

TRENDICATORS RESEARCH REPORT

# WHAT EMPLOYEES WANT MOST FROM THEIR MANAGERS

New research from Jack Wiley, Ph.D.  
reveals valuable insights for improving  
managerial effectiveness



**TRENDICATORS**

HR Research & Insights by Engage2Excel™

# INTRODUCTION

Readers of Trendicators reports are familiar with the work of Dr. Jack Wiley, Engage2Excel's Chief Scientific Officer. For more than three decades, Jack has conducted research on a broad range of workplace issues. This research covers a range of topics such as goal setting and performance feedback, helping managers get better at recognition, understanding what motivates candidates, measuring engagement to improve competitive advantage and understanding why employees leave.

What Employees Want Most From Their Managers presents an overview of what promises to be Jack's most influential work to date. Recently, we sat down with Jack to understand his motivation and objectives for conducting this research.

## **Q: Why did you begin studying what employees want most from their immediate supervisor?**

**A:** This work is an extension of my research that began in the mid-1980s, focused on what employees want most from their organization. It seemed highly relevant to follow that research with another research question, which is what employees want most from their immediate manager. The idea was to have employees describe—in their own words—what they most need to help them be more effective in their jobs.



## **Jack Wiley, Ph.D., Chief Scientific Officer, Engage2Excel**

Jack Wiley, Ph.D., is an author, consultant, researcher and university professor. For more than three decades, he has focused on two big research questions: What do employees want most? What organizational factors best promote employee engagement, performance confidence and business success?

Jack's book, "RESPECT: Delivering Results by Giving Employees What They Really Want," is based on compelling evidence that when organizations satisfy seven core employee "wants," the organizations are rewarded with stronger employee engagement, higher customer satisfaction and superior financial results.

He received his doctorate in organizational psychology from the University of Tennessee, is a licensed consulting psychologist and is the winner of a lifetime achievement award for Distinguished Contributions to Professional Practice from the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology.

## **Q: Why is this topic important in the field of organizational psychology as well as for business leaders, HR executives and managers?**

**A:** We do have several excellent theories of managerial behavior and performance, but none of them are based on the employee voice with regard to what they want most from their immediate boss. Unlike any research that has been previously conducted, this is focused on the employee as the identifier of the things that are most important to them as the followers of managers and supervisors. From a practical perspective, managers need help in understanding how to become more effective in today's workplace, where the perceptions of employees matter more than ever before.

## **Q: What are your plans for bringing this research to a broader audience of managers?**

**A:** Later this year, we'll be publishing a book that translates the research findings into practical guidance any manager can use to improve his or her effectiveness.

Stay tuned for more details on Jack's upcoming book and other related developments. In the meantime, the team at Trendicators and Engage2Excel are honored to offer our readers the following preview of Jack's work on What Employees Want Most From Their Managers.



# Why do employee perceptions of managers matter?

Understanding what employees want most in a manager is important for HR leaders and the executives and managers they support for a variety of reasons. In today's age, where all organizations are competing for talent, the role of the manager is vital. To be successful, organizations need managers with the ability to engage, motivate and lead teams in a very effective way. Employing managers who demonstrate the attributes that employees want most, especially in a highly competitive labor market, is critical to attracting and retaining the talent organizations need to achieve their fundamental business objectives.

Organizations and teams that are led by managers who display the attributes that employees want most have greater success, regardless of how you measure it: whether it is in terms of employee

engagement, employee productivity, the quality of team interactions or overall team performance.

Unfortunately, managers often receive little or no training in how to successfully engage, motivate and lead employees. According to a Career Builder survey, 58% of managers said they haven't received any management training.

**The Bottom Line:** Attraction and retention of the talent needed to achieve organizational objectives are dependent upon how managers show up and operate. Managers who embody the attributes employees want most in the way they operate their business achieve a host of positive results for themselves and the teams, departments and business units they lead.

