

Cultivating a Culture of

Sustainable

Employee

Engagement

Build a work environment where
true engagement takes root

 awardco



Creating and maintaining employee engagement is a constant challenge, exacerbated by the fact that engagement is a vague, difficult-to-measure concept. However, data shows that engaged employees are more productive, motivated, loyal, and happy—which is why it truly needs to be a top priority for leaders.

One key misunderstanding is that engagement can be created out of thin air with one burst of effort—think company parties, free food, or t-shirts. While nice gestures, these popular solutions don't work. As evidenced by the **continuing drop in engagement scores**: 31% of employees are engaged, and 17% are actively disengaged.

Awardco's research reflects a similar pattern: 24% of employees are fully engaged, while 31% are disconnected or actively demotivated.

Sustained employee engagement is more like growing a garden—it takes frequent effort and regular nourishment to create a thriving workplace where employees naturally feel motivated and engaged.

Luckily, you don't need a green thumb to improve engagement at work. You only need intentional, strategic improvements that help employees feel invested in their work, the culture, and the organization as a whole.

Grab your trowel, watering can, and gardening gloves—let's dig in to how to get a bountiful engagement harvest.



Benefits of organically grown engagement

Organizations that enjoy a culture of self-sustainable engagement have employees who care about their work, who go above and beyond the bare minimum, who innovate and improve, and who proactively collaborate.

Gallup research says it best—like a bounty of delicious crops, organizations that score high in engagement have:

- **18%** boost in productivity
- **23%** increase in profitability
- **81%** less absenteeism
- **43%** less turnover (in low-turnover orgs)
- **18%** less turnover (in high-turnover orgs)
- **64%** reduction in safety incidents
- **41%** fewer quality defects

Engaged employees care more and work harder—it's that simple. And the best part is, by putting in place the engagement strategies this paper will go over, these holistic benefits will naturally sprout and grow with minimal oversight by leadership.

Now, it's time to plant the seeds of engagement and nourish them to reap the rewards of a bought-in workforce. Below are the six steps you need to follow to take your engagement garden from barren soil to overflowing with beauty.

Foundational Engagement Strategies



Step one: prepare your soil

Seeds grow the best in ground that is prepared for their success, and the same is true for employees at your workplace. They need a safe, healthy space that is designed for their comfort and success from the soil up. Strategies to do this include:

Till the ground by **prioritizing clarity**

Mix in fertilizer by **building a value-based culture**

Moisten the soil by **supporting employee wellbeing**

These basic measures ensure that the employee experience has a strong foundation from the beginning, providing a framework that allows people to flourish.

Prioritize clarity: tilling the ground

Just as tilling the earth breaks up the soil and gives the seeds a place to take root, organizations must have basic practices in place that give employees the best chance to succeed.

An uncompromising focus on clear communication is one of the best ways to make sure your organization's ground is tilled and ready to go, leading to employees feeling **2.8x more likely to be engaged at work**. Clear communication removes the hard-packed barriers caused by silence, mixed messaging, or unclear expectations.

And considering only **45% of employees know what's expected of them at work**, this is a need that the majority of workers have!

There needs to be a clear flow of open communication from executives through department heads to managers and then to employees. This builds trust early, clearing the way for deeper engagement later on.

Develop an internal communication strategy [here](#)



Build a value-based culture: mixing in fertilizer

Fertilizer ensures seeds immediately have the nutrients they need to start growing. In business, strong core values—with leadership backing and alignment—give new employees something to care about and proud about from day one.

Company values need to direct what work gets done, how work gets done, and how interactions take place at work. And most importantly, leadership needs to model those values to reinforce their importance.

Recognition is one of the best ways to embed core values into employees' daily experiences. For example, if you have a value of "Collaboration," then when an employee takes the time to help a coworker, they need to be recognized for embodying that value.

A great example of this is how **Citizens Business Bank** built their recognition program around their core values, leading to a 25% reduction in turnover and higher overall engagement.

