

From a Study by the  
Public Agenda Foundation

# The Top-10 List of What Employees Want from Work

Improve Your PEOPLE SKILLS & PEOPLE WISDOM



Increase  
Your  
Influence!

This is a List everyone should know!



## The Leadership Opportunity

Reportedly it was J.D.Rockefeller who said, *"I'll pay more for the ability to mobilize the energy and talent of other people than any other skill under the sun."*

Is there a better definition of leadership? I don't think so.

*The ability to mobilize the energy and talent of other people.*

In modern terms, what he was talking about is ENGAGEMENT.

I want to focus your attention on engagement and involvement, because when you do, when you effectively increase engagement and involvement all of your important metrics go up.

I was once hired to deliver a presentation to a group of managers for a large aerospace manufacturer. The day before my speech, one of their VP's took me on a tour of their manufacturing facility. I had never been inside such a large building. It was huge. It had to be. They were building commercial jet airliners in there.

I couldn't get over how big this building was, and I asked the VP, *"How many people work here?"* He paused for moment, and then said, *"About 40%."*

We both had a good laugh at that. But he wasn't just making a joke. Literally hundreds of studies across many vocational categories, conducted over the last 15 years, have corroborated what he was saying. As it turns out, about 38-42% of all employees are self-motivated. They come to work already engaged. It's part of their nature. Most managers know exactly who these people are. They're the ones who can be depended on to "get it done."

The same studies tell us about 7-9% of employees are what we might call "dead wood." They're not pulling their weight, and most likely they never will. If possible it's best to invite these people to find work elsewhere.

Now, that leaves a final category of employees, 45-51%, that are waiting to be engaged, waiting to be influenced to truly involve themselves in their work.

These people are what I call the LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITY.

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Peter Drueker said many wise things during his lifetime that we still want to consider to this day. *"We get their bodies, and sometimes their minds,"* he said, *"But what we need is their bodies, their minds, AND their hearts."*

There are two questions I always present to managers and leaders:

1. How do we get people to truly engage their minds and also open their hearts to their work?
2. How do we get great performance from employees when we can't pay for it?

## From a Study by the Public Agenda Foundation

It is in pursuit of the answers to those two questions that I now invite you to examine the most authentic "Top-10 List" of "What Employees Want from Work." This list was derived from a study conducted by the Public Agenda Foundation.

It's a very important question: What do employees want from work?

If you're at all interested in exercising your positive influence and increasing your management effectiveness it's a question you want to answer.

Managers are constantly asking for more from their employees. It's fair to say that every year employees are asked to do more and more, often with less and less. And yet, how often do we stop to consider what more we can give them in return?

Managers think their hands are tied, because they can't give their employees more money or more benefits. But on this most authentic "Top-10 List of What Employees Want from Work," money and benefits didn't make the Top 10. Go figure!

What you're about to discover, and in many cases remind yourself what you already know, are the keys to "full engagement."

I invite you to "benchmark" yourself. I invite you to "become a student of your own behavior."

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As you read this information and become completely aware of this important Top-10 List, allow yourself to consider your own beliefs, your own values, and your own behavior.

- Are you in alignment with the wisdom on this list?
- How might you change your mind?
- How might you change your behavior?... to provide fellow employees with more of what they truly want from work.

On the following page you'll find THE LIST, followed by several pages of information to help you expand your "people skills" and your "people wisdom."

# The Top-10 List of What Employees Want from Work



1. Work with people who **treat me with respect**.
2. **Interesting** work.
3. **Recognition** for work well done.
4. Chance to **develop skills**.
5. Work with **people who listen** if I have ideas about **how to do things better**.
6. A chance to **think for myself** rather than carry out instructions.
7. **Seeing the end results** of my work.
8. Working for **efficient managers**.
9. A job that is **not too easy**.
10. **Feeling well informed** about what is going on.



## 1. Work with people who **treat me with respect.**

Respect is most certainly the foundational value for a “high satisfaction” working environment that is also highly productive. The term being used these days for a working environment that is not based on respect for each other is “toxic.”

The willingness for employees to invest discretionary effort into their work is what makes the difference in successful organizations. And that just isn't going to take place unless respect for each other is a primary value, accepted and expressed by leaders, managers, and employees.

There's nothing more destructive to employee satisfaction and employee engagement than being treated with disrespect.

So the question is... what constitutes respect? And what are the most harmful forms of disrespect?

Respect might be considered the attitude of holding people in high regard and reflecting that regard in your behavior... even when the pressure is on.

## An Essential Competency

We now know that one of the most important leadership and management skills for Influencing great performance from others is EMPATHY. It's an essential competency in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace.

- Able to sense how others feel.
- Care about how others feel.
- Understand their perspective.
- Empathy means listening first.

