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talent development

View Engagement Through a DEI Lens

Employee engagement and inclusion strategies should be interconnected.

Leadership Development

It's often said that employees don't leave a company but rather their manager. With the Great Resignation in full swing, many employers are facing a high rate of turnover and must find ways to retain their remaining staff. One way to stem the impact is by focusing on leadership development. As the vendors in this section convey, boosting leaders' competencies—for example, in trust building, emotional intelligence, and relationship building—can help improve a company's culture.

When it comes to leadership development in today's transforming work environment, it's not only *what* your leaders are learning but *how* they are learning. In a year-long collaboration with a large regional financial institution, we deployed six essential design components in the construct of its leadership development program.

If your organization is seeking an impactful 21st-century leadership development experience, you may want to evaluate your current program against these six essentials.

- **Competency-based:** Use your organization's leadership competency model as the program foundation. Include competency assessments for leaders and their managers to assess their perceived skill level.
- **Self-service content:** Curate and publish pertinent competency-building content, including articles, books, e-learning, videos, and podcasts for leaders.
- **Experiential activities:** The majority of learning happens through application. Develop resources with suggested experiential activities for each leadership competency.
- **Business scholars:** Use respected leaders as "scholars" to deliver relevant topics virtually—that is key to contextualizing the competencies and leadership best practices.
- **Social learning:** If your organization has an internal social platform, embed the platform in your program to facilitate organic learning between peers. Use the platform to push and pull content for leaders on a regular basis.
- **Certification status:** Offer a certification for leaders who fulfill program completion requirements. Provide an incentive for completion, such as executive recognition.

The success of your organization's leadership development depends largely on your ability to offer a flexible, practical, and digital-friendly option for leaders to learn on their own terms.

Follow our link to learn more about how to improve your leadership development experience and partner with a 2022 Brandon Hall Group Bronze Award-winning company. **WestStarAssociates.com**

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21st Century Learning and Development Solutions

How to Have Hard Talks at Work

A leader—we'll call him Dave—needed to have a difficult conversation with an underperforming team member. Dave prepared by creating a list of the employee's shortcomings. He built a logical and compelling case. But as the meeting neared, Dave grew anxious, sensing the conversation would go poorly. He was right.

Difficult conversations like those are often unavoidable. Many leaders, like Dave, choose to approach situations of conflict with logic (if a team member isn't pulling their weight, get proof). But while logic is an important part of the equation, emotions play a significant role as well.

Even in the best of times, discussing topics such as poor performance, inappropriate comments, and excessive absenteeism can be challenging for managers to address with their employees.

But the additional stressors of the past few years—economic uncertainty, the pandemic, and remote work—have made these difficult moments with colleagues even more challenging, especially when facilitated virtually.

That is why emotional intelligence, the ability to identify and regulate our emotions and even co-regulate emotions with others, is an invaluable skill set for both managers and employees.

Using EI to Navigate Difficult Conversations

So, how could Dave have handled his employee conversation more constructively? And how can you apply emotional intelligence to make those challenging workplace conversations go more smoothly and successfully?

1. Identify Your Emotions

A key tenet of emotional intelligence is recognizing your own emotional state, particularly before engaging in a difficult conversation.

If you're about to have a tough talk like Dave was, and you recognize you're feeling anxious or frustrated, it may be a good idea to take a moment and acknowledge those feelings. Naming them is the first step in regulating them.

2. Engage in Active Listening

Emotionally intelligent managers give their employees ample opportunities to speak—without challenge or interruption—and they listen carefully.

Dave may have achieved a better outcome by asking a few open-ended questions, such as:

- How are you feeling about your current projects?
- What are some key skills you'd like to be cultivating?
- What obstacles have you encountered, and where do you need support?

Researcher Avi Kluger has proven that effective listening can improve job satisfaction and boost employee creativity. When an employee feels heard and supported, they are much more likely to absorb your feedback and take corrective action.

3. Be Constructive, Not Just Critical

Dave's goal here was to help his underperforming employee improve and succeed. But he failed to prepare for the all-important second part of the meeting: the action plan.

The emotionally intelligent approach to these situations is to balance the criticism with a plan. This could include setting goals and milestones, for example, and holding one-on-one meetings to assess the employee's progress along the way.

Difficult conversations are an unavoidable part of the job. But by applying the skills and techniques of emotional intelligence, you can make those conversations less stressful and more fruitful for all parties.
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Oji Life Lab

Preparing for Gen Next

They're our youngest generation, one of the largest, and are on track to be the most educated in history. In three years, they'll make up 25 percent of the US workforce—and by 2030, one-third of it. So, are you prepared for Gen Z? Are your frontline supervisors ready for the unprecedented challenges they'll face?

