

Connecting with Your Team

Touchpoints for Building Engagement



Contents

The Power of Employee Interactions	3
The Benefits of Employee Engagement	3
Preparing for a Touchpoint	4
Setting Goals for the Meeting	4
Creating an Agenda	4
Preparing for Difficult Conversations	5
Conducting a Touchpoint	6
Setting the Tone for the Meeting	6
Active Listening Techniques	7
Asking Open-Ended Questions	8
Giving and Receiving Feedback	9
Following Up After a Touchpoint	9
Documenting Action Items	9
Following Up on Commitments	10
Continuing the Conversation	11
Common Pitfalls to Avoid	12
Avoiding Common Mistakes during Touchpoints	12
Dealing with Difficult Employees	13
Touchpoints in Practice	14
Real-Life Examples of Successful Touchpoints	14
Touchpoints – An Ongoing Practice	14

The Power of Employee Interactions

It is impossible to overstate the importance of Touchpoints between supervisors and employees. These meetings provide a forum for open and honest communication, which can lead to increased employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention. They also allow supervisors to gain a better understanding of their employees' strengths, weaknesses, and goals, which can help them to tailor their management approach and improve overall performance.

Touchpoints provide a safe space for employees to share their thoughts, concerns, and feedback with their supervisors. Employees who feel heard and valued are more likely to be engaged in their work and committed to the success of the organization. Additionally, these meetings allow supervisors to identify and address any issues that may be hindering employee productivity or morale, such as workload or training needs.

Regular “Touches” can also help to build trust between supervisors and employees. When supervisors take the time to get to know their employees and show a genuine interest in their well-being, employees are more likely to feel supported and motivated. This can lead to increased job satisfaction and a sense of loyalty to the organization.

The Benefits of Employee Engagement

The benefits of employee engagement are real and can be found on both the individual and organizational level. These include:

- **Increased productivity.** Engaged employees are motivated to work hard and take pride in their work. They are committed to achieving their goals and are willing to go the extra mile to meet targets. This results in higher levels of productivity, which ultimately translates into higher levels of growth and development.
- **Better customer service.** Engaged employees are more likely to deliver high-quality customer service because they are committed to meeting the needs and expectations of their customers and colleagues. They are also more likely to take ownership of service issues and find creative solutions to resolve them.
- **Higher employee retention rates.** Engaged employees are more likely to remain with the university for the long term because they feel valued and appreciated. They are also more likely to refer friends and family to Virginia Tech, which can lead to increased recruitment and retention rates.

- **Positive workplace culture.** Engaged employees are happier and more satisfied with their jobs, which leads to a more positive work environment. This, in turn, creates a cycle of positivity where employees are more likely to engage with each other and work collaboratively to achieve their goals.

Preparing for a Touchpoint

Setting Goals for the Meeting

One of the most important aspects of building engagement with your employees is setting goals for the meeting. This can be a little difficult if you don't know where to start. Yet, by following a few simple steps, you can ensure that your meetings are productive, focused, and beneficial for both you and your employees.

- **First, it's important to understand what your goals should be.** Ideally, you want your meetings to achieve three things: **to build rapport and trust with your employees, to provide feedback and guidance, and to set clear expectations and goals for the future.** By keeping these objectives in mind, you can structure your meetings in a way that ensures they are focused on what matters most.
- **Next, prepare for the meeting.** This involves setting an agenda and gathering any necessary materials or information ahead of time. You should also think about any questions or concerns your employees may have and be prepared to address them during the meeting.
- **During the meeting, it's important to be clear and concise in your communication.** Be sure to listen actively and ask questions to ensure that you understand your employees' perspectives and concerns. You should also provide clear feedback and guidance, being sure to offer both praise and constructive criticism where appropriate.
- **Follow up after the meeting.** This means setting clear action items and timelines, and checking in with your employees regularly to ensure that progress is being made. By doing so, you can ensure that your meetings have a lasting impact and are truly beneficial for both you and your employees.

Creating an Agenda

Touchpoints are an effective way to engage with your employees and build a strong bond with them. However, to make the most of these meetings, it is important to have a clear agenda that outlines the topics you want to discuss. An agenda helps you stay focused, manage time effectively, and ensure that you cover all the important points.