**58% of managers said they haven't received any management training.**

**However, managers who display the attributes that employees want most have greater success, regardless of how you measure it.**



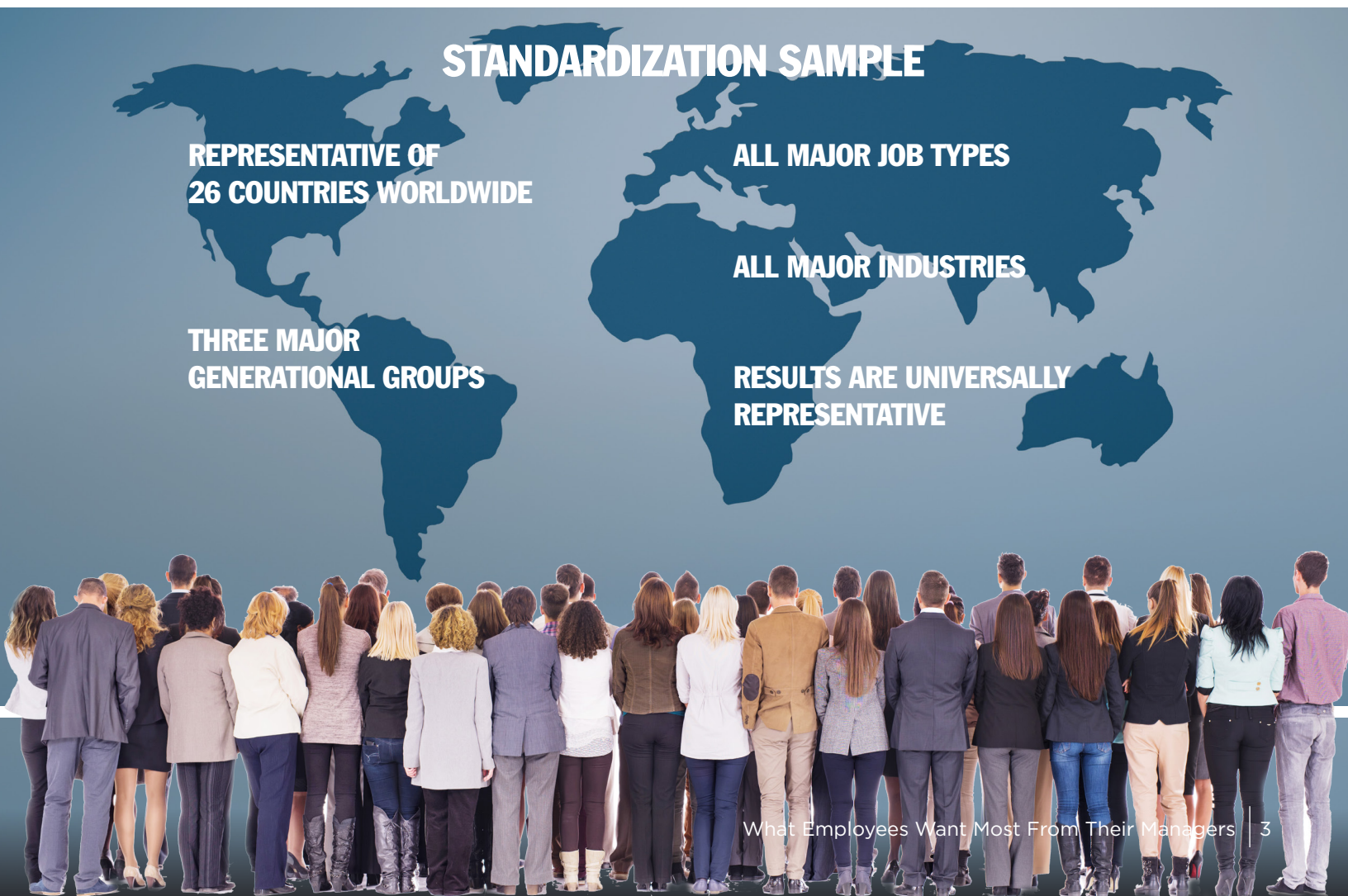
# Groundbreaking global research by Dr. Jack Wiley reveals what employees want most from their immediate supervisor

Few variables have greater influence over employee productivity and retention than the relationship between employees and their immediate supervisor. However, until now, what employees want most from their managers has not been the subject of both comprehensive and concentrated scientific analysis.

This report presents an overview of the results and actionable takeaways from a decade-long investigation involving more than 100,000 survey participants. Representing 26 countries, all major job titles and three generations across all major industries, the research reveals eight attributes that managers at any level within any organization can adopt to improve managerial effectiveness, create greater career experiences for employees and deliver better results for employers.

Based on groundbreaking research that has enormous practical implications, the eight attributes employees want most can be immediately put into action by any manager who seeks to improve employee engagement, retention and productivity.

Unlike the anecdotal advice offered in management self-help books, the eight attributes discussed on the following pages are based on rigorous analysis, and they are easy for managers to understand and adopt. Equally important, these eight attributes have been validated to account for more than three-quarters of the variance of effectiveness scores from 180-degree performance ratings.