While workplaces have changed and workforces have transitioned, employee management practices in many industrial sectors have not, particularly in labor-intensive industries, where autocratic or authoritative management styles still exist.

Developed during the Industrial Revolution for use with a generation no longer in the workforce, autocratic managers rely on title and authority and achieve performance outcomes through others via edict or management by decree. What worked well with past generations won't work with those entering the workforce.

Generation Z is categorically represented by those born between 1997 and 2012. Within the US, nearly 50 percent of the 68 million within this demographic are ethnic minorities. Considered digital natives, our junior-most employees have never experienced life without instant access to the internet.

As for daily routines, Gen Z typically spends more than three hours on social media. Over half spend 10 hours or more on electronic devices. While connected, many Gen Zers struggle with stress, anxiety, and depression and often report feeling lonely and sad.

In the workplace, Gen Z values diversity and inclusivity. They also view technology as essential. Most want variety and work-life balance—pay and flexibility rank high among priorities, even more than in previous generations. As for dislikes, long hours are at the top of the list, closely followed by poor management.

Gen Z is drawn to socially and environmentally responsible companies when selecting an employer. Mission and vision statements are essential, as are real-life examples of those values. Gen Z often steers clear of companies with a heavy ecological footprint or non-sustainable work practices.

For companies to effectively attract and recruit Gen Z employees, they must pay attention to those things most important to them. This may look like integrating more flexibility into the workplace, expanding diversity in the workforce, and modernizing employee management practices.

To retain Gen Z employees, companies must invest in developing the supervisors interacting directly with them. Old-school tactics no longer work. Incoming employees want to be coached and not managed. They want continuous and ongoing feedback and will only work for those they know and trust.

More so than at any point in the past, job applicants have many options. If they work for you, it's by choice. If they stay, it's because of the experience you provide to them while there. Developing your frontline resources will be critical to successfully integrating the next generation of workers. While it may not stop the revolving door, it will certainly slow it down and allow you to focus on the next set of challenges.

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Boost Mental Health With Bonds

Everyone experiences challenges at work. We can experience them as an engaging struggle that enables us to grow into our potential or a threatening obstacle that induces stress and fear-based behavior. When work is experienced as stressful (especially over prolonged periods), it can make employees susceptible to mental illness such as anxiety, depression, addiction, and panic attacks.

There's a lot of focus on employee benefits and self-care strategies to reduce stress, which can be helpful but are incomplete. It's time to name the real opportunity to help people lead emotionally healthy lives: building secure bonds at work. Most leaders are taught that emotion doesn't belong in the workplace and relationships are the antithesis of authority and strong leadership. We've got it all wrong.

More than any other factor, our bonds at work affect our mental health and performance.

Why is bonding critical? When we're born, we depend on another human for survival. When we feel a secure bond, we feel safe and confident in who we are. When we experience distance or an absence of those bonds, we experience fear, stress, and self-doubt—and in extreme cases, we can lose hope and die. Research by John Bowlby, creator of attachment theory, states that "Seeking and maintaining contact with a secure relationship is viewed as the primary motivating principle in human beings."

We see the power of relationships in end-of-life studies where the quality of our relationships is a greater predictor of happiness and longevity than any other health indicator. Our need for connection and relationship doesn't disappear at work. In times of stress, humans look to authority figures for support and reassurance. When it's not available, we experience more fear, stress, and anxiety. When those experiences are prolonged, we're at higher risk for emotional trauma, depression, and other symptoms that often worsen with time, including the health of our other relationships. It's a vicious cycle.

Leaders play a critical role in creating secure bonds at work. When we are securely bonded with our leader and organization, we are more resilient.
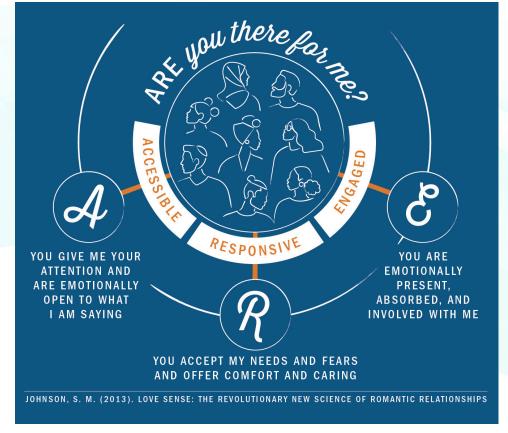
This question, based on Sue Johnson's work (*Love Sense*, 2013), gets at the heart of our attachment needs: ARE you there for me? Leaders can use that question and the embedded acronym to remember the three elements of a secure bond that team members seek:

- Accessible—you give me your attention and are emotionally open to what I am saying.
- Responsive—you accept my needs and fears and offer comfort and caring.
- Engaged—you are emotionally present, absorbed, and involved with me.