Here are some tips for creating an effective agenda for your Touchpoints:

1. **Set goals:** Before the meeting, identify the goals you want to achieve. What do you want to discuss? What outcomes do you want to achieve? Having clear goals will help you stay on track and ensure that you cover all the important topics.
2. **Prioritize topics:** Not all topics are equally important, so it is important to prioritize them. Start with the most critical issues that need to be addressed, and allocate time accordingly. If there is not enough time to cover all the topics, you can schedule another meeting to discuss the remaining issues.
3. **Be flexible:** While it is important to have a clear agenda, it is also important to be flexible. If an employee raises an issue that is not on the agenda but is important, be open to discussing it. Remember, the purpose of the meeting is to build a strong relationship with your employees, and that requires flexibility and adaptability.
4. **Involve the employee:** The Touchpoint is not a one-way conversation. It is important to involve the employee in the discussion and encourage them to share their thoughts and ideas. This will help you understand their perspective and build a stronger connection with them.
5. **Follow up:** After the meeting, follow up with the employee to ensure that the action items are being implemented. This will help you build trust and accountability with your employees.

Creating an effective agenda, and inviting buy-in, is critical to the success of your Touchpoints. By setting goals, prioritizing topics, being flexible, involving the employee, and following up, you can ensure that your meetings are productive, engaging, and build strong relationships with your employees.

Preparing for Difficult Conversations

Difficult conversations are an inevitable part of any professional relationship. Whether it's delivering bad news, addressing poor performance, or discussing sensitive topics, these conversations can be uncomfortable and challenging. However, avoiding them can lead to even bigger problems down the line. That's why it's crucial to prepare yourself for these conversations to ensure that they are as productive and respectful as possible.

Here are some tips for preparing for difficult conversations:

1. **Define the issue:** Make sure you have a clear understanding of the problem you need to address. Identify the specific behavior or action that is causing the issue and prepare specific examples that illustrate your concerns.

2. **Plan your approach:** Consider the best way to approach the conversation. Think about the timing, location, and tone you want to use. Remember to stay calm and professional throughout the conversation, and avoid attacking the person you are speaking with.
3. **Consider the other person's perspective:** Before the conversation, try to put yourself in the other person's shoes. Think about how they might be feeling and what their concerns might be. This will help you approach the conversation with empathy and understanding.
4. **Practice:** If you're feeling nervous about the conversation, practice what you want to say ahead of time. This will help you feel more confident and prepared.
5. **Listen:** Remember that a difficult conversation is a two-way street. Be prepared to listen to the other person's point of view and respond with empathy and understanding. Try to find common ground and work together to find a solution.
6. **Follow up:** After the conversation, follow up with the other person to ensure that you're both on the same page. Confirm any agreements you made and set a plan for moving forward.

In preparing for difficult conversations, you can ensure that they are as productive and respectful as possible. Remember to stay calm, listen actively, and approach the conversation with empathy and understanding.

Conducting a Touchpoint

Setting the Tone for the Meeting

The success of a Touchpoint depends on how well you set the tone for the meeting. As a supervisor, it is your responsibility to create an environment where employees feel comfortable and confident sharing their thoughts and ideas.

Here are some tips to help you set the tone for a productive meeting:

1. **Start on a positive note:** Start the conversation with a positive note by acknowledging the employee's achievements or progress. It will help to put the employee at ease and create a positive atmosphere for discussion. Praise their work and acknowledge their contributions to the team.
2. **Listen actively:** Active listening is an essential part of setting the tone for the meeting. It means giving your **full attention** to the employee, **avoiding distractions**, and **focusing on their words**. Listen to their concerns, feedback, and suggestions without interrupting them. Active listening helps to build trust and respect between you and your employee.

3. **Be open and transparent:** Be open and transparent about the purpose of the meeting and what you hope to achieve. Explain why you are having the meeting and how it will benefit the employee and the team. Be **honest** about your expectations and goals for the conversation.
4. **Encourage participation:** Encourage your employee to participate in the conversation. Ask open-ended questions that require more than a “yes” or “no” answer. Allow the employee to express their thoughts and ideas freely. It will help to create a sense of ownership and responsibility.
5. **Take notes:** Taking notes during the meeting is an essential part of setting the tone. It shows that you are interested in what the employee has to say and that you value their input. Taking notes also helps to track progress and follow up on action items.

