

Keep Your People: A Tactical Guide for Employee Retention

EngagementMultiplier®

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INTRODUCTION

The post-pandemic recovery is hitting full stride in the United States, and according to [new data](#), the UK is not far behind, recording the greatest increase in new jobs since 2014. This is undoubtedly great news, but it's not without impact - a perfect storm is brewing that is making it monstrously more difficult to retain employees, and attract new ones.

In the US, people are [quitting](#) their jobs at a rate not seen in 20 years. Worldwide, a recent survey found that 41% of people are thinking about leaving their current positions. For any employer, an exodus of employees is difficult. It's even worse at this particular moment, just as demand is soaring and businesses are recovering.

As the job market heats up, and hiring becomes increasingly difficult, another key challenge for leaders is retaining the talent they have. A good place to start is looking at why so many are leaving their jobs - doing so provides an immediate roadmap you can use to shore up employee retention. (As a bonus, these factors are also the key things job candidates are seeking in their new roles, so ensuring your organisation speaks to them in your recruitment marketing and related communications is vital to positioning the company advantageously.)

**“
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WHY DO PEOPLE LEAVE JOBS?

So why do people leave jobs? For starters, it's generally not for more pay. Key drivers we're seeing right now are:

- They seek flexibility and prefer working from home or hybrid working,
- They are stressed and burned out,
- They don't feel they belong anymore,
- They're seeking new opportunities (in ways you may not expect),
- Their manager.

It's also important to look at the "why" behind these drivers, delving into what people are feeling and how the experience of the coronavirus pandemic has changed their priorities.

Flexible work

We've written extensively about the need for leaders to consider [flexible work options](#) for their teams. After a year of working from home, many employees are determined to hang onto the benefits they've gained: more time in their days because they're not spending hours commuting, flexible schedules that enable them to watch their children's sports practice, or attend events after work, more time with their family, and healthier work/life balance.

Stress and burnout

The stress of the last year - layered upon the effort employees worldwide made to help their clients and organisations throughout the pandemic - is taking its toll on people. A global [survey](#) of workers by Harvard Business Review earlier this year found:

- 89% said their work-life was getting worse,
- 85% said their wellbeing had declined,
- 56% said their job demands had increased,
- 62% of the people who were struggling to manage their workloads had experienced burnout "often" or "extremely often" in the previous three months,
- 57% of employees felt that the pandemic had a "large effect on" or "completely dominated" their work.

Employees who are [burned out](#) are more than twice as likely to leave the company, and burnout is at an all-time high. Identifying burnout and mitigating it within an organisation is one of the most effective ways to improve employee retention.

They feel they no longer belong

A sense of belonging is the [top driver](#) of employee engagement this year. Belonging is a big umbrella, and underneath it, you'll find inclusivity, support for wellbeing, security, fairness, and purpose. Leaders who prioritise the cultivation of a sense of belonging and the creation of inclusive and welcoming environments - and who ensure company managers are equipped to support and sustain that sense of belonging — will be rewarded with higher employee engagement and its many bottom-line benefits, while also becoming an employer of choice.

"Creating a sense of belonging will enable leaders to align with employee needs and expectations, build a stronger culture and connect with people on a more personal level," says Stefan Wiedenbeck, founder and CEO of Engagement Multiplier. "By doing so, they will find the stable and resilient relation and employee."

THE RISING IMPORTANCE OF BELONGING IN THE WORKPLACE

In a society you can't trust, an engagement with your belonging, and for good is feeling of security and a sense of acceptance, inclusion member of a certain group is top of mind for employee

- The personal impact upon people's final mental well-being
- The need to be included whilst in lock down from home,
- The renewed focus on the workplace

As a tribal species, human belonging since time immemorial societies throughout time

1. Ginn, Ethan W., *Rebel*. An Harvard Business Review
2. Huang, Steven, *Isolate*.
3. Murphy, Sean, *Isolate*.
4. Schooley, Kyle, *Isolate*.
5. Schooley, Kyle, *Isolate*.

EngagementMultiplier
The Era of Belonging
Why a sense of belonging is vitally important and how to develop it within your organisation.

