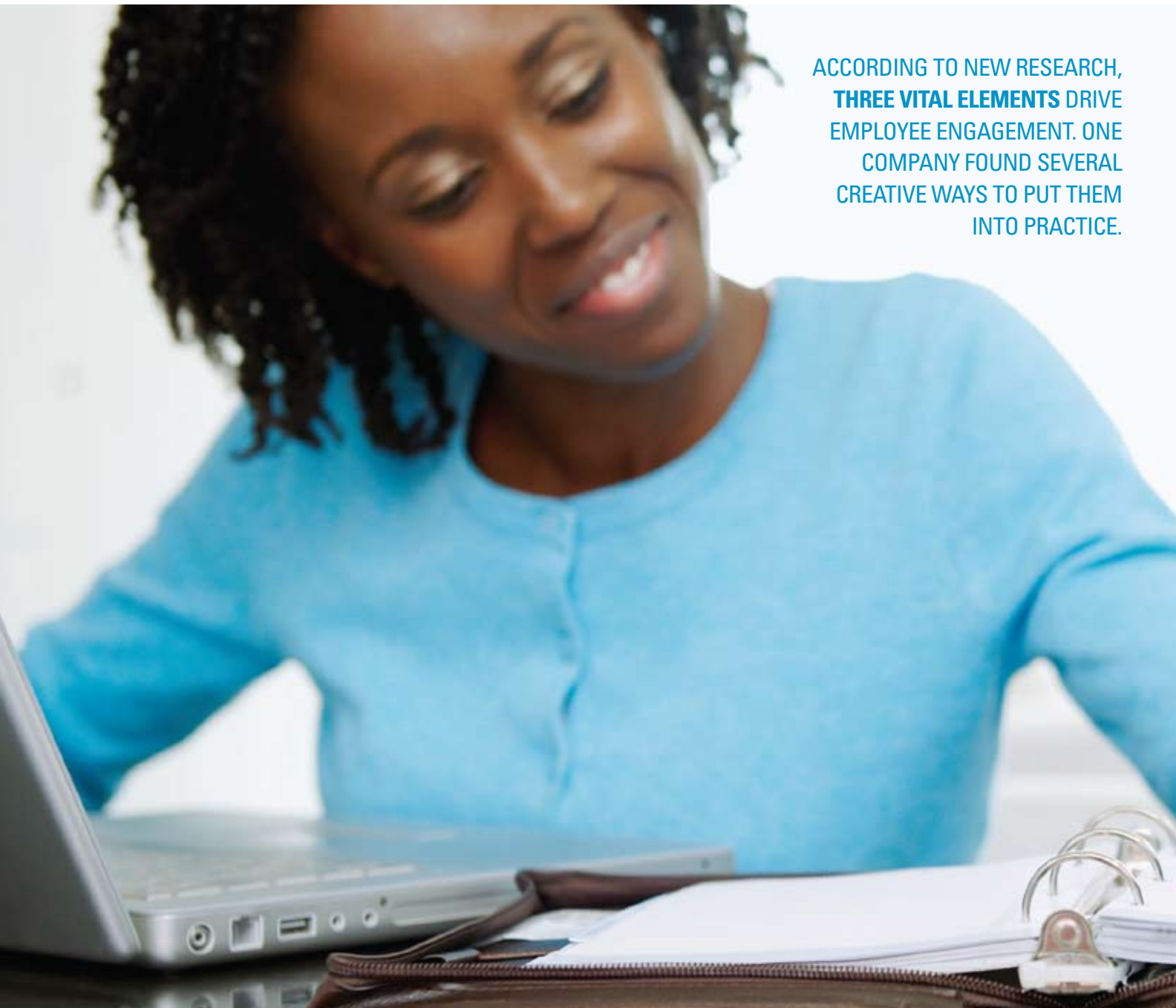


# ESSENTIALS OF ENGAGEMENT



ACCORDING TO NEW RESEARCH, **THREE VITAL ELEMENTS** DRIVE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT. ONE COMPANY FOUND SEVERAL CREATIVE WAYS TO PUT THEM INTO PRACTICE.

# CONTRIBUTIONS | COM

**A**lthough many executives view employee engagement as important to the success of their companies, an ASTD–Dale Carnegie Training–i4cp learning and employee engagement study finds that only one-third of their employees are engaged. There are three elements—contributions, connections, and growth and advancement—that drive employee engagement and must be ingrained in an organization’s culture for employee engagement to flourish.