Active Listening Techniques

Effective communication is a two-way street, and active listening is a crucial component to ensure that both parties understand each other. Active listening techniques are an essential tool for building trust, improving relationships, and increasing employee engagement.

1. **Pay attention:** One of the most crucial aspects of active listening is giving your undivided attention to the speaker. Avoid distractions such as checking your phone or emails, or looking around the room while the other person is speaking. Show the speaker that you are interested in what they have to say by maintaining eye contact, nodding your head, and asking questions.
2. **Paraphrase:** Paraphrasing is repeating what the speaker said in your own words. This technique helps to ensure that you have understood the speaker's message correctly and that there is no miscommunication. It also shows the speaker that you value their words and are invested in the conversation.
3. **Clarify:** If you are unsure about something the speaker said, ask for clarification. Avoid making assumptions or jumping to conclusions. Instead, ask open-ended questions to gain a better understanding of the speaker's perspective.
4. **Reflect:** Reflecting involves summarizing the speaker's message and your understanding of it. This technique helps to confirm that you have comprehended the speaker's message accurately and that there is no miscommunication. Reflecting also shows the speaker that you are actively engaged in the conversation and value their words.

5. **Empathize:** Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. It is an essential component of active listening as it helps to build trust and rapport. Show the speaker that you understand their perspective and are willing to work with them to find a solution.

Asking Open-Ended Questions

Asking open-ended questions is one of the most effective ways to build engagement with your employees. These types of questions encourage your employees to share their thoughts, feelings, and opinions, allowing you to better understand their perspectives and needs.

Open-ended questions are questions that cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”. Instead, they require more thought and effort to answer fully. They often begin with words like “what,” “how,” or “why.” For example, instead of asking, “Did you have a good weekend?” you could ask, “What did you do over the weekend?”

The benefits of asking open-ended questions are numerous. They can help you build stronger relationships with your employees by showing that you are interested in their thoughts and feelings. They can also help you identify areas where your employees may be struggling or need more support.

To effectively ask open-ended questions, it is important to create a comfortable environment where your employees feel safe and confident sharing their thoughts. This can be done by actively listening to their responses, avoiding interrupting or judging their answers, and encouraging them to elaborate on their thoughts.

Here are some examples of open-ended questions you can ask your employees:

- What are your thoughts on our current project?
- How do you feel about your role in the division?
- What do you think we could do to improve our team's performance?
- Why do you think our recent campaign was successful/not successful?
- What are your personal goals for the next year?
- How's work going for you this week?
- What can I help you with?
- How do you feel about your progress on (individual goal)?
- What key things do you need from me to do your best work?

Asking open-ended questions is just one part of building engagement with your employees. It is important to follow up on their responses and act to address any concerns or ideas they may have. By consistently engaging with your employees in this way, you can create a more positive and productive work environment for everyone.

Giving and Receiving Feedback

Giving and receiving feedback is an essential component of building engagement between employees and their supervisors. It helps to create an environment of open communication, mutual trust, and respect that fosters growth and development. Whether you are a supervisor or an employee, it is important to understand how to give and receive feedback effectively.

As an employee, it is essential to be open to feedback and take it positively. Feedback is an opportunity to learn and grow, and it is not a reflection of your worth. When receiving feedback, listen attentively and avoid being defensive. Ask for examples of what you did well and what you could have done better. Take notes and ask for clarification if needed.

On the other hand, when giving feedback it is crucial to be specific and objective. Avoid using vague language that can be misinterpreted. Begin by highlighting the positive aspects of their work and then move on to areas that need improvement. Avoid personal attacks and provide constructive criticism that will help them improve.

It is also essential to give feedback regularly rather than waiting until the end of the year. Regular feedback helps employees to stay on track and improve their performance. It also creates a culture of constant improvement and growth.

As a supervisor, it is important to create a safe and supportive environment for your employees to give feedback. Employees must feel comfortable and confident to share their opinions without fear of retaliation or judgment. Encourage them to give feedback regularly and take their feedback seriously.

Giving and receiving feedback is an opportunity to learn, improve and create a culture of continuous improvement. As an employee, be open to feedback and take it positively, while as a supervisor, to create a supportive environment that encourages regular feedback.