As well, William James, considered by many to be the father of modern American psychological thought, pointed out the #1 behavior of respect when he said, *“The deepest need in all of human nature is the desire to be heard.”*



## The Power of Listening

Yes, it's about listening. Listening is the #1 behavior of respect, because it is through "attentive open listening" that we provide people with the experience of being heard.

The Buddhists say that just by listening deeply we eliminate pain and suffering in the world. And in the workplace just by listening deeply we connect with people in a way that opens them to being influenced by us.

At one point in my speaking career I was hired by ARCO to deliver an entertaining after-dinner presentation to a new group of managers each week for 10 weeks. This was at their seminar training center in Santa Barbara, California. Each week a new group of managers went through five days of management training at the center. And I had the pleasure of speaking to each group at a special group dinner on the final night of their training.

Also, and this is very important to this story, each group was assigned a different high-ranking executive vice-president to spend the week with them.

What was remarkable was how different were the energy levels of each group. And it didn't seem to have anything to do with how many extroverted people were part of each group. The determining factor for the energy level of each group seemed to be the personal qualities of the executive leader assigned to that group.

One week I showed up at the seminar center to speak to one of the groups, and those people were just bubbling over with enthusiasm and positive energy, noticeably so. So during the cocktail hour prior to the dinner I asked several of them what they liked the most about their week of training. They all said they truly enjoyed visiting with the executive leader who had been assigned to spend the week with them.

Probing further in my effort to discover the source of their wonderful "group energy," I asked if she was charismatic in some way. "No, not at all," was the universal reply. So what is it about her, I asked directly to a few of the managers. They all quickly agreed on the same answer, *"All week long she has really been listening to what we have to say."*



## Open Listening

The most respectful and influential type of listening is OPEN LISTENING.

Open listening is about listening with an open mind, listening without judgment or evaluation. This is not easy for most managers, and requires some practice. Most managers, and most people for that matter, have developed the habit of judging and evaluating what the other person is saying while they are saying it.

The best time to engage in judging and evaluating what people are saying, which we all must do in work situations, is AFTER you've heard them out, after you've truly listened to what they have to say. It's only in doing this that we provide people with the experience of "being heard." And remember, it's the experience of truly being heard that we are all seeking.

Here's some behavioral advice on how to practice Open Listening...

- Listen without judgment or evaluation. (Hear them out first.)
- Don't spend your listening time thinking about what you're going to say next.
- Focus on their words, and also their non-verbal content.
- Listen for their pause before speaking.  
(This will eliminate interrupting them, which is a sign of disrespect and lack of interest.)
- Paraphrase your perception of their message, and ask clarifying questions.

Do you listen like this? If you'll focus on listening in this way the increase in your influence on the people you work with will be remarkable. (And your family members too!)

What you want is this: When people walk about from talking with you they have the feeling their opinions and what they had to say really counted. They feel like they were really listened to. They feel like they were heard.



## **2. Interesting work.**

It really isn't so surprising that this is #2 on the Top-10 List.

Work that isn't interesting seems to drag on forever, whereas work that holds and compels our interest takes us out of "clock watching," and makes work so much more enjoyable.

The question the best managers answer is... How can we make work more interesting for everyone?

This is why cross-training is so important in some job sectors. Learning a new function does, indeed, keep work more interesting. And anything we can do to keep work more interesting will be welcomed and will be naturally motivating.

Sales contests and volume production contests all fall into this category, of activities that add interest to the work employees do.

## **3. Recognition for work well done.**

This is one of the most important items on this list. When I'm speaking about this subject and I ask audiences to guess what's #1 on the Top-10 List and just shout it out, always someone yells out, "Recognition!"

It can be said we have developed three basic ways we give recognition to people in the workplace in America:

1. The most valuable employees for the year, based on established parameters like "sales volume," etc., revealed at the big annual company banquet or event.
2. Employee of the month, complete with a photo of the employee on display somewhere for the entire month.
3. Moment-to-moment "pats on the back" for work well done.



## Moment-to-moment Pats on the Back

In studies conducted from the late 1940's right up to the present day, when employees are asked which of these three types of recognition they like the most, in overwhelming numbers they all say, "moment-to-moment pats on the back" for work well done.

It's so much more satisfying – and much more motivational – to be recognized for doing good work right at the moment that work is being done; or as close to that moment as possible.

So, Ken Blanchard was right when we told us, some years ago, that managers should strive to "catch employees doing something right."

In the valuable and famous 22-year Gallup Study of the "12 Core Workplace Characteristics for Attracting the Best Work Talent in the Marketplace," they phrased their results as 12 questions the employee would ask in assessing the environment in which they work.

One of those questions was this... *"In the last seven days have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?"*

The key phrase in that question is "the last seven days."

We humans need recognition from our managers and from each other when we do something really well, when we go out of our way to serve a customer or a fellow employee. A little recognition goes a long way in strengthening our desire to come to work each day and put our hearts into our job.