They're seeking new opportunities

People have always valued the opportunity for growth and development - that hasn't changed. What has changed are people's priorities. Specifically, employees have re-prioritised their relationships and wellbeing and aren't willing to compromise on either. A startling number of [women](#) are deciding to leave the workforce, and also spurring many people to [change professions](#). Understanding the 'whys' driving these changes is vitally important - because if you can speak to those same desires within your organisation, you'll have a shot at keeping more of your talent, and will have an appealing story for candidates, too.

[Download The Era of Belonging](#)

Their manager

Employees don't leave companies, they leave their managers. The pandemic faced managers with a pantheon of rarely-or never-anticipated challenges.

"One thing we learned was that front-line managers are critical to the success of the team and, unfortunately, most of them were not up to the task. This is the biggest risk to business going forward," writes Brian Watkins in a *Chief Learning Officer* [article](#) titled, "COVID-19 didn't challenge managers, it exposed them."

Understanding whether your managers are compelling your staff to leave is the first act to stem the turnover tide.

HOW YOU CAN RETAIN EMPLOYEES

Now that we've provided a broad view of the reasons people are deciding to leave their jobs, we'll focus next on the steps you take to retain your people. We'll concentrate on three areas:

- Finding the problem areas and at-risk employees in your organisation
- Identifying burnout, and what to do about it
- Retaining your people and winning the talent war

Finding the problem areas & at-risk people within your organisation

A properly executed employee survey provides the business with the truth about what's really going on in the business, what employees are really thinking, and provides insights leaders otherwise wouldn't have.

"If you're going to spend the time developing a robust business strategy, you should also take the time to understand if your team is standing shoulder to shoulder with you and is ready to drive things ahead," notes Stefan Wissenbach, Engagement Multiplier's founder and CEO.

Well-constructed employee surveys can act as early-warning systems for difficulties within the organisation, indicating when teams are falling out of alignment or when disengagement is setting in – both of which can hamper productivity and lead to employee turnover. Employee surveys can also deliver powerfully positive insights by capturing wisdom from within employee ranks that are hidden from senior managers, and can also showcase the strong leaders within the company, as indicated by strong engagement numbers.

There are a host of ways you can acquire this information, but the common denominator is this – you have to gather employee feedback. Initiate a series of round table meetings, host town halls, or, for the swiftest results, field a survey of your employees.



You can use an employee engagement survey to quickly spot problem areas within your teams.

[Try it free](#)

Signs employees are burned out & what to do about it

Employee burnout remains top of mind for leaders, for several good reasons. First and foremost, it's costly and can lead to real damage to the business. Secondly, burnout is a key catalyst of employee turnover. Finally, as dire as its consequences can be, burnout is both preventable and resolvable - if leaders can identify and focus upon the root causes within their organisations.

Burnout is a real health condition

While people may casually say they're burned out when they simply need a break, burnout is a real health condition that is [distinct](#) from exhaustion and disengagement, it's close cousins.

In 2019, the World Health Organization added new detail to the description of burnout syndrome, which is classified in the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases ([ICD-11](#)) as an occupational phenomenon, as follows:

"Burnout is a syndrome conceptualised as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterised by three dimensions:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
- reduced professional efficacy.

Burnout refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life."

Burnout, when it occurs, is more entrenched than exhaustion or overwork, and is difficult to rectify. One example of its persistence and effect on people is the simple fact that time off does very little to help employees who are burned out. While most employees return from a break rested and refreshed, those who are burned out face returning to work with nothing short of dread.

How to tell if employees are burned out

Leaders who keep their ears to the rail of their business can detect burnout before it takes hold. An early warning sign is often one's gut instinct telling them something's not right, and it shows up in reduced work quality, declining enthusiasm for new initiatives, fewer people "going the extra mile" and worsening morale.

As burnout becomes more serious, it also becomes more measurable. Project deadlines slip, productivity declines, and absenteeism starts to increase. Leaders whose gut instincts are sounding an alarm should take a fresh look at their HR and employee engagement data, and look for trends in unscheduled absences, as well as downward shifts in engagement scores (or an uptick in negative feedback.)

At its most serious, burnout results in increases in sick leave and employee turnover - both of which are enormously costly to the business.