Following Up After a Touchpoint

Documenting Action Items

Documenting action items is an essential aspect of building engagement with your employees. It is a way to ensure that progress is being made on projects and that everyone is on the same page. Documenting action items can also be used to hold employees accountable for their work and to ensure that deadlines are being met.

When documenting action items, it is important to be **clear** and **concise**. Use bullet points to break down the task into smaller, manageable steps. Use action verbs to describe what needs to be done, and be specific about the expected outcome. Include any relevant deadlines or milestones, and assign the task to a specific person or team.

Once the action item has been documented, it is important to **follow up** on it regularly. This can be done through regular check-ins or progress meetings. During these meetings, review the action items that were assigned and discuss any progress that has been made. If there are any issues or roadblocks preventing progress, discuss them openly and work together to find a solution.

Documenting action items can also be used to celebrate successes. When an action item is completed successfully, take the time to recognize and celebrate the achievement. This can be as simple as a verbal recognition during a team meeting or as elaborate as a team outing.

Documentation is an essential component of building engagement with your employees. It helps to ensure that progress is being made on projects, holds employees accountable for their work, and helps to ensure that deadlines are being met. By being clear and concise when documenting action items, following up regularly, and celebrating successes, you can help to build a more engaged and productive team.

Following Up on Commitments

One of the most important aspects of building engagement with your employees is following up on commitments. When you make a promise to your employees, it is important to follow through on that promise. This builds trust and shows that you are committed to their success.

Following up on commitments is not just about doing what you said you would do. It is also about communicating with your employees throughout the process. Keep them informed of any changes or delays, and let them know when you have completed the task. This helps to build transparency and shows that you value their time and input.

To ensure that you follow up on commitments, it is important to **set realistic goals and deadlines**. Don't promise something that you can't deliver, and be honest about any potential delays or obstacles that may arise. This helps to manage expectations and ensures that everyone is on the same page.

When following up on commitments, it is also important to **solicit feedback** from your employees. Ask them about their experience and if there is anything that could have been done differently. This shows that you value their input and are committed to continuous improvement.

Following up on commitments is a critical component of building engagement. It supports trust and the commitment to the employee's success. By setting realistic goals, communicating throughout the process, and soliciting feedback, you can ensure that you follow through on your promises and build stronger relationships with your employees.

Continuing the Conversation

Congratulations! You have taken the first step towards building a stronger connection with your employees by having a one-on-one conversation. But don't let it end there. To truly build engagement, the conversation needs to continue.

One of the best ways to continue the conversation is to set up regular touches with your employees. These can be as often as weekly or as infrequent as biweekly, depending on the needs of the employee and the nature of their work. During these Touchpoints, you can discuss progress towards goals, challenges that have arisen, and any new developments in the employee's role.

It's important to remember that these Touchpoints **should not** be a one-sided conversation. Encourage your employees to share their thoughts, concerns, and ideas. Listen actively and respond thoughtfully. By doing so, you will show your employees that you value their input and are committed to supporting their growth and development.

Another way to continue the conversation is to provide regular feedback. Don't wait until the annual performance review to give your employees feedback on their work. Instead, provide feedback in real-time, both positive and constructive. This will help your employees to stay on track, make adjustments as needed, and feel valued for their contributions.

Finally, don't underestimate the power of informal conversations. Keep the momentum going! Take the time to chat with your employees when you see them in the hallway or break room. Ask about their weekend, their family, or their hobbies. These conversations help to build rapport and trust, and make it easier to have more substantive conversations in the future.

Continuing the conversation is essential for building engagement with your employees. By setting up regular touches, providing feedback, and having informal conversations, you can build stronger connections with your employees and create a more engaged and productive workforce.

Keep the momentum going!

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Avoiding Common Mistakes during Touchpoints

Touchpoints can be a powerful tool for building engagement between employees and their supervisors. However, they can also be fraught with pitfalls that can harm the relationship and reduce the effectiveness of the meeting. In this section, we will explore some common mistakes that employees and supervisors make and offer tips for avoiding them.

One of the most common mistakes that supervisors make during Touchpoints is **failing to prepare adequately**. This can lead to a lack of focus and direction during the meeting, and can leave employees feeling like their time has been wasted.

