

TRENDICATORS RESEARCH REPORT

The Sound of Leadership

What employees want
and need to hear now



TRENDICATORS

HR Research & Insights by Engage2Excel™ Group

In the virtual workplace, what managers say and how they say it becomes a vital tool for influencing employee perceptions, attitudes and behaviors.

As the pandemic continues to take its toll in health, economic and emotional terms, employees everywhere need to hear that their contributions are valued. With virtual interactions now the primary form of engagement between many workers and their managers, meaningful affirmations that were once conveyed face-to-face are now delivered online. What managers say and how they say it matter now more than ever. *The Sound of Leadership* presents insights and expert advice on how managers can use verbal interactions to improve employee engagement and their sense of appreciation, purpose and belonging.

Trendicators is the research division of the E2E group of companies, leading providers of engaging career and consumer experiences. Trendicators provides original HR research, along with reports on insights and best practices from industry leaders and experts.



Navigating the new normal: Why are verbal interactions more important than ever?



What managers say and how they say it have always been important in both one-on-one and group interactions. Verbal communication, combined with active listening, is critical to meaningful engagement during the pandemic.

The Two-Part Specificity Rule of Recognition: Roy Saunderson, recognition expert and chief learning officer at Engage2Excel Group, observes that we have all gotten lazy in using phrases like “good job” or “well done,” which have only a neutral connotation. In training managers to become more proficient at recognizing employees, Saunderson advocates a two-part specificity rule for expressing recognition. The first part describes the positive behavior or action of the employee. The second part indicates the impact that the employee had. For example: “Thanks for getting me that report ahead of time. I now have extra time to create an awesome presentation for the executive team on next year’s budget.”

Vocal Processing of Emotion: Researchers at Yale University found that subjects were better able to determine emotional sentiment by listening only to the sound of someone’s voice than by seeing someone’s face and hearing their voice. Another study of the sound of group laughter found that a majority of test subjects were able to accurately determine whether members of a group knew each other or not based solely on a one-second sound snippet. Our ability to discern emotion from vocalization is embedded deeply within human DNA.

Active Listening: Ask questions to determine the emotional state of an individual or group. Saunderson indicates that two people talking and really listening to each other lights up a different area of the brain than facial recognition, and the brain patterns between the people literally synchronize.

Whether communicating face-to-face, via video conference or over the phone, use active listening and intonation to convey concern or enthusiasm and create more meaningful interactions.



**Employees
need to hear that
they matter and that
their contributions
make a difference.
Specificity, tone and
active listening are
critical for improving
verbal interactions.**



Management vs. Leadership: What's the difference?



Employees work for managers. They follow leaders, particularly those who demonstrate the attributes employees want most.

The difference between management and leadership has become increasingly nebulous in recent years. There are several causes. Technology and the move to flatten organizational structures have given employees greater autonomy in day-to-day decision making. This, along with efforts to elevate the role of managers, has blurred the differences. Unfortunately, most managers lack adequate training in people management. According to a survey conducted by Dr. Jack Wiley, chief scientific officer for Engage2Excel Group, 61% of managers who received formal training in people management said it lasted four hours or less. People work for managers. They follow leaders.

What's Your Personal Experience? Think of the people you have reported to throughout your career. Which of them stand out as having had the greatest influence on your career? It's likely that these managers were great listeners who understood how to provide positive verbal recognition in a tone that conveyed a genuine sense of interest in your performance, development and personal success.

An Employee-Centric View: For more than three decades, Dr. Wiley has analyzed workplace variables that influence employee engagement, performance and retention. In his upcoming book, Wiley reveals eight attributes that 80,000 employees in 28 countries said they want most in managers. These attributes, which include five behaviors, one skill and two values, are increasingly demonstrated through virtual interactions in today's work environment.

Employee-Preferred Managerial Attributes

Five Behaviors	One Skill	Two Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support & Understanding• Recognition• Dignity & Respect• Clear Performance Expectations• Honest & Trustworthy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Problem Solving & Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fair & Just• Honest

EVP Refresh:

Is it time to update your employee value proposition?



The pandemic has caused companies across all industry sectors to update their customer value propositions. What about the employees who are on the front lines of creating value for customers? Proper alignment of your employee value proposition (EVP) with what current and future workers want and need most is vital for attracting, motivating and retaining employees.

Messaging vs. Strategy: While messaging to employees has been a core component of every organization's pandemic response plan, many HR organizations have been too busy to conduct a strategic evaluation of their pre-pandemic EVPs. With the recovery period expected to extend into 2022, it's a necessary time to move beyond tactical messaging to create strategic alignment between corporate strategy and your value proposition for current and future employees. The following is an overview of important steps to take in evaluating and updating your EVP.

Survey Employees: Employee engagement surveys provide objective, scientifically valid insights to use in formulating your EVP and evaluating its relevance over time. If you haven't surveyed employees previously, your survey partner can add questions to determine how the pandemic has influenced employee perceptions, priorities and needs.

Update Your Strategy: Based on survey results, update your strategy to reprioritize the what's-in-it-for-me (WIIFM) advantages of working for your organization. Be realistic in setting expectations. Don't over-promise. But do make sure your organization's values, purpose, ideals and commitment to employees are clearly enunciated in easy-to-understand terms.