Are your employees experiencing burnout?

- Missing project deadlines
- Low enthusiasm for new initiatives
- Worsening morale
- Increase in unscheduled absences
- Downward trending engagement score
- Decrease in productivity
- Higher than usual employee turnover
- Uptick in negative feedback

What to do about burnout

Put simply, burnout happens when employees feel powerless, such as when they are faced with unrelenting workloads or unreasonable deadlines, feel they are being treated unfairly, or don't have the tools, information, or support they need to do their jobs.

Leaders faced with burnout within their organisations should meet the problem head-on, and assess which of these issues are present within the teams that are struggling.

Asking for employee feedback or surveying the affected team is an important early step in the process - people feel less powerless when they know they are heard, and in this case, the simple act of listening can act as a valve, releasing some of the pressure and buying leaders some time. In addition to providing employees with tangible evidence of management's awareness of the issue, survey results and feedback can help leaders identify teams that are struggling. Ideally, the survey will be well crafted and, in addition to pinpointing where the problem is within the organisation, the data will provide insight into the underlying causes, as well.

In many cases, the root cause of these issues is the manager

The number one reason why people leave their job is because of their manager. While we're not trying to impugn managers, there is no escaping the fact that their influence upon employees and the employee experience is significant.

According to a landmark study by Gallup, managers [account](#) for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores across business units. The company also asserts that this variation is in turn responsible for severely low worldwide employee engagement.

Outstanding managers are a rare breed. [Coaching](#) and upskilling your company leaders and helping them understand the impact of their behaviours on people is the first line of defence against burnout and creating a situation where a manager is compelling employees to leave.

When burnout is identified in a team, it can be a sign that the manager is struggling.

“ Managers account for at least **70% of the variance in employee engagement scores.**

Remote working has created new challenges for managers that can contribute to burnout

The pandemic threw challenge after challenge at leaders and required many to manage employees remotely — which requires a range of entirely new skills. As a result, pitfalls we're seeing remote leaders fall into include several behaviours that align with the burnout drivers listed above, but in different ways, such as:

- Becoming invisible to employees now that all are working remotely, with the result that employees feel less supported,
- Expecting employees to be “always-on” and immediately responsive to emails,
- Using technology to monitor employee activities,
- Over-reliance upon meetings, as a proxy for keeping tabs on productivity.

Combatting burnout starts with first understanding its root causes, and then identifying where those exist within your organisation. The next step is more complex - leaders need to understand the factors that contributed to their people's circumstances. Did managers misinterpret priorities? Did the company fail to anticipate the unexpected consequences of new policies? Is a team dealing with a toxic personality?

The point is this: the causes of burnout are unlikely to be remedied entirely by a policy change. Revising policies will not resolve underlying drivers such as an absent leader, treating employees unfairly, or being a poor communicator. Durable remedies start with the company's leadership, and the behaviours they both model and reward.

3 Ways to Retain People & Win the Talent War

How do you keep employees from jumping ship - especially when yours is a smaller enterprise, and the competition is dangling increases in salary and benefits that you simply can't match?

Smaller organisations can compete effectively if they take a focused approach, and find creative ways to meet - and even exceed - their employees' needs and expectations. In addition to getting creative, ensuring your efforts align with what your employees actually value is crucial, as is communicating clearly (and consistently) about the initiatives you've implemented.

1. Make flexibility your superpower

One of the most significant changes employers are facing is the demand for increased job flexibility from workers of all disciplines and professions.

"Flexibility" means different things to different people. Knowledge workers are continuing to express a decided preference for working at home, at least part of the time. Some are also seeking location-agnostic roles, as they trade city dwellings for new locales in small towns, villages, and suburbs.

For others, including site-specific industrial and construction roles, flexibility means implementing [flexitime](#), providing people with the ability to select hours and days worked, and even work based on outcomes, not hours.

A recent [study](#) in the UK found that introducing flexible working for construction workers increased the number of workers who felt they had enough time to look after their health and wellbeing from 48% to 84% - a huge increase. The study also found that overtime work decreased, and that trust between team members rose.

Another trend that is gaining momentum is the [4-day workweek](#), which is proving to deliver remarkable [results](#) for the organisations that have tested shorter workweeks.