And if we go more than a week without someone paying attention to the great work we're doing – and giving us a little "pat on the back" for it – our natural motivation gets cut off one inch at a time.

As a customer, whenever you encounter an employee who seems totally disengaged, not inclined to serve you from their heart, you can bet they've gone for weeks and weeks without receiving any recognition for any of the valuable work they do.

We totally underestimate the emotional and productive impact of simple acts of recognition.

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Managers are really good at catching mistakes, really good at seeing where and how things are being done wrong. This is an important skill. And it needs to be balanced with a conscious effort to also see where it's going good and "catching people doing something right."

Employees are working hard, and at least every seven days they need someone to recognize some aspect of the great work they are doing and give them a pat on the back.

This is one of the keys to creating a passionate and loyal work team. This is one of the keys to influencing involvement and engagement.

And, you'll find this works in your family life as well. What are the words you will never hear your mate say? *"I've had it with all this appreciation and recognition. I can't take it anymore!"*

## 4. Chance to **develop skills**.

I love that this is high on the list, because it's way past time for us to realize that helping people develop valuable skills is a GIFT in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

If you want to turbo-charge your work team, create ways to assist them in developing their workplace skills. There are simple ways to do this, as well as more advanced, traditional ways for implementing this.

One of my clients is a small manufacturer. Their managers wanted to empower their employees to become more involved in their work at reducing errors on the job.

They instituted an advanced training program to teach employees a skill set for noticing and reducing errors. They also gave weekly recognition to the people who produced the most error reduction. And... on top of that they started a company library of the most current and highly valued business books, and allowed employees to freely check them out and read them at home, on an honor system. Those books got talked about and passed around from one employee to the next.

Their error metrics went way down, and job satisfaction went way up.



## 5. Work with **people who listen** if **I have ideas** about **how to do things better**.

If I had to select the most important element on this Top-10 List for “enhancing employee engagement” it would be this one, #5.

By paying attention to this you can do more to improve morale, improve your operation, and improve your service to your customers, than anything else I know.

Employees are in a position to see and to know what needs to be changed to improve just about every aspect of the business. If only you could somehow get them to start really looking and really caring about that improvement.

Want to know why employees aren’t engaged, aren’t paying attention like we want them to? It’s because we aren’t asking for and using their ideas!

In general across all of corporate America, guess how many ideas are cultivated and utilized on a yearly basis? Guess how many ideas per employee per year.

The answer: 0.8

Less than one idea per employee per year.

Is it any wonder that employees are not truly engaged?

The good news is, there’s a way to change this, a way that many organizations are now implementing to their great benefit. And that is to “cultivate ideas from everyone on a regular basis.”

Boardroom, Inc., aggregates valuable information into newsletters they market to several sectors of the population. Their revenue numbers were dropping and their COO couldn’t figure out why. He hired a consultant who recommended they start gathering ideas from all 105 of their employees on a regular basis.

So they started a program where it was “mandatory to bring two new ideas” to the Monday morning department meetings each week. And they began processing 103 ideas per employee per year.

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That's no easy thing, but it turns out to be more than worth the effort.

Their "profit per employee" metric is now 700% higher than their industry standard. Imagine that! And of course their overall revenues are way up as well.

## Cultivate Ideas from Everyone

The "BrainWriting Technique" is the best method I've found. And here are the characteristics of all the best IDEA SYSTEMS...

1. Ideas are requested on a regular basis.  
Twice a month is good.  
People are expected to bring their ideas twice a month.
2. Small ideas are best. Small ideas are welcomed and valued.  
  
Small ideas can make a big difference. They easy to implement, which "fuels" the momentum of the "idea process." And small ideas add up to large improvements.
3. Evaluation of the ideas is done by the people contributing the ideas.  
  
This is critical. If ideas are dropped in a box – ugh! – to be "kicked upstairs" for some manager to evaluate who has no idea of the context within which the idea came to someone's mind, it kills the energy of the process.  
  
Use a process that allows the people contributing the ideas to work as a team to evaluate the best ideas and come up with a quick action plan for implementing the most valuable ideas selected.
4. Swift Implementation of the best ideas selected.  
  
Seeing good ideas get used and implemented is what people really want the most. It is naturally motivating and "fuels" the idea system.
5. Results are reported, and success is celebrated as a group.

Start an "idea capture & implementation" process with your work team right now. It might take you a few tries to get comfortable with it, but soon enough it will "connect" with the natural desire all employees have for their ideas to be valued and utilized.

And you'll soon notice a remarkable improvement in morale & productivity.



## 6. A chance to **think for myself** rather than carry out instructions.

The key to getting employees to put their hearts into their work is to create a sense of “ownership.”

