

Tips, Tricks & Strategies

for Strengthening the Manager-Employee Relationship



A company is a holistic ecosystem—and the relationship between a manager and their employees is one of the most critical to operating a smooth, successful business.

So, what do managers need to do to have effective, high-performing teams? We've gathered a (non-exhaustive) list of tips, tricks, and strategies for managers, leaders, and HR to use across each touch point in the employee lifecycle.

Start From Onboarding

Building a strong manager-employee relationship starts from even before day one. In the recruitment process, ensure that manager set role clarity and that the new hire truly understands what the role requires, how the manager runs the team, who they'll work with on a day-to-day basis, and what metrics will be used to track performance.

Once the manager makes a hire, the work is far from over. As the new employee enters the onboarding phase, the manager is at a critical junction—where they can start the relationship off on the right foot and lay the foundation for a strong relationship, or they can drop the ball completely.

So what's the number one thing a manager can do during onboarding to lay the foundations of a strong relationship? Enter 30-60-90-Day Plans.

The first 3 months can either make or break an employee's experience at your company—which is why it's so crucial to create a 30-60-90 day plan. Broken into 3 parts, this plan clearly outlines a new hire's tasks and priorities, along with any training they will go through.

To give them metrics to strive towards, this plan should also list out new hires' goals. Simply writing down goals makes employees 42 percent more likely to achieve them. These goals should be SMART: specific, relevant, measurable, attainable, and time-based.

At the 30, 60, and 90 day marks, managers should check in with employees. During these one-on-ones, they can discuss their progress towards goals and any roadblocks they may be encountering. This will help keep employees motivated and set them up for success, increasing the chances that they're in for the long haul.



Communicate, Communicate, Communicate



Communication is the foundation of any successful relationship—business, personal, or otherwise. And we’ve all heard the phrase, “Employees don’t leave a role; they leave the manager.” But one thing you might not have heard is that many leaders say that 9 times out of 10, performance issues are actually communication issues.

The bond between managers and employees is strengthened by communication, allowing the two people to build psychological comfort, loyalty, trust, and respect.

To facilitate open communication with your employees, keep them informed about ongoing projects, and provide them with any resources that can help them meet their goals.

Promote two-way communication, so they are tuned into your expectations and clearly understand what needs to be done. Allow them to ask questions and listen carefully to their concerns or opinions.

When looking to streamline communication, you may want to develop online resources, courses, and webinars focused on training your staff on organizational best practices.

One other way to strengthen those communication paths is to utilize 1:1 meetings.

It's imperative that managers set aside dedicated time for each employee to promote and drive performance, get people committed and engaged to a company's mission, and check in on employees' personal life and mental health.

Here are some tips to make your 1:1s successful:

- Establish a regular cadence. The length is up to you, but make sure you're meeting once a week.
- Ensure that you set an agenda before the meeting, and have both parties bring items to add.
- Ask personal questions as well as professional. Don't underestimate the power of a simple, "How are you?"
- Be an active listener, and listen to understand, rather than just waiting to respond.
- Close Slack, mute your notifications, and be really tuned in to your conversation. Employees will notice if you're not paying attention!



Prioritize!

One of a manager's main roles is helping their employees prioritize, and we often talk about prioritization in terms of a list of priorities. But the origin of the word 'priority', is singular. When everything is a priority, nothing is.

When thinking about prioritization as a manager, ask yourself: "What is our rally cry? What is our singular focus that we can all get behind to create that clarity and alignment for what the business needs?"

When you have that clear North Star, you can spend the additional time and energy usually spent on ticking off tasks to work on things like having career growth conversations.

When interacting with employees, managers should discuss what's on the plates of their directs. Help them focus, prioritize, and, most importantly, deprioritize. Think about what doesn't align with that rally cry. Managers can, and should, be that tiebreaker to help create that separation between what is a priority and what isn't.



Give Useful Performance Reviews

Whether you conduct reviews quarterly or annually, evaluating your employees' performance is critical to their success at your company. From quality of work to productivity, performance reviews recognize your employees for their accomplishments and identify their areas of improvement.

When a manager puts in the effort to execute a well-planned performance review, it can actually make a difference in an employee's work ethic and have a positive impact on the success of the company overall.

Instead of viewing performance reviews as a waste of time, make them a priority. By providing the right type of feedback for employees and properly executing reviews, you can change the way your employees and managers handle the process.

Don't Forget Career Development

Don't leave all of your career development conversations to performance reviews. In fact, performance reviews should focus more on the now—on individual and team performance and how that person has contributed.