#### THE STUDY

**Contributions.** Engaged employees, defined as employees who are mentally and emotionally invested in their work and contributing to their employer’s success, know that what they do at work contributes to their company’s success. Organizations can create that knowledge by imparting a clear mission and vision. Companies that fail to do so have higher turnover rates than companies that freely discuss and circulate organizational goals.

Informed employees feel a sense of pride in what their company is striving to achieve, as well as a sense of empowerment that they have a role in helping to reach those goals. Although nearly all (90 percent) of the companies surveyed by ASTD for the study agree that they should be clarifying and communicating their organization’s missions and goals, only around half (52 percent) acknowledge that they are currently doing this to a high or very high extent.

**Connections.** Another vital link in the employee engagement chain is connections. Connections are the foundation of healthy working relationships and even friendships. For many years, it was thought that friendships at work led to reduced productivity and idle chit-chat. But now, friendships are looked at as useful, allowing employees to feel more connected to their work. In the study, 79 percent of people surveyed said “good relationships with co-workers” drove employee engagement to a high or very high extent.

Still, strong connections with co-workers are not seen as the most important relationship in terms of engagement. The most important relationship at work is between employees and their immediate supervisors. Ninety-one percent of people surveyed said that these relationships drove engagement to a high or very high extent. This was found to be the most important factor influencing engagement, rating higher than “opportunities to excel,” “good work-life balance for employees,” and “competitive compensation and benefits program.”

In the study, 30 percent of people (the highest percentage) named managers the group that is most responsible for employee engagement. Although employees won’t stay in an organization just because they have a good relationship with their managers, a poor relationship alone is more than enough to make employees leave.

Managers must be held “most” accountable for the engagement of their employees. Managers who have engagement-building skills on their performance appraisals are more likely to devote time and energy to developing those skills.

The study found that organizations that hold “all managers” or “all employees” responsible for engagement were the most likely to have a pervasive, engagement-based culture. Conversely, the organizations with the lowest levels of engagement were the ones that saw human resources as the group responsible for engagement.

**Growth and advancement.** Employees desire opportunities for growth and advancement in their organizations. This means that the learning opportunities offered at an organization have a direct effect on engagement. The survey found that 65 percent of respondents answered that the “quality of training and learning opportunities” positively influenced employee engagement to a high or very high extent—the strongest response of the survey.

The key factor here is quality, which matters more than breadth (54 percent said it positively influenced engagement to a high or very high extent) or frequency (51 percent said it positively influenced engagement to a high or very high extent).

We can only learn so much by examining statistics, however. Let’s look at a case study to find out how one organization is boosting employee engagement.

# CONNECTIONS | GROWTH



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## ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

Recently, Morrison Management Specialists has seen a 15 percent drop in turnover rates. Morrison, which provides food, nutrition, and dining services to the healthcare and senior living markets, employs more than 14,000 employees in more than 450 locations.

Three years ago, Morrison rolled out a new employee engagement initiative, which includes a yearly engagement survey and increased learning opportunities. “We have no other significant change to tie this [turnover rate] drop to except that we are doing this,” says Andrea Seidl, Morrison senior vice president. Morrison created its employee engagement initiative using Berrett-Koehler’s book, *Love ‘Em or Lose ‘Em* by Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans, as a framework. The book includes 26 engagement strategies for getting good people to stay.

The Morrison engagement survey, conducted by Hay Group, includes

specific elements from Gallup’s book *12: The Elements of Great Managing* by Rodd Wagner and James K. Harter. *12* is based on a global survey of managers and employees on what keeps them engaged. Some of the 12 elements are “a connection with the mission of the company,” “my opinion seems to count,” “opportunities to learn and grow,” “recognition and praise,” and “someone at work encourages my development.”

**Contributions.** Morrison’s philosophy is that every person in the organization is responsible for employee engagement. The company is guided by a mission statement called “The Morrison Way,” which focuses on five core values—trust, team, customer focus, learning, and profit. It represents Morrison’s culture in which people are the driving force.