Anything that serves to empower employees stimulates their sense of ownership on the job. All of what we’ve been examining so far serves to empower employees, and increase their sense of “owning their work.”

This sense of ownership is so important because “pride” is tied to ownership.

Question: When was the last time you washed and waxed a rental car?

Answer: It never happened!

But remember that very first car you ever owned? Remember that? I’ll wager at one point you got a plastic bucket full of soapy water, a sponge, and a water hose, and you washed that car yourself. And you loved doing it.

## The Full Engagement Formula

A powerful formula to consider is this one:

Trust + training + responsibility + authority = Ownership = Pride = Quality Work

Trust is so important. You can’t provide an authentic sense of ownership without it. but it’s hard to give trust if the employee doesn’t have a sufficient skill level. That’s where training comes in. And remember, training is a gift. Training is empowering. Trust and training go hand in hand in the “high-performance High-satisfaction work environments.”

And then you have to provide responsibility AND some measure of authority. There’s nothing more demotivating than responsibility without authority!

Of course, evaluations and course corrections will be required, but this is the formula for stimulating full engagement. And full engagement is what we’re talking about.



## 7. Seeing the end results of my work.

How can we ever expect people to truly connect their hearts to their work and to their customers if they don't have an opportunity to see the true end results of their work.

Remember, all of these elements on this list are what employees really want.

Some employees never get to see the customer or how the customer benefits from the product or service they help create. Visits to see customers can really be inspiring for employees, and are easier to implement than you might think.

At the very least, you should be gathering client testimonials and actively sharing them with staff members all the time. That allows, in some small way, people to get a real sense of the end results of their work. This is so important. When you think of it in this way, those client testimonials become much more meaningful than you've been thinking, don't they?

The surgical tools division of 3M arranges, on a rotating basis, for all of their tool designers and surgery equipment support employees to watch their surgeon clients use their tools "on the job" in surgeries, viewing from surgery observation rooms.

Do you think those designers and support employees have a greater sense of the value of their work and the importance of their work after watching surgeons use the tools they help create? You bet they do!

## 8. Working for **efficient managers**.

This is so important to employees. And speaks to leading by example, and the importance of leadership congruence. There's nothing worse than being stuck with a manager who isn't efficient, who's approach wastes time and talent and energy.

In that Gallup Study, one of the fascinating things they found was when people leave a company, when they quit their job, they're not quitting the company. They're quitting their manager.

What all employees want is a manager who is "on it."



## 9. A job that is **not too easy**.

Do you sometimes wish your job was easier? Of course you do, when the pressure is on and the work has piled up. But not really.

If your job was really easy all the time, you'd get bored sooner or later. And you'd start looking for work that would **CHALLENGE YOU**.

Yes, it's true. Challenge engages us, stimulates us, and facilitates our growth. We've got to have it to be engaged.

This issue is the level of challenge. Too much, and it's hard to think of it as anything other than a burden. Too little, and boredom sets in.

Oh, we humans. We are so fascinating. But you know, it's not rocket science to understand us.

Pay attention to the level of challenge your employees are facing. Help them measure up to the unavoidable challenges of their work, with additional training and support.

And provide some extra challenge when it seems like they're ready for that, when it seems like they're coasting just a bit. This involves paying attention to people as true individuals, which is what the best managers do.

## 10. **Feeling well informed** about what is going on.

This one is **HUGE**, because once again we are talking about a sense of control. That's why the employees who engaged in this study put this item on the list of the top ten things they want most from work.

Studies on this very subject have proven that when humans feel they have some measure of "control" their sense of well-being goes up, their productivity goes up, and their creativity goes way up!

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So anything we can realistically do to provide an enhanced sense of control is really valuable. We might say, the first duty of management is to *understand people's need to know*.

There are few things more de-motivating than feeling like “you’re out of the loop,” or you’re always “the last to know.”

And conversely, the feeling like you “are in the know,” that you know what’s really going on, does provide a sense of control, and is naturally motivating.

The premiere element of good customer service is keeping customers well informed. And the premiere element of authentic employee empowerment is keeping employees well informed.

Sam Walton started out in business running a small “Five & Dime” store, with pony rides in the parking lot to attract customers. When he passed away he left a fortune in excess of five billion dollars.

Sam used to say, “Communicate everything you can to employees, whether it seems like they want to know it or not. The more they know, the more they care.”

If you want full engagement, nothing is more important than keeping people well informed.

## So that's the Top-10 List

So that's it. That's the most authentic Top-10 List of What Employees Truly Want from Work. And it says so much.

If you just paid attention to this list and what it really means; and you focused on developing the skills for delivering to employees what's on this list, you'd become an award-winning manager known for...

- fully engaged employees
- high levels of employee satisfaction
- genuine customer loyalty, and
- profitable revenues

And that's what I truly want for you, your team, and your organization.

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