According to [a study](#) by the University of Reading's Henley Business School titled, "Four Better or Four Worse?" half of UK businesses surveyed reported they have enabled a four-day working week for either some or all of their staff, and reported they are reaping rewards, including increased employee satisfaction, improved productivity, reduction in employee sick leave, and a resulting savings of almost £92 billion (around 2% of total turnover) each year as a result of improved operational efficiency.

Flexible options are extremely popular with employees, to the point that people are making decisions to leave employers who are unable or unwilling to offer employees any flexibility related to when and where they work. Making flexibility your organisation's superpower could be a boon to both your retention strategy as well as making the firm more attractive to potential employees.

2. Ensure your managers are not compelling people to leave

People don't leave companies, they leave managers, and as we mentioned in the Burnout section, managers have an enormous impact upon their direct reports. However, there's more to it than this simple statement suggests.

In 2019, a comprehensive study by the Society of Human Resources Professionals found that 58% of employees who left their jobs cited their managers as the primary reason for their departure. Additionally, the study also found that employees also strongly connect the company culture to their managers.

"Toxic workplaces—where employees dread going to work, don't feel they can be honest with their manager, and may witness or experience sexual harassment or age discrimination—are a primary reason workers quit their jobs. They often hold the managers in their workplaces responsible for creating the toxicity," wrote Beth Mirza in the SHRM [article](#), "*Toxic Workplace Cultures Hurt Workers and Company Profits.*"

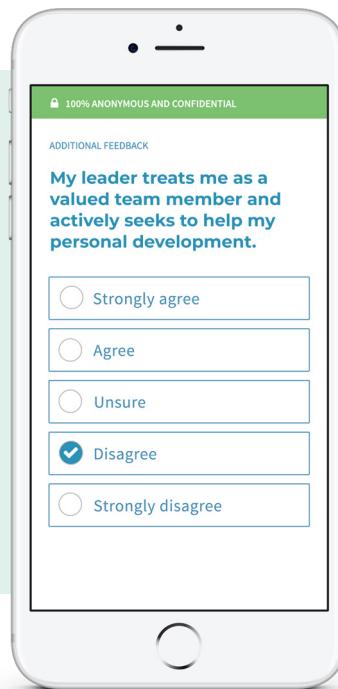
Ensuring your managers aren't compelling employees to leave is crucial for limiting employee turnover.

Asking employees questions about their work and the team dynamics they've observed can bring previously hidden issues into sharp focus. Here are some examples:

- Are you able to maintain consistent boundaries between your workday and personal time? This is especially important for employees working remotely, as many have [reported](#) working more hours when they work from home. Allowing work to spill over into personal time is a surefire way to frustrate people, and may even lead to burnout (and their subsequent departure.)
- Is your workload manageable? An impossible workload is a leading cause of burnout. Employees faced with tasks they feel are impossible can become hopeless and less motivated.
- Does your manager treat people fairly and equitably? The perception of unfair treatment can lead to feelings of frustration and can pose other risks for the organisation, as well as leading to burnout if a manager is playing favourites or distributing work unequally.

To quickly find out if leaders within your organisation are compelling people to leave, use our [Leadership Perception Gap survey](#), alone or (for a more comprehensive evaluation) in conjunction with our Benchmark Assessment employee engagement survey. Taken together, these surveys provide leaders with a clear view of which teams are thriving, and where leaders are struggling.

And if you need help coaching struggling leaders, our ebook "[The 7 Qualities Leaders Need for Post-Covid Success](#)" provides guidance and tools to improve leaders' self-awareness and soft skills.



3. Get serious about growth opportunities for employees & hiring internally

One challenge smaller enterprises face is the comparative lack of growth opportunities for strong performers. It's not uncommon to lose motivated employees who were otherwise happy simply because there was no opportunity for upward growth. However, smaller organisations can create opportunities for development within their own ranks, providing valuable experience for employees, whilst also building up the company's bench strength.

Two ideas to consider:

- *Project leadership:* Invite talented employees to lead cross-functional project teams. Placing them into business sponsor roles, for example, will provide unparalleled visibility into the organisation's project processes and enable the employee to build their project management skills.
- *Leadership development:* Consider creating a leadership development plan that includes putting high performers into different roles across the organisation. Even better, rotate them through different departments. You'll present them with new challenges, increase their agility and adaptability, and hone their skills as leaders.