# Overview: What do employees value most in their immediate manager?

The table below shows the eight attributes that employees worldwide want most from their managers. Five of these attributes pertain to behaviors, one is skill-related and two refer to personal values.

**Five Behaviors:** The five behaviors identified in the research pertain to providing support and consideration, demonstrating recognition, treating employees with dignity and respect, providing employees with clear performance expectations and rewarding performance contributions.

**One Skill:** The one skill that employees feel most keenly about and that emerged as an attribute is problem-solving and decision-making. Employees don't just want managers to make decisions; they want them to demonstrate competence in making decisions that positively affect work outcomes.

**Two Values:** The values employees want most in a manager are to be just and equitable in their decision-making and to be honest and trustworthy. When managers say something, employees need to believe it's true. When managers indicate that they'll follow through on something, employees want to have confidence that their manager will do so in a fair manner.

Not all of these attributes are equally weighted. Support and consideration is what 26% of the world's workers said was most important to them. This is double the next highest attribute that has to do with providing recognition, followed immediately by communicating performance expectations and problem-solving and decision-making skills. The just and equitable treatment of employees and treating employees with dignity and respect are ranked fourth and fifth, respectively, followed by rewarding performance and being honest and trustworthy.

## OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH RESULTS: WHAT EMPLOYEES VALUE MOST IN MANAGERS



# Five Managerial Behaviors Employees Value Most

The five behaviors employees value most in a manager paint a clear picture of what all individuals need to perform effectively and achieve psychological well-being in the workplace.

**Support and Consideration:** Employees want a manager who will be available, listen to the issues and concerns that they have, and adopt a positive point of view with regard to the subordinates' contributions and potential to contribute. They want a manager who will support them emotionally, support them with resources and help them get their job done.

**Recognition:** Employees want to feel appreciated for the knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies they bring to the job. However, in addition to work contributions, employees are interested in being recognized for their passion and for their willingness to go the extra mile to accomplish things.

**Dignity and Respect:** Employees want to be treated in a respectful way, regardless of how much experience

they have, their number of years in the job or even the level at which they perform in relation to their coworkers. Demonstrating respect for diversity in the workplace is increasingly important in the world in which we operate.

**Clear Performance Expectation:** Employees know that their performance will be evaluated. They need help in understanding what is expected of them to be successful, which is essential to maintaining self-esteem. Once they understand the expected contributions and outcomes, they are better informed and motivated to perform.

**Rewarding Performance Contributions:** The role of the manager in rewarding performance is overlooked by most theories of managerial behavior and performance. But this is very important to employees. They want to be rewarded for the contributions they're making, not just financially but also in terms of their personal development. Employees want more opportunities to be trained, to develop their skills and career, and to know that their manager is invested in helping them advance their careers.

## MANAGERIAL BEHAVIOR ATTRIBUTES AND SAMPLE RESPONDENT QUOTES



# One Managerial Skill Employees Value Most

The one skill that employees value most in their immediate supervisor is problem-solving and decision-making. If you stop to think about this, it's not difficult to understand why this is so important to employees. In today's world, where changes occur so quickly and managers and employees are stretched thin, problem-solving and decision-making at the managerial level has immense implications for the quality of the work environment.

Layers of management have been taken out of organizations so that managers, as a result, have far greater spans of control. Often, teams can't move forward without their manager's involvement in solving a particular problem. That may involve the allocation of resources or a work-around for a political consideration inside the organization.

Employees highly value managers who are skilled at problem-solving and decision-making.

Employees don't just want a manager to make decisions, they want a manager who is skilled at making decisions that advance the cause for the team and enable them to successfully complete their work as part of a winning team.

At the end of the day, all employees want to be on a winning team. Managers who are effective at problem-solving and decision-making foster a sense of confidence in their subordinates. This contributes not only to employee motivation but also to high levels of engagement and organizational citizenship. When employees know they're part of a successful operation, they are willing to go above and beyond what's asked of them to get the job done.

## MANAGERIAL SKILLS ATTRIBUTES AND SAMPLE RESPONDENT QUOTE

### Problem-Solving & Decision-Making

“Make decisions  
and remove  
obstacles to getting  
work done.”



# Two Managerial Values Employees Value Most

Another area that is largely missing from academic taxonomies of managerial behavior and performance is the attributes we regard as values. Employees say that there are two values that are most important to them.