Build a values-based culture [here](#)

Support employee wellbeing: the first watering

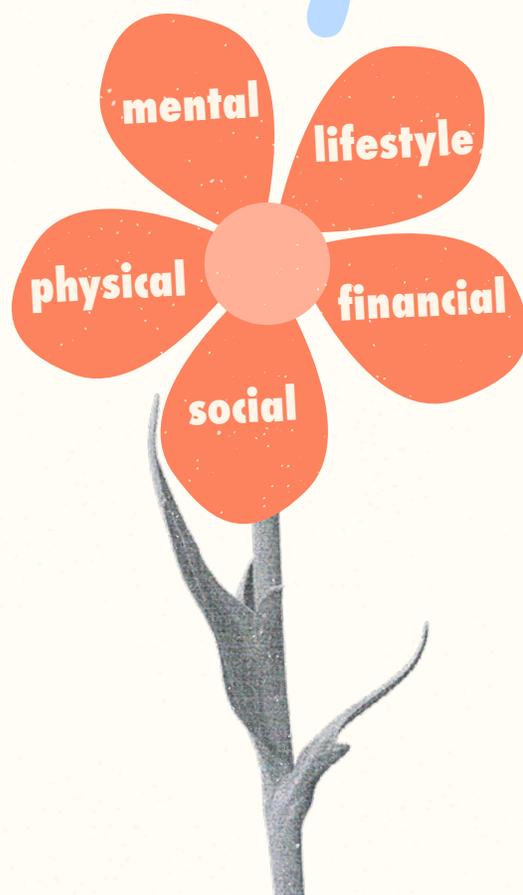
Watering the soil before planting the seeds kickstarts growth, and organizations can do something similar by building a support structure for employee wellbeing.

Stress and anxiety have taken a toll on the workplace, with only 50% of employees feeling like they're thriving in their lives, while 45% feel like they're struggling—and only 21% of employees agree that their organizations care about their wellbeing.

By holding to the foundational belief of healthy boundaries for employees, your people won't be distracted by trying to manage work stresses while juggling their personal life situations, too. This allows them to focus on work without distractions, improving productivity.

Simple employee wellness strategies to get you started:

- **Offer physical benefits**, such as health food/snacks in the office, gym reimbursements, ergonomic office equipment, and onsite fitness classes.
- **Provide mental health benefits**, such as therapy reimbursements, mindfulness sessions, and flexible schedules to assist busy parents/adults.
- **Support social health** by building both online and offline communities at work to foster connections between employees.
- **Help with financial needs** through financial literacy courses, generous employer matches, and other resources
- **Create a Lifestyle Spending Account** program that provides funds on a regular cadence for employees to spend on wellness-centered expenses.



Consider this: employees who are **engaged at work** have 42% lower stress than those who aren't engaged. So by putting strategies in place to support the mental, physical, social, and financial wellness of your people, you'll see stress lower and engagement rise.

Create employee wellness incentives [here](#)

Proper Onboarding



Step two: plant your seeds

Now that your soil is prepped and ready, it's time to plant your seeds. Tossing seeds randomly and leaving them to fend for themselves is a sure way to a barren garden. Ensure each seed is placed in the right spot of ground and has everything it needs to succeed with a robust onboarding strategy.

With a good onboarding strategy, you can enjoy **50% greater retention**, **60% higher productivity**, 2.5x greater profit growth, and employees who are **18x more committed to their organization**. After all, 89% of employees say onboarding helped them feel **very engaged at work**.

On the flip side, nearly 66% of employees are **likely to quit new jobs** within the first year if their onboarding is negative—and only 12% of employees agree that their onboarding experience was good.

Meet new hires' needs by following these employee onboarding strategies:

Meet new hires' needs by following these employee onboarding strategies:

- **Assign** an onboarding buddy to each new hire to act as their friend, mentor, and resource for their first few weeks.
- **Explain** the new hire's role in explicit detail to ensure clarity and productivity
- **Help** new employees set goals and milestones for their role
- **Make** sure the new hire's manager is involved in the onboarding process—this makes it **3.5x more effective**
- **Facilitate** regular check-ins to find out how employees are doing
- **Recognize** and reward early contributions to show new hires that their work is noticed and appreciated

Employees need to feel wanted, seen, and valued from day one. They need to know the company is aware of them and is there to help guide their growth. So take the time to set up a dedicated onboarding strategy for each department in your organization, tailoring it to fit open roles as needed.

Review modern onboarding strategies [here](#)

Purpose Driven Work



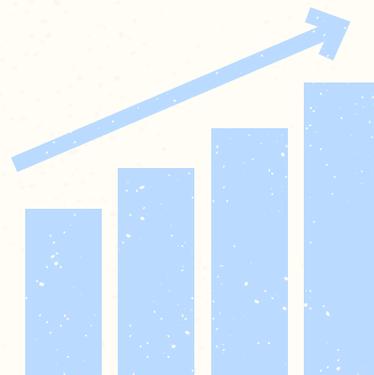
Step three: regularly water the ground

When prepping your soil, the initial water helps seeds germinate and start to grow. Afterward, regular watering helps your plants absorb nutrients, build a strong structure, and photosynthesize. What could be so central to the success of your engagement strategies?