Partner with Marketing: Engage your internal marketing team early in the process of developing or updating your EVP and in creating the communications programs, tools and experiences that will help make it compelling and relevant.



Updating your EVP helps to ensure alignment between employees' needs and your corporate strategy to ensure relevant, consistent messaging.



Rethinking Recognition: The in-the-moment experiences matter most.



**Recognition is
mostly an intangible
expression of
acknowledgment
and valuing of an
individual or team
for positive behaviors,
personal effort or
the contributions
they've made.**

Saunderson, who develops and conducts recognition training for managers, has found that many managers don't know how to express recognition in a meaningful way. In contrast, others underestimate the importance of recognition to employees. In a recent survey, Dr. Wiley asked 1,000 managers what they thought employees wanted most from them. While 13% of employees indicated that recognition was most important, only 1% of managers believed it was most important to employees — a 93% gap.

Saunderson believes that effective recognition has two components: appreciating individuals for who they are and recognizing them for what they do.

Appreciating the Individual: It is essential to express acknowledgment of and appreciation for an individual's background, education, family life, personal life and interests. Managers are always busy and focused on the next task at hand. But taking the time to acknowledge individuals and who they are is a form of appreciation that often gets overlooked.

Valuing Day-to-Day Effort: The second part of effective recognition — expressing recognition for what an individual does — often occurs only at the completion of a particular task. Sometimes, this can take weeks or months. People want and need to hear how they are doing, not just when they finish something but along the way.

Creating In-the-Moment Experiences: When anxiety levels are high and the effects of isolation continue to accrue, the simple act of appreciation creates important social bonds that are vital to positive workplace relationships. Whether during a touch-base call, Zoom meeting or chance encounter, creating meaningful in-the-moment recognition experiences is critical for maintaining an engaged and productive team.

The Role of Recognition in Management: What difference can 14 seconds make?



In conducting recognition workshops in over 14 countries around the world, Saunderson always asks managers what the biggest barriers are to giving recognition. Invariably, Saunderson says managers believe they don't have time to give recognition daily. This is a prime example of a difference between management and leadership, which we discussed on page 4. Leaders make time for recognizing employees. They understand that doing so is vital to creating a shared sense of purpose and appreciation that defines the social fabric of an organization.

Do You Have the Time? To dissuade workshop participants from the belief that they don't have enough time for recognition, Saunderson asks them to turn to the person next to them to say thank you and to time how long it takes. Participants usually laugh and say it takes just one second. Then, he asks them to use the two-part specificity rule for recognition, discussed on page 3, where a manager describes a positive behavior or action and indicates the impact that the employee had. On average, this takes about 14 seconds.

Awareness Leads to Action: While managers say they don't have time to recognize employees, the root causes in cultures where employees don't receive the recognition they crave are actually fear and lack of awareness. Some managers are fearful of giving recognition because they don't know how to do it effectively. Others give recognition infrequently because they are unaware of its importance to employees. Once these barriers are overcome and managers realize how easy it is to deliver meaningful and effective recognition, they begin practicing this important leadership function. As a result, the atmosphere changes, employees feel more appreciated and productivity and performance inevitably improve.

An Everyday Occurrence: Most organizations have formal and informal recognition programs, which can impact up to half of all employees. However, where most organizations fall short is the delivery of everyday recognition, which can impact up to 100% of employees.



Managers say they don't have time to deliver recognition. Leaders make time for recognizing employees on a daily basis because they understand its importance.



Measuring Recognition: You can't improve what you don't measure.



**Helping managers
overcome barriers
to delivering more
effective recognition
is vital for developing
and improving
leadership skills
at all levels of the
organization.**

It is well-established that recognition drives engagement and that organizations with higher engagement scores enjoy higher customer satisfaction levels, greater productivity and profitability and fewer safety incidents and quality defects. If you can't improve what you don't measure, then measuring the effectiveness of a manager's ability to recognize employees is essential for improving organizational success. Unfortunately, few organizations measure manager effectiveness at delivering recognition. While modern platforms automate processes for recognizing and rewarding employees, few are designed to hold managers accountable for providing effective recognition.

Requisites for Accountability: Rewards and recognition platforms track activity, leading to a quantitative metric. But without a qualitative metric for measuring employee perceptions, the impact of recognition is overlooked. Take, for example, an organization that gives managers 1,000 points to award employees over a month. Manager A awards them consistently throughout the month, whereas Manager B waits until the end of the month for fear of being chastised for "failure to recognize." Without qualitative input from employees on how effective their managers are at recognizing them, the intended impact of recognition is not evaluated.

Requisites for Improvement: To facilitate improvement, quantitative and qualitative metrics must be baked into recognition platforms and combined with training to deliver effective and meaningful recognition for managers who underperform.

Requisites for Leadership Development: In today's business environment, managers' ability to influence employee perceptions and performance is essential for accelerating recovery. Helping managers overcome barriers to delivering more effective recognition is imperative for developing and improving leadership skills at all levels of the organization.

The Engage2Excel group of companies creates engaging career and consumer experiences. Its Career Experience Suite (CXS) provides recruitment, onboarding, employee recognition, manager development and employee survey solutions tailored to each organization and designed to help clients find and keep their talent. With over 3,000 client partners, Engage2Excel has a proud heritage of developing innovative solutions that improve competitive advantage and boost bottom-line results.

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