

Employee Experience: Building Morale and Engagement

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All sales organizations need to keep three numbers in mind: 89, 76, and 36. These are not lottery winning numbers, but rather, they paint a picture of the current state of the workforce. For instance, 89% of employees say their workplace well-being has declined since the pandemic, 76% of employees report experiencing burnout at work, and only 36% of employees report being engaged at work – meaning nearly two-thirds of employees are disengaged.

Employee burnout and disengagement have been exacerbated by the turbulence of the past year, with almost half of sales reps saying they are less productive than they used to be, and less than two-thirds expressing confidence in their sales organization's ability to close deals in the current economic environment.

While issues in the workplace related to a lack of engagement and burnout are not new, the economic slowdown and social tensions of the pandemic have accelerated these problems in many organizations. Sales reps, who are often extroverts who thrive on connecting with

others, are facing a new and overwhelming set of challenges. This means that moving forward, keeping sales momentum going can no longer rely solely on traditional, pre-pandemic sales practices.

Sales enablement practitioners have the unique opportunity to empower and supercharge their reps through nuanced approaches and innovative methods that motivate peak performance. As employees find themselves in a rut, organizations can address employee needs proactively through support and resources to maintain morale and engagement.

To unleash the power of employee experience to transform rep performance and the business, keep the following three principles in mind.

Understand Barriers of New Reality

The unprecedented changes of the past year have brought about a new reality for employees and the workplace environment. Among many differences are the new and elevated expectations of employees. People are being trained by some of the best companies in the world to expect to get what they want, where, when, and how they want it. As a result, employees expect their managers and companies to meet those expectations as well.

Employees have now adopted a consumer mindset and approach to their jobs, partially because in the virtual sphere, it is easy to access what working at a particular company is like. In essence, many employees are choosing where to work the way they might choose where to go to dinner.

Similarly, the virtual environment has created a new barrier in how sales teams operate: virtual engagement. Although virtual platforms made getting through the last year possible, it is hard to connect emotionally, read people, and gauge how people are feeling over video conferencing. Therefore, organizations might be facing a strong sense of disconnection and isolation among their employees, which needs to be addressed when building engagement.

Additionally, the restriction on rewards presents a barrier to motivation. Without a strong reward system, extrinsic motivation tools are greatly limited. Traditional award ceremonies, company parties, or president's club dinners are no longer viable options for organizations, as it is already challenging to gather people together in one room. Meanwhile, rewarding employees with vacation has become inaccessible, as many employees are working from home, and travel restrictions are still in place. Because company budgets are, across the board, tightening, even if an organization has figured out a creative way to motivate or reward people, the budget might not have the capacity to implement it.

Another shift of the new workplace reality is the growing importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. The past year has ignited managers and companies to realize that they must engage people's whole selves at work and do so clearly, fairly, and authentically.

Thus, the way leaders motivate their employees will have to do more with their professional role, and incorporate aspects of their personal values and goals.

A change in times calls for a change in motivation approaches. The old way of motivating reps to produce peak performance is no longer effective, and on top of that, we are living and working in a time of more and faster change than ever before. Organizations need to approach motivating reps in new ways to effectively get through to their employees.

Employ a Marketing Mindset with Employees

Building morale and engagement in any organization is contingent on the employees. By prioritizing the experiences, needs, and wants of employees, every member of the organization will feel supported and valued by their company.

In sales especially, sales reps and customer success teams are asked to deliver smooth and comfortable experiences for their customers. However, employees can only deliver experiences to customers that they experience themselves.

When organizations give employees the kind of experience they want their customers to have, reps understand what an excellent experience involves, how it makes them feel, and they appreciate how important it is. As a result, employees start to intuitively make decisions and adopt new attitudes and behaviors that lead to great customer experiences and phenomenal sales.

To successfully employ the customer mindset toward employees, managers will need to approach their employees in innovative ways. The best sales managers are distinguished by their sales innovation rather than driving sales rep compliance with the established sales process and taking corrective action when reps don't comply. That same innovation must be utilized when managers are engaging with sales reps. Managers should approach reps as if they are customers and managers are marketers trying to get them to buy a product. In the case of reps, buying the product is about producing sales results.