**Just and Equitable:** Employees want managers who treat people equitably and fairly at all times without playing favorites. Certainly, there may be employees whom managers can rely on more because of the time that they've worked with a manager or the experience level they possess. But employees know whether their manager is fair. Effective managers size up the situation and render fair decisions, and those decisions are going to be consistently replicated across a variety of circumstances.

**Honest and Trustworthy:** The other value employees want most is honesty and trustworthiness. This is

fundamental. Employees want managers who tell the truth, especially in difficult situations. Managers who shade the truth or cut corners in telling the truth lose a tremendous sense of followership as a result. Consequences can be very devastating for them. When employees don't have confidence in the honesty of their manager and when they don't believe that what their manager says is true or that they're not going to follow through on promises, this diminishes motivation, engagement, and advocacy for the group. Why would employees encourage others to come into the group or to recruit talent into the group if they don't trust the manager as being honest and trustworthy? Who wants to put their career in the hands of someone who isn't honest with them?

These are fundamental human values that are very important to all employees world-wide in sizing up what they want most from their manager.

## MANAGERIAL VALUES ATTRIBUTES AND SAMPLE RESPONDENT QUOTES

### Just & Equitable

"Equal treatment of employees and fairness in all areas."

### Honest & Trustworthy

"That he/she is real and does not lie."



# The Managerial Attributes Employees Want Most Determine 83% of Effectiveness Scores

Not surprisingly, how managers demonstrate the eight attributes employees want most directly correlates with how employees view the overall effectiveness of their boss as a manager.

**The analysis:** To arrive at this conclusion, a separate dataset involving 10,000 respondents in the U.S. was utilized. These data included a series of questions on how employees rated their immediate supervisor. The objective was to understand the degree of correlation between the ratings employees provide of their immediate manager on the eight attributes and the ratings they provide on the overall effectiveness of their manager. Regression analysis was utilized to understand the extent to which the ratings of the attributes of the manager account for the ratings on overall performance.

**A clear and direct correlation:** The regression analysis revealed that 83% of the overall rating of managerial effectiveness can be explained by the ratings of the eight attributes employees want most in a manager. In other words, there's not much left that goes into an employee's view of their immediate manager's performance than the rating of these eight attributes, the very things they are seeking from their manager.

Why is this important? If managers want to be seen by their employees as effective managers, then the effectiveness of their overall performance can fundamentally be explained by how they demonstrate these eight attributes. As a result of these findings, Dr. Wiley is currently developing new tools and resources for measuring and improving manager effectiveness, to be released later this year.



# Three Ways That Every Manager Can Improve Their Effectiveness

If there's only a short list of things that managers could do or focus on to improve their perceived effectiveness in the eyes of their employees, what are those things? Regression analysis helps determine which attributes are most important and predictive of the rating an employee would provide on a manager's overall performance in a 180-degree performance review. This analysis reveals that there are three things every manager can do to improve their perceived effectiveness.

**Listen to employees:** Exert the effort necessary to listen to your employees, ask them questions, listen to what they have to say and find out what their issues are. Providing a listening ear to employees, genuinely, honestly and thoughtfully will raise your effectiveness as perceived by your employees.

**Make good decisions:** Another way that managers

can significantly boost their perceived effectiveness is to develop a track record of making good decisions that positively influence work processes and outcomes. One way to do this is to get input from employees on important decisions. This shows that you value employees, provides a broader context for decisions and ties back to being a good listener.

**Be honest and fair:** Tell the truth. Don't cut corners and don't lie. Be honest with employees about the issues that the team, department or work group is facing. Be honest about what they are contributing and what you most need from them to be successful. Be straightforward about opportunities for further development and advancement within the organization and how you're going to support them in that.



**1**  
**Listen**  
**Thoughtfully**

**2**  
**Make Good**  
**Decisions**

**3**  
**Be Honest**  
**and Fair**



Engage2Excel helps organizations create unique career experiences from pre-hire to retirement. We understand what employees and managers really want, because we look at the entire employee lifecycle through a scientific lens. We conduct original surveys, validate best practices from our client base of 3,000+ organizations and rely on three decades of groundbreaking research by our chief scientific officer, Jack Wiley, Ph.D.

Engage2Excel's industry-leading solutions for recruitment, employee recognition and engagement surveys are tailored to each client's unique business objectives and are designed to help clients increase competitive advantage and improve bottom-line results.

**To learn more, visit [engage2excel.com](https://engage2excel.com).**

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