Cross-functional opportunities can be incredibly beneficial to all concerned. Both employer and employees benefit when people find new strengths and hone their unique abilities. Similarly, the impact of "cross-pollination" across the organisation can be profound: as employees develop new relationships and a deeper understanding of the business, they will spread new ideas and perspectives across the organisation.

Exposing different employees to a variety of managers can also help those leaders become less biased, enabling the company to more strongly support its diversity and inclusion goals, and expanding the pool of candidates hiring managers will consider.

BUILD TRUST & ACCOUNTABILITY WITH COMMUNICATION

These are a few of the actions an organisation can take to immediately make tangible differences employees will appreciate and value, thus removing hot-button issues that motivate people to leave. However, no matter how well your organisation executes against these ideas and others like them, all will fail if employees aren't aware of the opportunities you've created and the efforts you've made on their behalf. Clear communication and follow-up are required to rebuild trust and demonstrate that change is happening - both of which are crucial in convincing people to stay.

Making - and communicating - meaningful incremental changes that induce people to stay

Successfully turning the employee feedback you receive into meaningful change your employees value doesn't need to be complicated. In fact, in our experience, the desired changes employees most often cite are relatively simple: improved leadership communication, more visibility into company strategy, and the ability to provide feedback are the three most common employee requests.

The following steps will build transparency and trust on the part of employees, and assist leaders in planning, executing, and communicating resulting changes.

- 1. Interpret the results and develop an action plan.** After gathering your employee feedback and/or survey results, the next step is simple – assess the results, select a few (we recommend three or fewer) key areas you will tackle first, and develop the action plan for the next 90 days the organisation will undertake for removing the barriers employees are encountering.
- 2. Be sure to communicate clearly and frequently with employees** after gathering their feedback. Failing to do so will give a distinct impression that nothing's happening, and their feedback isn't valued. Here's a simple communication plan outline we have found is incredibly effective:
 - Share the findings. You don't need to go into minute detail. Sharing the key findings, especially if the feedback showed a recurring theme, will let your employees know they have been well and truly heard. Don't wait until you have devised your action plan. Instead, simply share the findings and then let them know what's happening next, e.g. "Within the next 30 days, we will share our plan for addressing the opportunities for improving your feedback highlighted for us."