Embracing employee centricity requires managers to have a deeper understanding of their team members. With a marketing mindset, managers can orient around the employee when trying to motivate them to produce peak performance. Savvy marketers start with the customer, not the product. In the same way, managers need to start with focusing on the employee as opposed to a sales target or sales process.

Motivating with a marketing mindset requires organizations to accept that offering incentives, role modeling, and coaching are no longer enough to motivate employees to be at peak performance. While these approaches are still important and need to be done, a more holistic approach to engagement is needed for reps to meet their full potential.

When organizations foster employee centricity, managers develop a sense of intimacy and empathy with their employees. In doing so, managers can work to truly understand reps and identify their new needs and drivers.

On a broader scope, sales leaders have a choice to make. Leaders need to clearly decide if they want to embrace a new way to motivate reps, or if they are fine using the same approaches over and over again, and expecting a different result. If leaders want to avoid the high cost of turnover, toxic employees, and poor performance, employing a marketing mindset to motivate their employees can be a highly effective strategy.

Implement an Employee Experience Plan

Employee experience constitutes every step in an employee's journey with an organization, from the first contact that they have as a potential recruit to the last interaction after the end of their employment. Everything employees do, see, hear, feel, and touch is a part of their cumulative employee experience.

To design extraordinary employee experiences, there is a four-step process that organizations can implement.

The first step is to **segment employees**. Since reps are not all motivated by the same things – especially given how different people have experienced the pandemic, economic, and social justice issues of the last year differently — segmenting employees allows for organized variation in motivational approaches.

To successfully segment employees, enablement practitioners can take the following actions:

- Research and listen to employees
- Understand the needs and wants of employees
- Identify discrete groups
- Think beyond role level or department

Next, **map the employee journey**. Identify the key steps, interactions, and touchpoints that comprise employees' engagement with your organization. After mapping the entire employee journey at the organization, identify the points that have the greatest impact on sales reps, and prioritize those interactions as opportunities for unique and valuable impact.

For instance, the mapping process might lead organizations to identify training and development as a priority in the journey for their organization. From there, enablement can assess how they can give employees access to resources that help them understand what customers want and need, publish guides that provide updated definitions of what success looks like in today's context, or develop working sessions to engage reps with the brand purpose.

Third, **adopt a design model**. A design model helps categorize and prioritize the elements of the employee experience. Design models should consider different mechanisms of engagement that fit the varying employee segments. For instance, companies can utilize a book of customer success stories or adopt an organization-wide reward system to motivate employees.

Finally, **align with the brand and culture of the organization**. For each employee segment, in each interaction, and with each design element, curate an employee experience that connects to the organization's values and desired culture. Each experience employees have with an organization's brand and culture must connect to the purpose and values of the organization. When developing employee experiences, organizations must ensure that they are differentiated and valuable, like their brand.

When this four-step design process is implemented, enablement can listen with empathy to gain valuable rep input and feedback to design more emotionally intelligent programs. Each stage of the process helps connect the dots between what the company wants to be known for and how each employee contributes to that aspiration. By bringing the brand and desired culture to life in the employee experience, employees can be emblems of the priorities and values of the organization with customers.

Employee experience is a journey, not a destination. It requires commitment, discipline, focus, and passion, and there will always be more work to do. However, it is a journey worth taking to build a superior employee experience and organizational culture.

The results of a successful employee experience process implementation include a competitive advantage in the war for talent, reduced employee turnover and the high accompanying costs, and customer satisfaction as a result of employee engagement.

When employees are engaged, the impacts are felt on a company-wide scale. By establishing a clear culture, and implementing those values and priorities into the employee experience, employees will reflect the organization's values and culture, leading reps and the organization to meet their full potential.

The challenging times that reps are facing call for a revolution in the employee experience. Although change can be uncomfortable, it will prove highly beneficial to find the potential for growth in the inherent discomfort. With a thorough understanding of new barriers, approaching employees as customers, and implementing the four-step customer experience plan, enablement can help motivate reps to achieve peak performance in innovative ways.

Brand leadership expert and keynote speaker Denise Lee Yohn recently spoke at the Sales Enablement Soirée. This article is adapted from her presentation.



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