That's easy: employee purpose.

It is nearly impossible to be engaged in a task that feels meaningless or unimportant, but when employees feel like their work has a purpose and connects to the company's overall purpose, the results are impressive:

- **77%** more likely to be engaged
- **87%** more likely to stay at the company
- **29%** work quality
- **51%** less absenteeism
- **64%** fewer safety incidents



While 85% of executives and upper management agree they have a purpose at work, only **15% of managers and lower-level employees feel the same**. So how do you bridge the gap?

Fill your watering can with strategies that connect individual efforts with organizational success. That way, every employee knows that what they do matters, and they can take pride in it. Keys to accomplish this include:

- **Nail the organization's purpose:**
A strong organizational purpose allows employees to align their own purpose with it. A company's purpose should guide its decisions, empower its contributions to society, and soak through each aspect of work.
- **Build resonate core values:**
As mentioned above, core values help employees feel connected to the company. These values should be authentic, actionable, and exemplified by company leadership.
- **Celebrate results, big and small:**
Recognize when employees make an impact, whether it means a successful client onboarding, positive customer review, a big sale, or even just helping a colleague with a project. Tie these recognitions to core values, reinforcing the impact of employees' work on company goals.

Purposeful employees are **more likely to innovate** and go above and beyond because they're invested, they care, and they know their work is noticed.





Employee Recognition

Step four: provide plenty of sunlight

Sunlight powers photosynthesis, which is how plants convert carbon dioxide and water into food for energy. It drives growth and ensures the ongoing health of plants.

Just like sunlight, the warm fuzzies of employee recognition power the continuing engagement of your workforce.

We say warm fuzzies, but there's nothing fuzzy or abstract about the impact of employee recognition:

- **Regular, meaningful recognition** helps employees feel 9x greater belonging, 6x more likely to stay, and 2.5x more likely to work at peak productivity
- 94% of employees who feel highly appreciated **love their workplace**
- When employees say they're meaningfully recognized, they're **2.3X more likely to be engaged**, 1.7X more likely to stay at the company, and 2.4X more likely to have high wellbeing at work.
- Employees are **18x more likely to produce great work** when they're recognized for their efforts

Awardco research shows that the biggest differentiator in employees who simply show up and those who are fully engaged is if they're recognized through the full spectrum of channels, including from managers, leaders, peers, publicly, privately, and so on.

Because when employees are recognized for their work—when they feel seen, valued, and appreciated for what they do and who they are—they're more engaged, productive, and loyal. It's that simple.

Don't worry, spreading the warmth of recognition sunlight may seem overwhelming, but just like a garden naturally basks in the sunlight, recognition will naturally flow and spread with the right processes and tools in place.



Use a modern recognition platform

Outdated, manual recognition systems don't get the job done—**just ask any of our clients** who updated their old systems and saw amazing benefits. Modern recognition software brings a host of benefits that allow recognition to spread throughout your culture with hardly any effort:

- **Create** and manage multiple custom recognition programs on a single platform
- **Automate** and streamline administration to save **30+ hours** of monthly admin work
- **Simplify** point distribution, budget management, and reward fulfillment
- **Customize** the platform, each program, and reward catalogs to fit your brand/culture

The Awardco platform is purpose-built to give admins an all-in-one tool that powers your **recognition, rewards, and engagement** strategies. Contact our team to **get more specifics** on how it can solve your culture challenges.