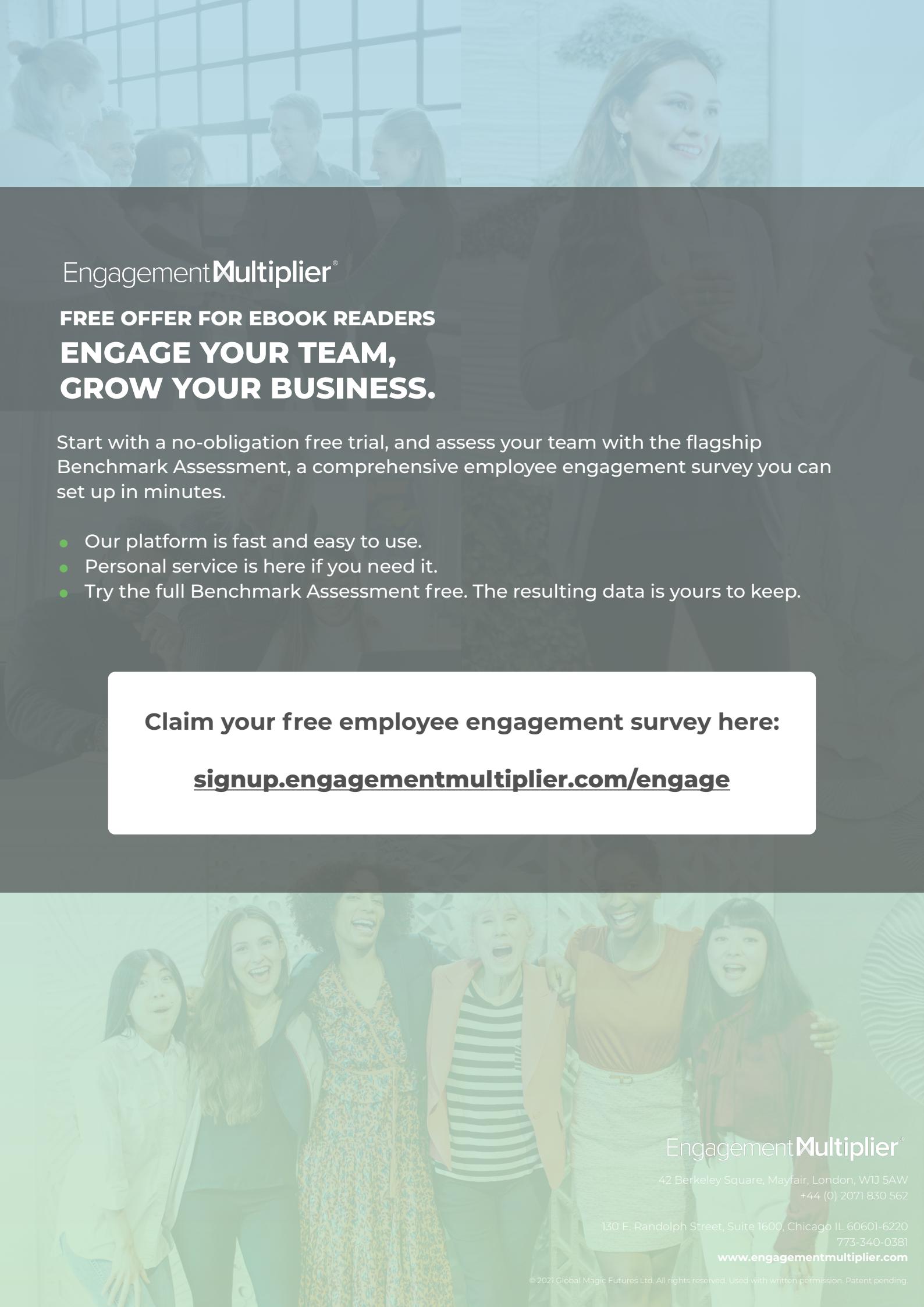
- Share your action plan, including the areas you'll be focusing on, the steps you'll be taking to make improvements, and your timelines for doing so. We recommend promising some results within 90 days. By modelling the behaviours of planning and accountability, you'll be building trust with the team – even before you've started the work of effecting change.
- Develop a cadence for routine updates over the 90-day period. Advise the team of your progress and any associated outcomes.

- 3. Report the results.** Our founder, Stefan Wissenbach, likes to say "Tell them, tell them, tell them." When you tell them what you're going to do, tell them what you're doing, and then tell them what you did, you'll be conveying – in a clear and accountable way – the value of employees' feedback and their ability to impact their workplace. This is real and meaningful empowerment, and when you re-survey your team, chances are good you'll find an increase in participation, enthusiasm, and engagement.
- 4. Reassess.** We recommend re-surveying employees to understand whether the actions taken have been successful, to identify the next set of improvements the organisation should undertake, and to continue to build trust and credibility with the team. Then, simply repeat the steps outlined above.

This approach can be magical in its effects. After a few cycles, you may notice that your organisation is getting really good at giving and synthesising feedback. In addition to developing a process for continuous improvement, you may also observe the organisation becoming more agile. This agility and ability to rapidly change will make the organisation and your people more resilient: between the greater trust in each other and their ability to listen and respond, their confidence will increase. Along the way, as individual employees become more engaged, they will influence those around them positively, creating an upward spiral of improved morale, motivation, job satisfaction, and engagement. This is how you stem the tide of employee turnover and create a strong, healthy culture your team will value and strive to protect.

This transparent approach will also help your organisation prevent [survey fatigue](#), which is marked by declines in participation and results when people don't see any change resulting from their feedback. If people know their feedback is valued and will be acted upon, they are likely to continue to participate enthusiastically and at a high rate. It's a good idea to assess or survey employees multiple times a year, to identify issues before they turn into real problems, capture feedback, and do what's needed to keep the team truly engaged and performing.

