

Invest in Change for Growth and Engagement



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THE PANDEMIC'S SOPHOMORE YEAR

Business leaders continue to trek into new territory as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. While 2020 can be considered the freshman year of the pandemic — where everyone nervously moved ahead feeling lonely and unsure — 2021 is sophomore year. Business leaders are older and wiser and have learned the ropes; yet, there is a level of uncertainty as leaders continue to learn and change to create a thriving business and become a better leader.

As the dust continues to settle from the pandemic, new challenges emerge. Workplaces and businesses are facing outside pressures to demand change and redesign. Leaders will tackle new initiatives to address these pressures — but will likely have to change direction again and again. The road is bumpy and there is no one-size-fits-all approach; yet we can't deny there is a level of excitement as we witness a systemic shift that will transform our workplaces.

Investing in change will help businesses grow and thrive in ways defined very differently than they would have been in 2019. Creating an engaging environment with the following seven strategies will help businesses retain talent, realize new ways to innovate, and improve efficiencies.





CHANGE IS HERE TO STAY

Employees aren't shy to voice their opinions on remote, in-person, or hybrid work environments. According to a survey by FlexJobs, 58% of workers said they would "absolutely" look for a new job if they can't continue working remotely, and 65% of respondents said they wish to remain full-time remote, 33% said they prefer a hybrid arrangement, and only 2% want to return in-person full time (["FlexJobs Survey Finds Employees Want Remote Work Post-Pandemic"](#)).

The survey continues to state that 49% of respondents are concerned about COVID-19 exposure and infection. Nearly half also stated they are worried about returning to a lack of flexibility and work/life balance that they have grown accustomed to. Fifteen percent state that childcare/caregiver responsibilities are a concern, and 32% said they are worried about a lack of health and safety measures in their offices.

According to the Gallagher poll "[2021 Workforce Trends Report: Physical & Emotional Well-being](#)", 41% of employers said they are offering enhanced benefits, like pet insurance, discounts on legal services, and medical/pharmacy benefit increases.

Outside forces are pressuring workplace changes, specifically with supply chain issues that impact the timely delivery of products. According to PwC, business leaders need to dive deeper into the dimensions of their supply chains and truly understand every aspect of them (["COVID-19: Operations and Supply Chain Disruption"](#)).



HOW TO CREATE AN ENGAGING ENVIRONMENT

Systemic shifts are happening in our workplaces. Leaders who want to create an engaging environment and retain top talent must take action. Here are seven key aspects of the business leader's playbook to ensure engagement and retention.

- 1. Don't Fight the Hybrid Work Model.** The hybrid work model can be extremely beneficial to productivity and employee happiness. It's essential for leaders to manage outcomes — not time in the office. This means that leaders will have to figure out different ways to manage their teams effectively. According to Nicholas Bloom, professor of economics at Stanford University, 70-80% of companies are moving toward three days in the office and two days remote (HBR IdeaCast: "Hybrid Work Is Here to Stay. Now What?" Episode 807). However, Bloom recommends companies dictate when employees come in, versus letting them decide, as most employees will choose to work from home on Mondays and Fridays and go into the office on Wednesdays. This could create a space issue when more than half of the employees are in-office on the same day.
- 2. Redesign the Office.** Move away from individual desks and separated office spaces to best utilize the space. Create a collaborative workspace that allows for the ins and outs of employees while reducing the costs of renting a larger office. However, keep in mind that many employees are nervous about congested office spaces, elevators, and bathrooms due to COVID-19; therefore, it's advised to maintain enough open space to ensure proper social distancing.
- 3. Develop New Communication Structures.** Key meetings will look different than in the past. For example, have all employees come in on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and conduct all team meetings on those days. Then, during remote days, employees can focus on writing reports, finalizing presentations, conducting research, or other solo activities. Holding team building events are crucial to maintain and build trust among the team. Lunch gatherings or after-hours events will help employees feel valued and engaged. Finally, be sure to have one-on-one meetings or small group discussions to gauge employee satisfaction. Remember, employees are dealing with childcare issues, school quarantines, and other caregiver worries that could impact their work life. Keep open communication with them to help them figure out solutions to these essential issues.
- 4. Rethink Compensation.** Be extremely competitive in salary, hourly wages, and benefits to retain and attract top talent. Businesses that do not engage in competitive wages will suffer. Benefits can include additional time off, flexible schedules, and being supportive of childcare challenges. People are used to working full-time from home with no commute, so being flexible in other areas will help maintain a level of happiness and engagement.



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- 5. Celebrate Innovation and Productivity.** There are numerous ways to become more efficient, productive, and innovative — and your employees hold the answers. Meet with the team each month and discuss the next area of focus to become more effective as a team. Engaging employees in this way ensures they are committed to the business and acknowledges that their ideas are heard and implemented. Reward innovations and thank employees for their productivity gains.
- 6. Streamline Operations.** Technology has been used in new and exciting ways during the pandemic; keep that ball rolling. Technology can be utilized to streamline operations and increase efficiency. For example, one client of ours streamlined their estimating, project management, and payroll processes in a way that allows them to get more done with less people as they continue to grow.
- 7. Rethink Growth and Roles.** Business owners are realizing that business growth means something different now than it did two years ago. Leaders are readjusting their expectations, and some are even realizing that they are satisfied with leading smaller teams and making a profit on smaller deliverables which allows for more work/life balance. Find what growth means and determine a way to achieve it. Establishing where you see your company in three-to-five years and matching it with annual milestones will keep your team on track.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Take time to strategize next steps, particularly if your business struggled during the pandemic. Revitalize your business and recognize that it's not going to look the same as it did in 2019 or 2020 as it will in 2022. There's nothing like a great crisis to shape up how leaders are working and operating. Discover and embrace new ways of operating and be sure you're enjoying the journey.