Create specific recognition programs

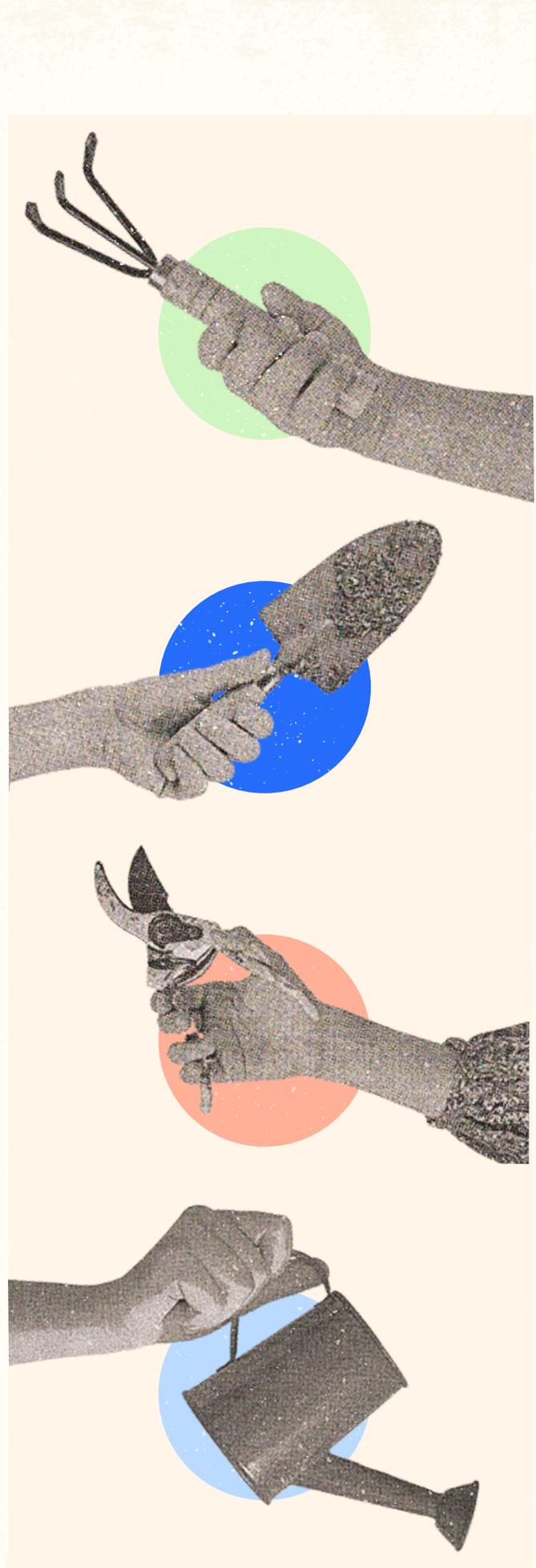
Specific programs give employees structured avenues to both recognize and be recognized for specific behaviors. Intentional programs built through a modern recognition platform remove barriers of uncertainty, simplify the recognition process, and offer robust reporting capabilities.

Different types of recognition programs include:

- Peer-to-peer
- Manager-to-report
- Incentives (wellness, safety, sales, etc.)
- Nomination awards
- Milestones (service anniversaries, birthdays, etc.)
- Lifestyle Spending Accounts
- Holiday activities

Programs can be structured with top-down approval flows or unstructured with more casual, on-the-spot recognition. They can be tied to monetary rewards or focus exclusively on non-monetary gratitude. The key is to build programs that fit your people, culture, and budget in a way that reaches everyone.

See how Awardco's [mobile features](#) and [offline capabilities](#) make reaching offline, deskless, frontline, and remote employees a breeze.



Start from onboarding onward

Introduce recognition from an employee's first day to reinforce your commitment to appreciation. Express gratitude to new hires for choosing your company, give them some points or some swag as a welcome gift, and encourage their new managers and colleagues to recognize them through your peer-to-peer program, too.

After onboarding, ensure your recognition programs carry touchpoints throughout the entire employee journey. As mentioned above, with various recognition programs that highlight achievement, milestones, and efforts, you'll have a culture of far-reaching recognition that keeps people engaged from day one.



Real-world data: how recognition with Awardco effects engagement

To show the impact of recognition, we **surveyed our clients** to learn more about their engagement levels. This research had some clear results that show how engagement levels at companies with robust recognition strategies differ from global engagement averages:

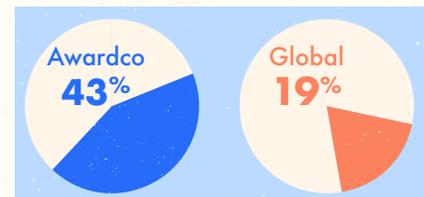
**% of employees
actively demotivated**



**% of employees
partially disengaged**



**% of employees who
feel engaged**



The data proves it: by fertilizing your workplace with meaningful recognition, you'll create a flourishing garden of engagement and motivation.

Professional Development



Step five: introduce a trellis for support

The impact of a professional development strategy can't be overstated—just like a trellis, stake, or cage provides plants the support they need to reach heights it couldn't reach on its own, professional development guides and motivates employees to become the best version of themselves.