If you and your team can't confidently answer yes to that question, you will inevitably see insecure responses and behaviors. When we feel bonded, we become more resilient and stronger together. While it's not a panacea for broader organizational or even personal health issues, it's a strong foundation for navigating greater challenges.

Ready to talk about mental health at your organization? **tier1performance.com/working-together/ workforce-mental-health**

ARE you there for me?

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YOU ARE EMOTIONALLY PRESENT, ABSORBED, AND INVOLVED WITH ME

JOHNSON, S. M. (2013). LOVE SENSE: THE REVOLUTIONARY NEW SCIENCE OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

TiER1 PERFORMANCE

Start by Building Trust

According to *Harvard Business Review*, organizations with a culture of trust report 50 percent higher productivity, 74 percent less stress, and 40 percent less burnout in employees.

Executives at Abilitie have worked with Fortune 500 companies worldwide to help their leaders become better people managers. Across the various company cultures we've worked with, the common truth is that effective management is about building trust.

When your team trusts you, they are better equipped to execute at their full potential, find more fulfillment in their roles, and be better teammates. Building a culture of trust is critical to the success of your business.

As a leader, you can take four steps right now to improve the trust and success of your team:

1. Set Clear Expectations

Creating a team rooted in trust starts with each member clearly understanding expectations. When communicating new tasks or projects, co-create what success looks like. Align on the outcome you want to achieve and discuss how to achieve it together using explicit language to avoid misunderstandings.

2. Enable Motivators

Your employees are likely not incentivized by the same things you are; everyone finds motivation from different sources. Invest in discovering your employees' unique motivators.

When you understand what drives your team members, you can inspire better collaboration and motivate for higher output, which naturally leads to improved trust.

3. Provide Actionable Feedback

Feedback is a vital part of any managerial relationship. When providing feedback to employees:

- Define the outcome you want to achieve from the conversation. How do you want this person to feel?
- Evaluate the best environment for the discussion. Support the intended outcomes by considering the factors you can and cannot control.
- Create a safe space. Start with specific, warranted praise or appreciation.
- Do not assume. Be curious and inquisitive, spending more time listening than speaking. Good communicators are good listeners.
- Link feedback to goals and motivations. Help them see that addressing the feedback is an opportunity to achieve their goals.
- Be honest and constructive. Ensure the employee is clear about next steps and understands your commitment to supporting them.

Trust occurs when an employee believes you have their best interests at heart. By implementing these steps to improve how you provide feedback, you'll build trust.

4. Be Present

Researchers at Stanford studying multitaskers concluded that "by doing less, you might accomplish more." Focus on removing distractions and being fully present in your interactions with team members. Turn off notifications and be fully present to accomplish more. Removing distractions helps you pick up cues to ask better questions and create better solutions together.

Managing others is one of the hardest things you will do as a professional. By dedicating your full focus to the pursuit, you will reap the rewards.

While building an environment of trust between you and your employees takes time and practice, the resulting outcomes are well worth the investment for leaders at any company, no matter your size or the industry in which you operate.

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Relationship building is a key leadership skill to be learned. Having trouble retaining good people? If the number 1 reason people quit their job is the poor treatment they receive from their boss, then how can leaders build relationships of trust that bring out dedication and cooperation from their employees?

Leaders are oftentimes hesitant to approach the "touchy-feely" realm of human interaction and may hesitate to get close to people because they are afraid that will prevent them from exercising real authority and discipline. If they get "too friendly," they assume they will receive demands for things they cannot give: higher wages, better working conditions, a smaller workload. Relationship-building skill mitigates those fears of intimacy by providing direction and purpose to our communication. What is needed is to take the time to understand people as individuals, to listen to their opinions and feelings, and to take actions that find the solution to the real problem—not the problem they mistakenly assumed it to be. To lead people well, we cannot afford to ignore personal issues.

In the end, the leader has what their people want—fairness, understanding, reasonable accommodation—and it is usually not difficult to give. The real difficulty is finding out what those needs are. The solution may be as simple (or as difficult!) as saying "I'm sorry."

By rebuilding strong relationships based on mutual trust, leaders can then proceed to train their people well and have the confidence to give them the freedom to exercise their own ideas on improving their jobs. This gives them pride in their work and is the foundation of a good team environment. **twi-institute.com**

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