Set aside separate time to speak with each employee about their career goals, what they hope to accomplish within the next 6 months to a year, what they want to learn, what they like and don't like, and how you can help them. This is a great opportunity to offer advice on courses they can take (see professional development), help them find a mentor (see mentorship opportunities), or provide them with a stretch project that will help them test their skills and try out a project that might be more common if they upleveled their role.

Ensure that you also are completely transparent about the career path for that person's role—even laying it out in a document. Tell your employees what is expected of them at their current level and what exactly they need to do to take it to the next level.

Ask For Feedback

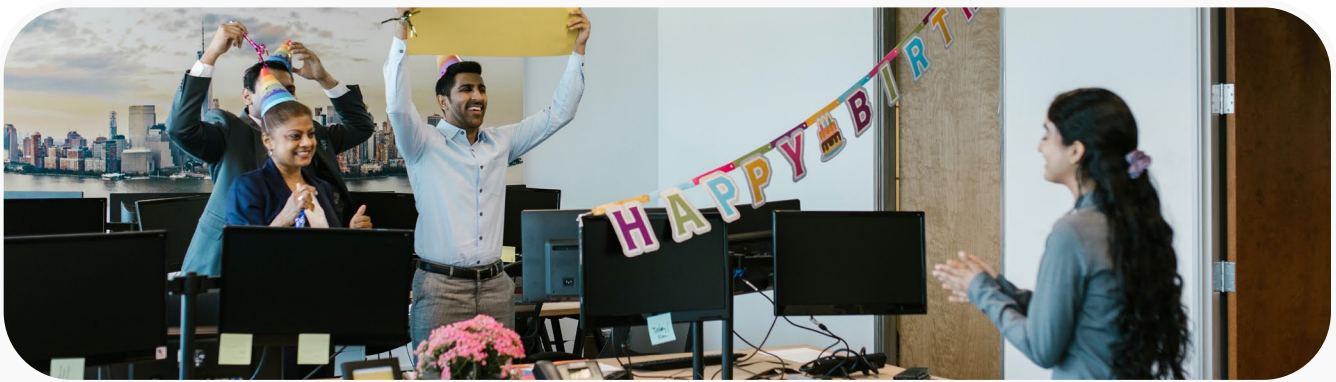
Check in with your employees and ask how they're feeling about the business or current project they're working on, determining if there are any roadblocks or challenges you can help with. This can be done directly through conducting feedback meetings or implementing engagement surveys.

Connecting with your employees on a deeper level and getting their feedback on company processes creates an environment of inclusion and belonging. Allowing them to participate in making important business decisions gives them a sense of ownership in their work.



Build Company Culture

To create a positive work environment, it's important to interact with your employees and connect with them professionally and personally. On the latter front, acknowledge your employees and their personal lives—celebrate dates that are important to them, like birthdays, weddings, welcoming a child, or buying a new apartment. Encourage open dialogue that allows them to share their perspectives and insights. This helps lay the foundation for a collaborative and authentic company culture.



Measure Manager Effectiveness

Managers have a lot on their plate—meeting the needs of the business but also providing the coaching and leadership that comes along with managing a team.

But remember: managers need to have a reasonable understanding of what's possible. It's every manager's job to understand the scope of the work, the amount of time available, and most importantly, the capacity and ability of that person to do that work, aligned with expectations.

Management is incredibly important to the success of a business, and HR and leadership needs to make sure things are going well. One good way to measure manager effectiveness is using eNPS. eNPS, also known as Employee Net Promoter Score, is a scoring system designed to help employers measure employee satisfaction and loyalty within their organizations. The main output of this is a score that highlights how likely it is that the employee would recommend the organization as a place to work.

Another great way to measure manager effectiveness is to send out engagement surveys. A few questions you can ask in these surveys are:

- Is your manager engaged during your 1:1s?
- Does your manager express interest in engaging with you?
- Does your manager express interest in your career growth?

Make sure you keep the questions the same each survey so that you can compare changes over each period.

Lead By Example

Perhaps the most important way to make sure your employees are happy, healthy, and likely to stay at your company is to just be flexible and honest. Make sure your employees know that they don't always have to be available, that they can take time off, and that their personal lives are valued. But HR and managers have to lead by example. This means signing off at a normal hour, taking PTO, not emailing on weekends, taking breaks during the day, being honest about appointments/leaving early, and just bringing your real, authentic self to work every day.