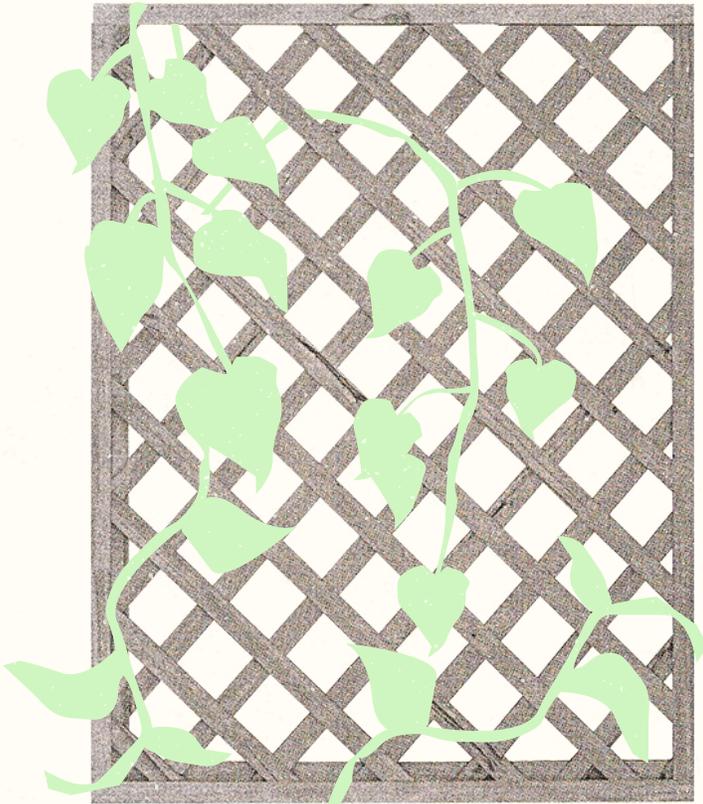
Over 70% of employees agree that training and development opportunities **increase their job satisfaction** and 94% would stay at their company longer if given **ways to learn and grow**. That's why organizations that have a **strategy in place to develop their employees** have 11% greater profitability and 100% greater retention than those that don't: employees who know they can grow in their role care more, are more engaged, and work harder.

However, 63% of people say they've quit jobs due to a **lack of growth opportunities** and 40% **don't see a clear path forward** in their careers. It's time to close the gap and ensure each employee has access to their own trellis of growth.

Build and implement an effective professional development strategy with these ideas:

Introduce recognition from an employee's first day to reinforce your commitment to appreciation. Express gratitude to new hires for choosing your company, give them some points or some swag as a welcome gift, and encourage their new managers and colleagues to recognize them through your peer-to-peer program, too.

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Build and implement an effective professional development strategy with these ideas:

Assess where each employee is right now: where are their skills, where are their gaps, and how satisfied with their work are they right now? Do they have a clear view of progression?

- **Assess where the company gaps are:** Does your company have clear gaps in workflows, experience, roles, productivity, or quality assurance that need filling? Which roles need to exist, and which employees could fill those?
- **Set individual goals that align with company goals:** Have managers help employees create their own **Professional Development Plan** (PDP). Help them set goals that fit with the company's present and future needs/goals.
- **Choose the right training resources:** Instructor-led courses, Q&As with experts, online training, external development opportunities, mentorships, and coaching are all great development methods. Decide what's best for your situation.
- **Implement the strategy and boost engagement:** Marketing your new development programs with flyers, posters, company mentions, and more. Consider creating an **incentive program** that rewards employees who attend or who accomplish certain goals on their PDP.

Provide structured avenues of development to guide employee growth, and employees will engage with their work in a way that mutually benefits them and the company.

Regular Feedback



Step six: pull out any weeds

Weeds steal nutrients, block light, and otherwise hinder the growth of your garden. Misunderstandings, unclear expectations, unhelpful feedback—or worse, a lack of any feedback—can be the barriers that block engagement and improvement for your people.

Nearly 80% of employees who have received **meaningful feedback** in the past week are fully engaged at work—compared to only 20% who haven't received said feedback. The problem is, only 21% of employees agree they've received meaningful feedback in the past week.

360-degree feedback is the best way to open avenues to give feedback to, and receive feedback from, every employee. The idea of 360-degree feedback is that each employee gets feedback from the people who work the most closely with them: including peers, supervisors, and subordinates.

The goal is to provide comprehensive feedback that increases awareness of both employee strengths and points of improvement.

In addition to 360-degree feedback (which should be done at least once a year), managers need to be trained to provide more frequent feedback through 1:1s and informal conversations. 80% of employees who **received meaningful feedback in the past week** are fully engaged, so frequent feedback is something employees want—don't be afraid to provide it!

