



# WHY MOST

## Employee Engagement Programs Fail

by Kevin Kruse

**Every year, Gallup and other companies reveal their** annual employee survey results, and while the numbers may shift by a point or two, the headline is still the same—the vast majority of employees are not engaged at work. Despite everyone being aware of the engagement crisis at hand, most organizations still fail in their efforts to increase the commitment of their workers.

Based on my own journey from a bad boss to “Best Place to Work” award winner, and from working with dozens of companies on their own journeys to creating great cultures, these are the most common reasons engagement efforts fail:

- 1. People mistakenly think engagement means making employees “happy.”** Often, engagement initiatives crater in the C-suite because senior executives don’t know what employee engagement is. They may confuse it with nice but “soft” efforts to make employees “happy”. While it’s nice to make employees happy, “happy” doesn’t mean workers are necessarily hard at work focusing on the company’s objectives. Engagement is the emotional commitment one feels to their organization and its goals. When engaged, employees give discretionary effort—the secret sauce to gains in productivity, quality, service, and sales, and ultimately profits and share price.
- 2. Many smart people don’t think engagement can actually be measured.** Even some notable business gurus were quoted recently as saying, “Don’t try to measure engagement or you’ll kill it.” Or, “You can’t measure engagement, but you know it when you see it.” HR consultancies around the world have found ways to measure proxies of engagement. While engagement might be a feeling that can’t truly be measured, we can definitely use surveys to measure the likelihood of looking for another
- job, referring a friend to an open position, and being challenged and satisfied at work. Measurement is the first step in managing better outcomes.
- 3. Companies measure engagement, but then don’t share results.** Typically, when an engagement survey is completed, the results are scrutinized by the C-level executives and HR professionals. Rarely are all the results shared throughout the company. Engagement improves from the grass roots. Each front-line manager needs to be given their own team scores and held accountable for improving them.
- 4. All the ideas for improvement come from the top.** Related to number three, senior execs often work as a council of wise men and women, brainstorming for better benefits or new award programs for the whole company. The secret to engagement is that it comes from the relationships front-line managers have with their direct reports. Only action planning at the individual team level will generate the ideas that will move the needle.
- 5. They think it’s about picnics and parties.** Unfortunately, C-suite top-down ideas typically include things like summer picnics, dress-down Fridays, Employee of the Month awards, or tweaks to the benefits package. The true drivers of engagement are growth, recognition, trust, and communication. While people might feel “happier” during a party, it’s only a true change in their daily and weekly work experience that will make them feel emotionally connected to their organization.

The employee engagement crisis has gone on long enough. We must strive for excellence and implement an annual survey, share the results with front-line managers, and insist on team-level action planning to move the scores in the right direction.