To reinforce this operating philosophy, Morrison’s web address is [www.iammorrison.com](http://www.iammorrison.com), and all corporate email addresses end

## ENGAGEMENT

### CONTRIBUTIONS

Here are some suggestions for letting your employees know that they contribute to company success:

- Build a clear mission and vision statement.
- Have transparency regarding revenue and company goals.
- Give employees a voice regarding strategic initiatives.
- Hold a weekly “town hall meeting” where employees can voice their concerns, give feedback, and share successes.
- Implement an informal recognition program, where employees can recognize one another for outstanding achievement.

### CONNECTIONS

Here are some suggestions for letting your employees connect with management and one another:

- Schedule periodic brown bag lunches co-workers to mingle in a relaxed setting.
- Conduct monthly or bi-monthly “pulse check” meetings to gauge employee satisfaction and engagement.
- Encourage employees to join professional groups to connect with colleagues in their field.
- Take an active approach to monitoring employee engagement; don’t rely on exit interviews to measure the engagement of your workplace.
- Allow employees to virtually connect with each other via a company intranet or social networking site.

### GROWTH & ADVANCEMENT

Here are some suggestions for providing growth and advancement opportunities for your employees:

- Provide mentoring opportunities for all employees; everyone has something to teach someone else.
- Push employees out of their comfort zones; allow them to explore new roles and duties to keep them interested and challenged.
- Offer short-term job assignments or limited-run project assignments where employees have an opportunity to explore completely new responsibilities for 6 months to two years.
- Provide training for engagement building skills, and include these skills as part of managers’ development plans.
- Involve employees in designing their own career plans.

with “@iammorrison.com.” These ever-present web elements serve as constant reminders of each employee’s importance to the company.

Morrison has other ways of creating meaningful connections between company and employee. A yearly update of the company’s direction is given to the managers and subsequently disseminated to other team members. A simple discussion between managers and employees about where the company wants to go makes an immense difference. Morrison also sponsors what they call “Our Great Partnership” training sessions for hourly associates, which clarify the company’s identity and their mission—to provide first-class food service. The training sessions often tie in what the employee does every day in a hospital setting to the bigger picture.

Many hourly employees may not understand the far reach of the company. “Our Great Partnership” helps change the employees’ perspective of Morrison. They see that Morrison not only provides food to their hospital but to recognizable events such as the Olympics and the Oscars (by Morrison’s parent company, Compass Group).

They relate to those events and are proud to work for such a company. The employees connect to Morrison on a different level—although they work at one hospital, they are part of something much larger.

Another program, “People First,” is a hero recognition program, whereby Morrison employees can recognize each other for extraordinary service. Individual hospitals are encouraged to hold a ceremony to recognize honorees, who are given a letter of congratulations from the CEO.

“What has happened from an engagement standpoint is that people feel more empowered to step up their role and do these extraordinary things because they know that is rewarded, appreciated, and recognized,” says Seidl. These honorees are eligible to receive what Morrison calls the ultimate reward: the granting of their lifetime dream.

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A past winner was an employee who out of his own pocket bought presents for children on the pediatric floor during Christmas. His dream was to have a Santa Claus suit to wear while handing out the presents. Morrison purchased him a top-of-the line Santa suit and sent him and his wife on a trip.

This program is exceptional because rewards are personalized to the individual employee rather than giving winners the standard bonus check. More employees have a better chance of being recognized because many people are nominated by the people they work with every day.

**Connections.** One of the ways Morrison fosters connections at work is through a program called CHAT (Communication, Help, And Training). CHAT is a monthly meeting that covers anything from safety to well-being. Because the topics of these meetings transcend the workplace, they offer managers and employees the opportunity to discuss issues on a more personal level, allowing them to develop a richer relationship. In addition to CHAT, Morrison uses a format of daily meetings that keep employees current on events in the workplace and reinforce key messages of service and training.

**Growth and advancement.** Morrison provides learning opportunities through stretch assignments and encourages growth through yearly reviews and a development plan for every employee. They provide educa-

tional reimbursement for employees looking to continue their education outside the office. Morrison also records training sessions and circulates them to employees who couldn’t attend the actual session. These recorded events are also rotated to hourly employees directly responsible for food preparation and service.

#### FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

The Morrison case study shows that there are numerous ways to improve employee engagement through better management and development processes, and without having to invest large amounts of new capital. Simply making it a higher organizational priority is the first step toward turning employee engagement from a buzzword into a reality. **T+D**

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