No Email, No Problem: Creating A Feedback Loop With Non-Desk Workers

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It's difficult to imagine a workplace without email. The average office worker sends and receives 121 emails a day, according to a report by the Radicati Group. But there's a growing number of non-desk employees (83% to be exact) who don't have access to company email. From the leader's perspective, communicating with these workers can be a challenge.

But have you thought about the other side of the spectrum—making sure these employees feel heard?

Through my conversations with hundreds of people leaders, I've created (and written a book about) a framework for employee engagement that makes feedback the cornerstone of any strong company culture. Employee feedback can play a variety of roles in your engagement strategy. Not only can it validate any gut feelings you have about your areas of improvement, but gathering feedback from your team can also prove that any new initiatives you put in place are actually working to create more invested employees.

Neuroscientist Paul Zak reports that a 10% increase in an employee's trust in his or her company's leaders has the same impact on engagement as a 36% salary increase. If you fail to give your employees the opportunity to communicate their opinions, they will become frustrated by the lack of change at the leadership level. Couple this lack of feeling heard with an overall feeling of disconnectedness when you're not reporting to an office every day, and it's no wonder that only 22% of non-desk workers feel connected to the purpose of their organization.

Fixing The Feedback Gap With Non-Desk Workers

You've probably tried using the more traditional mediums of gathering feedback from your team, like town hall meetings or paper surveys. These approaches are not effective if employees work outside of an office and don't have a reliable, direct way to receive communications.

If you're frustrated by the lack of options for gathering feedback with your distributed workforce, don't lose hope. For example, one of our clients — one of the largest homebuilders in the Midwest — operates with three district business functions: in-office work, field sales and construction. Most of their field sales and construction workers spend their days at company properties rather than the company's central office. On top of that, these distributed staff members work with independent contractors and other builders to help construct new properties, which means that communication needs to be direct and efficient. The company represents the diversity of today's average business, yet successfully found a way to give their team a voice.

Through working closely with this company, I've witnessed their success in engaging non-desk workers. Here are three alternatives to more traditional ways of gathering employee feedback, borrowed from their playbook and my conversations with dozens of other business executives:

Make feedback the norm. Create and foster an open environment for feedback by encouraging the leadership team and managers at your organization to make it routine. Begin by setting up multiple touch-points for feedback, from manager one-on-ones to company-wide meetings to employee surveys. Then, act on and communicate that feedback to remind employees that their opinions are valued. Once your team realizes they have multiple options to voice their feedback, they'll feel more willing to contribute and make feedback a part of their own interactions at work.

Diversify your approach. Employees are diverse, and so are their methods of communication. This means a "one size fits all" engagement approach almost never works. Make sure your methods for gathering feedback are accessible by employees who may not have corporate email addresses or as much face time with leadership. The majority of U.S. workers own a smartphone, and younger generations are especially apt to using their smartphones to access company information. When we think outside of the email (in)box, it's easy to see how mobile communication might be a better option in some situations.

Encourage anonymous feedback. When feedback feels too formal, like in a town hall meeting or review session, people might feel intimidated and less likely to share their thoughts. Pulse surveys, where management or HR sends a short, targeted question to employees, give workers an easy way to share private feedback. My client ties anonymous pulse questions to push notifications so they can gauge the feedback against their company strategy. For example, a recent quick poll revealed that 20% of their employees didn't feel like they were receiving enough training. The company then responded with more targeted poll questions around the types of training the team

wanted to see to show those employees that they were listening.

When you open up the lines of communication and feedback to *all* employees at your organizations, the opportunities for increased retention and profitability improve drastically. Turn your focus to making it easy to give and receive feedback with user-friendly technology and processes that guarantee anonymity and simplicity. When employees feel heard, they'll be more likely to continue sharing--and that's a feedback loop guaranteed to engage employees and grow your business.