The role of the gardeners (managers)

HR and senior leadership are important for strategizing, implementing and exemplifying many of the tools and behaviors necessary for engagement. However, managers are the ones who provide the daily nourishment that employees need to grow and maintain strong engagement.

Like gardeners care for the plants in their garden, providing the right amounts of water, light, weeding, and care for each individual shoot, managers provide the meaningful, personal care employees need.

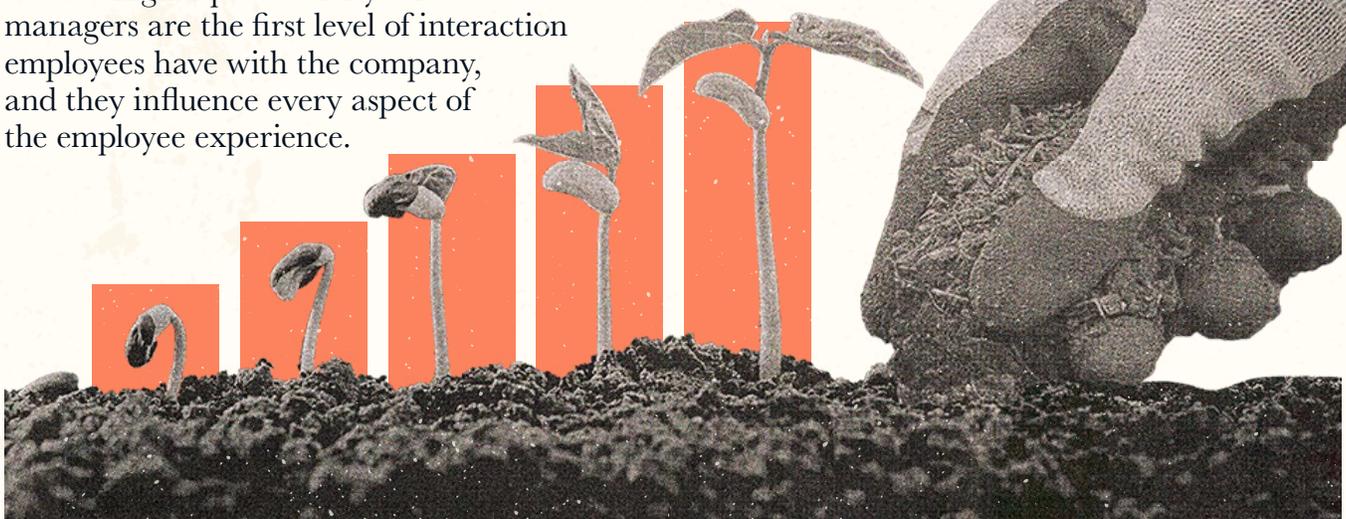
According to Gallup research, at least 70% of variance in team engagement scores is impacted by the quality of the manager. Which means the majority of employee engagement is on managers' shoulders.

Managing people is difficult, but there are behaviors and strategies that resonate with employees and drive greater engagement.

Strategies to improve as a manager:

- **Communicate** openly, effectively, and often
- **Balance** workloads to best fit employees' strengths, goals, and work preferences
- **Avoid** micromanagement by building trust
- **Show** genuine interest in each employee as a person
- **Model** positive behavior and foster a positive work environment
- **Recognize** good work as often as you can
- **Adapt** your management style to fit employee personalities

There's a reason that **96% of engaged employees** trust their managers, leading to 50% higher productivity—it's because managers are the first level of interaction employees have with the company, and they influence every aspect of the employee experience.





Awardco: The fertilizer for your success

Awardco Engage™, our product line of employee engagement tools, is purpose-built to make listening to and acting on employee feedback simple, effective, and data-driven.

Awardco Engage empowers employee listening through surveys, insights, and action planning by allowing admins to:

- **Build** and launch custom annual, pulse, onboarding, or exit surveys
- **Increase** participation with built-in incentives and rewards
- **Gather** feedback from every employee and view sentiment in real-time
- **View** dashboards and reports to turn insights into action

Drive actionable insights with **Awardco Engage** and see the impact of increased engagement for yourself.

Reap a bountiful harvest of engagement

By preparing your workplace with foundational support, nailing the onboarding process, giving each employee a purpose, spreading frequent recognition, investing in professional development, and providing frequent feedback, you'll grow a garden that's wonderful to behold.

And the fruits of your labor will be a holistically engaged workforce that feels invested in their jobs, cares about the company, innovates to improve processes, and sticks around longer because they love where they work.