight into customer expectations and trends so they can take their service to the next level. Additionally, tools that simplify and streamline necessary work processes—such as a single customer database or CRM—make it easier for employees to do their jobs, which in turn increases engagement.
- **Employee recognition:** Sometimes boosting engagement is as simple as recognizing those who are already performing well. Consider ways to recognize employees that works well for their job role, location, and schedule. This may include informal praise in an email or a meeting, or in more formal settings such as organizational or departmental meetings. Some companies may benefit from an employee recognition system, where peers or managers can nominate others for outstanding work, increasing engagement and strengthening relationships. Employee recognition helps employees to feel their performances are contributing to the organization as a whole, and encourages them to keep doing so.
- **Inclusive and diverse workplaces:** Creating a workplace culture that fosters a sense of belonging translates to a more engaged workforce and greater competitive advantage. To create a sense of belonging, many organizations turn their attention to strategies and tactics that support diversity—the variety of differences between people in their workforce—and inclusion—helping those employees feel a greater sense of belonging. A Deloitte study found that organizations that focus on both diversity and inclusion can see up to a 2x increase in feelings of engagement, as compared to organizations that focused only on diversity (1.2x), or only on inclusion (1.7x).



The Future of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement will continue to evolve, as it becomes more widely adopted. The future of employee engagement depends on the use of AI and People Analytics to help organizations identify and understand enterprise-wide trends. Machine learning algorithms and natural language processing will continue to reduce the latency associated with employee engagement data, making it faster to identify drivers and patterns associated with employee engagement.

At the same time, employee engagement is set to expand beyond mere data-driven analytics, to encompass a greater emphasis on the whole employee—including growth and development. Whereas the analytic component of employee engagement is assessment-focused, that's only the starting point for identifying how to better engage employees. The coming years will see a greater focus on a more holistic view of an employee —with tools and solutions to support their growth, development, and performance that will naturally cultivate employee engagement.

Employee Engagement 101: More Resources

For more resources and to learn about Glint, a LinkedIn company, visit: www.glintinc.com.

Join the conversation about navigating challenging times with peers in the LinkedIn Group, [People Success Forum](#).

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About Glint

Glint is the people success platform that leverages real-time people data to help global organizations increase employee engagement, develop their people, and improve results. Leading brands leverage Glint's unique combination of intuitive design, sophisticated analytics, and actionable intelligence to help employees be happier and more successful at work.