

# HR Insights

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## 8 Employee Engagement Mistakes to Avoid in 2025

Employee engagement refers to an employee's emotional connection and commitment to their organization and its goals. It is often reflected in their loyalty, motivation and willingness to advocate for the organization. Engagement is a critical factor in driving retention and productivity.

According to a report from Gallup published in early 2025, the percentage of engaged employees fell to 31% in late 2024 from 33% in 2023. It was the lowest level of employee engagement recorded in a decade. Previous years saw high levels of employee quits, while employees are now more likely to stay in their current jobs—even if they are not satisfied with their role or their employer. This means employers may face lower productivity and a damaged workplace culture, which can lead to attraction and retention difficulties.

Because employee engagement initiatives are generally low-cost, these strategies are a popular route for employers to improve employee retention and productivity without excessive spending. Zywave's 2025 State of the Market Survey found that "focusing on employee engagement" was the number one strategy employers are exploring to improve attraction and retention.

This article provides an overview of engagement challenges in 2025 and discusses common mistakes to avoid.

### Employee Engagement Challenges in 2025

A mix of economic uncertainty, shifting workplace dynamics and changing employee expectations drive rising levels of disengagement. Researchers at TalentLMS found that in 2025, more than half (54%) of U.S. workers are experiencing a phenomenon called

"quiet cracking," in which they feel some degree of unhappiness at work that leads to disengagement. Individuals who suffer from this tend not to go the extra mile, pitch in with new ideas, or show up for team or company events. Many also have a strong desire to quit their jobs.

The root causes of this trend are often job insecurity and a lack of professional development. Without training, mentorship or clear career paths, employees may feel stagnant, overlooked or unprepared for future roles.

Gallup also cites several issues behind the drop in engagement, including the following:

- Rapid organizational change
- Challenges adapting to hybrid and remote work models
- Shifting customer expectations
- Ineffective or outdated performance management systems

Successful strategies encourage employees to find meaning in their work and deepen their commitment to the organization. However, many employers neglect to pursue the initiatives that will meet the needs of their workers.

### Mistakes to Avoid When Building Engagement Strategies

Many employers are seeking ways to reengage their teams, but even well-intentioned efforts can backfire if not executed correctly. The following are eight mistakes to avoid when developing engagement strategies:

1. **Not providing growth opportunities—** People are naturally motivated by progress, and the best performers will likely want to grow. Without a clear path forward, they might feel stuck and undervalued. Providing mentorship, offering to spearhead projects, and encouraging employees to train for new roles or responsibilities can help employees stay energized and see a future within the organization.
2. **Failing to establish clear expectations—** Defining what engagement looks like within an organization helps employees understand what is expected of them. While surveys might show disengagement, managers can't take meaningful action without specific and measurable benchmarks. Having well-defined standards can help workers see how their work contributes to an organization's success while allowing leaders to easily recognize good performance.
3. **Not modeling engagement at the leadership level—** Employees look up to management to set the tone for what behaviors are valued in an organization. When leaders demonstrate passion, involvement and commitment, employees are likely to mirror that behavior. A top-down approach shows that engaged behavior is not just encouraged but expected.
4. **Failing to share impactful stories—** Storytelling is a powerful tool for emotionally connecting employees to their work. Publicly sharing authentic stories of how teams overcame challenges together or how employees contributed to a client's success can foster pride and reignite a sense of purpose.
5. **Neglecting employee feedback—** Surveys, exit interviews and skip-level meetings are critical for gauging employee engagement. Getting feedback demonstrates that an employer is serious about learning what they're doing right and what areas could be

improved. Employees who see their feedback acted upon are more likely to stay loyal and engaged.

6. **Overlooking employees' hard work—** Employee recognition should be part of the culture, not an occasional gesture. Publicly acknowledging contributions helps motivate employees and drives better performance. Celebrating even small accomplishments through shout-outs or handwritten notes can boost morale and inspire them to continue working hard.
7. **Not hosting social events—** A strong sense of community is a pillar of engagement. Holiday parties, summer outings, team celebrations, virtual meetups and other social events give employees the chance to have real conversations that can build trust and strengthen relationships.
8. **Failing to empower managers—** Managers are the frontline of engagement, but without the proper tools and resources, they may struggle to boost engagement. Employers can support them by giving them access to feedback, providing budgets for rewards programs and training them in communication, coaching or mentorship.

## Employer Takeaway

Employee engagement is imperative to retaining top talent and increasing productivity. While effective approaches to drive engagement may vary per organization, avoiding pitfalls could lay the foundation for a more engaged and productive workforce.

Contact us for more employee engagement resources.