To avoid this mistake, supervisors should take the time to prepare an agenda for the meeting, and to review any relevant information or feedback from the employee beforehand.

Another common mistake is **talking too much**. While it's important for supervisors to provide guidance and feedback to their employees, it's equally important to listen to their concerns and ideas.

To avoid this mistake, supervisors should practice active listening during the meeting, and allow the employee to lead the conversation.

While performance is an important aspect of Touchpoints, it's not the only one. Supervisors who focus too much on performance can leave employees feeling like they are just a number, rather than a valued member of the team.

To avoid this mistake, supervisors should also make time to discuss the employee's career goals, development opportunities, and other aspects of their work that are important to them.

Finally, one of the most common mistakes is **failing to follow up on the discussion**. Whether it's providing feedback, scheduling a follow-up meeting, or acting on an issue that was raised, supervisors who fail to follow up can leave employees feeling frustrated and disengaged.

To avoid this mistake, supervisors should make a habit of following up on the discussion within a reasonable timeframe, and communicating the results to the employee.

Touchpoints can be a powerful tool for building engagement between employees and their supervisors, but they require careful planning and execution to be effective. By avoiding these common mistakes, supervisors can create a positive and productive environment that promotes engagement and fosters growth and development for both the employee and the organization.

Dealing with Difficult Employees

As much as we would like for all of our employees to be easy to work with and always be on their best behavior, the reality is that there will always be difficult employees. These are the ones who seem to always have a negative attitude, are constantly complaining or causing drama, or are simply not meeting expectations.

As a supervisor, it can be challenging to deal with difficult employees while still maintaining a positive work environment for the rest of your team.

Here are some tips for how to handle these situations:

Don't avoid confronting the problem. If you notice that an employee is not meeting expectations, begin by having an open and honest conversation with them. Listen to their concerns and give them the chance to explain their behavior. Then, explain the impact their actions are having on the team and the company and work together to find a solution.

Make sure that your expectations are clear from the beginning. This can include job duties, performance goals, and behavior standards. When expectations are not met, address the issue immediately.

Offer feedback and support when employees need it. This can help them improve their performance and behavior. By providing constructive feedback, you can help the employee understand what they need to improve upon and how to do so.

If the situation escalates and disciplinary action is necessary, it is important to **document everything**. Keep a record of all conversations, performance evaluations, and any disciplinary action taken.

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, an employee may not improve. In these situations, it may be best for both the employee and the company to part ways. Have a plan in place for how to handle this situation, including legal considerations and how to communicate the decision to the team.

Touchpoints in Practice

Real-Life Examples of Successful Touchpoints

Touchpoints are an essential part of building engagement between employees and their supervisors. It provides an opportunity for both parties to connect on a personal level and discuss any concerns, goals, or progress. When done correctly, Touchpoints can lead to improved job satisfaction, increased productivity, and a better work environment.

Here are some real-life examples of successful Touchpoints:

Example 1: John, an associate director, had a Touchpoint with his employee, Sarah, who was struggling with meeting key deadlines. During the meeting, John listened to Sarah's concerns and suggested some changes to her time management. He also provided her with additional training resources and offered his support. As a result, Sarah's performance improved, and she felt more confident in her role.

Example 2: Mary, a team leader, had a Touchpoint with her employee, Tom, who was feeling overwhelmed with his workload. Mary listened to Tom's concerns and helped him prioritize his tasks. She also offered to delegate some tasks to other team members and provided him with additional resources. As a result, Tom felt less stressed and was able to focus on his work more effectively.

Example 3: Alex, a supervisor, had a Touchpoint with his employee, Jane, who was interested in taking on more responsibilities. During the meeting, Alex discussed Jane's career goals and provided her with opportunities to take on new projects. He also provided her with feedback and guidance to help her succeed. As a result, Jane felt more engaged in her work and was able to develop new skills.

Touchpoints – An Ongoing Practice

It is important to remember that Touchpoints are not just another task to check off your to-do list. They are a valuable tool in building engagement between employees and their supervisors. By continuing the practice of these meetings and taking them seriously, employees and supervisors can build a relationship of trust and respect, provide feedback and support, and set goals and track progress.



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