As you craft your plans, be sure to include ongoing communication elements. Investing time in creating visuals and messaging for the programs you develop and the benchmarks you establish will enable you to reinforce the messaging for employees - and strengthen your pitch to job candidates, as well.



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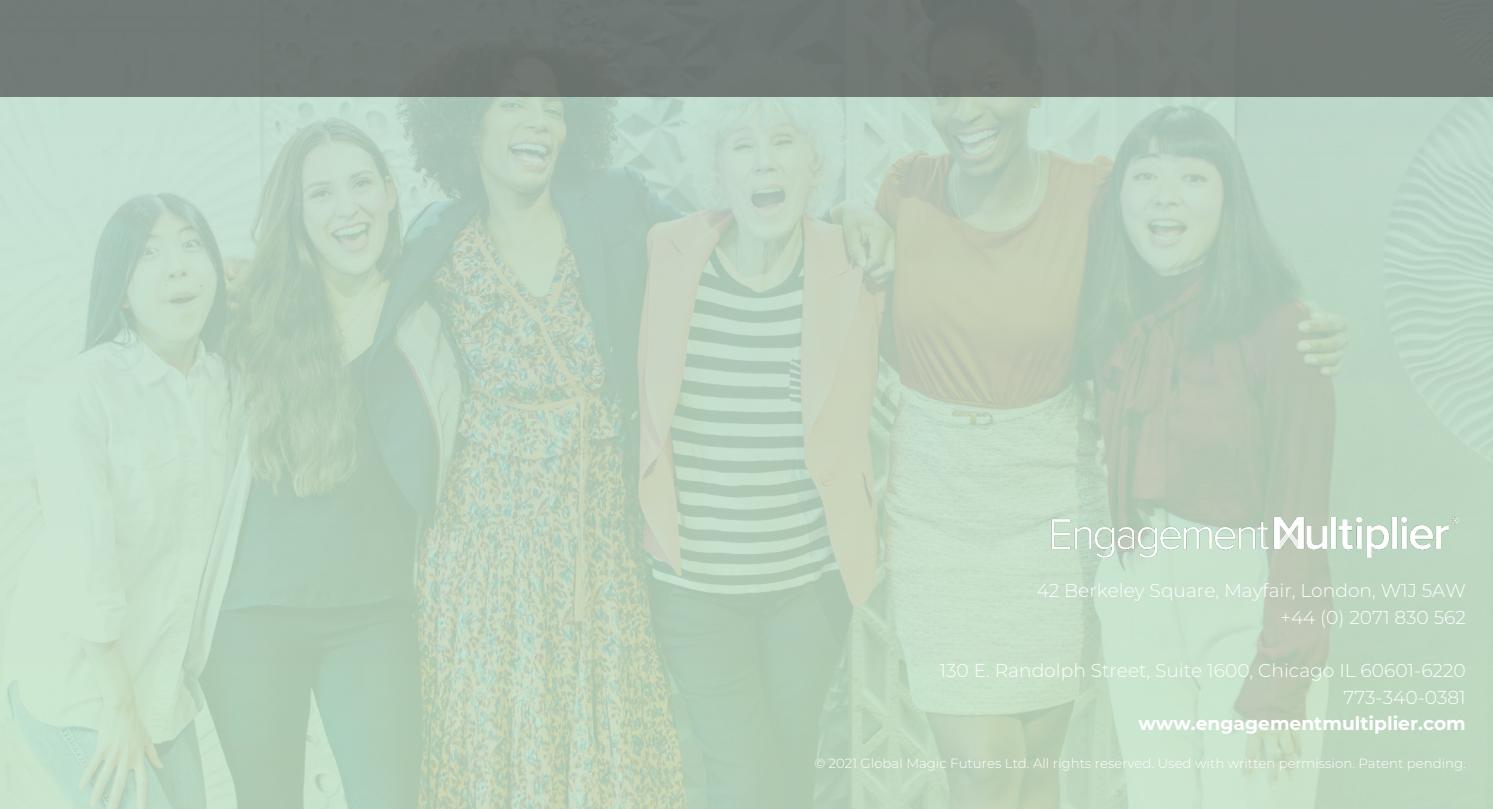
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