

# Maximizing Employee Engagement

Text-Only Version

## Course Introduction

As a supervisor or manager in the Federal Government, you know that employee engagement has a direct impact on individual performance, team productivity, and organizational results. You want to promote engagement in your work group, but you are not sure how. There are a lot of questions you need answered first. Like, what exactly is employee engagement? Why is it important? What factors contribute to it? What strategies can you use to evaluate and maximize engagement in your direct reports? This course will provide you with the answers to all of these questions.

## Topics and Objectives

Welcome to the Maximizing Employee Engagement course. This course has six topics, including this introduction. In topic two, Employee Engagement Overview, you will learn about employee engagement and why it is important. In topic three, Strategies for Assessing Engagement, you will learn how to assess your direct reports' engagement. In topic four, Strategies for Maximizing Engagement, you will learn several methods and techniques for creating an engaging environment for your direct reports. In topic five, Learning Activity, you will get the chance to practice the strategies you have learned in an interactive scenario. The Course Conclusion provides a description of supplemental resources and a summary of what you have learned.

## Employee Engagement Overview

### What Is Employee Engagement?

The first thing you need to know is what is employee engagement? In general, an engaged employee is described as being fully involved in and enthusiastic about his or her work and organization. The United States Merit System Protection Board, or MSPB, bases the concept of employee engagement on six components: pride in one's work or workplace, satisfaction with leadership, opportunity to perform well at work, satisfaction with recognition received, prospect for future personal or professional growth, and a positive work environment. According to a 2008 report by the MSPB, called *The Power of Federal Employee Engagement*, engaged employees are described as having some type of heightened connection to their work, their organization, or the people they work for or with that causes them to produce better results for the organization. In other words, long term organizational success requires engaged employees. Check the course Resources if you wish to review the MSPB report.

### The Importance of Engagement

Why is employee engagement so important to your organization and your success as a supervisor or manager? Employee engagement is best described by its results, as it is directly connected to many organizational outcomes that have a potentially large impact on productivity and culture. Research indicates several trends. Fully engaged employees have higher job involvement and higher organizational commitment. They generate higher customer satisfaction, lower turnover, lower safety risks, higher productivity, and higher profitability. The benefits of high engagement also apply to your success as a supervisor or manager. Higher engagement means more trust, enthusiasm, and effort

among your team members, quality work products, and less stress. Disengaged employees also affect the output of their organizations. Low engagement results in turnover as well as disengaged employees who do not leave but instead stay and damage both productivity and relationships. It is clear that with high employee engagement, your organization can achieve more. In light of this, the MSPB treats employee engagement as an organization-driven outcome, calling on agencies and organizations to exert the level of effort necessary to create an engaging environment.

### Examples of Research

Caterpillar, Inc. (construction machinery and equipment company) saved \$8.8 million at one plant from decreased attrition, absenteeism, and turnover (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004).

Molson Coors Brewing Company “strengthened” employee engagement and the company saved over \$1.7 million in one year through improved sales performance and reduced costs of safety incidents (Vance, n.d.).

In a 2019 study of human resources professionals working in Canadian companies, the most common results of disengagement were dysfunctional work relationships (29%), lower productivity (25%), and an unwillingness to go beyond their job description (17%) (Baker, n.d.).

### Factors That Contribute to Engagement

To fully understand employee engagement, you need to know what factors contribute to it. Supervisors, managers, employees, and organizations as a whole have an effect on engagement and share in the responsibility for when it increases or decreases. When a new employee joins an organization, the employee expects that certain basic human needs will be met. Employee engagement develops as the organization fulfills these needs. Employees need to be matched to a job that aligns with their talents and interests. Employees also need to be able to trust that the organization will deliver on its promises, be honest and open in all communication with employees, invest in them, and treat them fairly. Employees need to feel confident that if they work hard, demonstrate commitment, and make meaningful contributions, they will be recognized and rewarded accordingly. Finally, employees need to believe that they will be able to grow, develop their skills, and have the opportunity for advancement. When you and the organization fail to meet these needs, engagement decreases. In his book titled “The 7 Hidden Reasons Employees Leave: How to Recognize the Subtle Signs and Act Before It's Too Late”, Leigh Branham identifies these factors for decreased employee engagement. As a leader in your organization, you have the ability to effect changes which impact employees and, consequently, their engagement level.

### Introduction to Engagement Strategies

Finally, you want to know how you can evaluate and maximize your direct reports' engagement. Establishing and promoting an agency-wide culture of engagement starts at the highest levels of an organization. It is the responsibility of executives to ensure that the policies, procedures, and resources are in place to support engagement. However, there are many actions that, as a supervisor or manager, you can take on your own to foster employee engagement. This course will provide you with strategies for both assessing and promoting the engagement of your direct reports. Details will be provided on each of the strategies listed here.

- Assessing Engagement

- Use Employee Viewpoint Survey Results
- Observe Behaviors Associated with Engagement
- Maximizing Engagement
  - Lead by Example
  - Leverage Emotional Intelligence
  - Foster Job Autonomy
  - Align Performance Expectations with Agency Mission
  - Enhance Communication
  - Create a Positive Work Environment
  - Use the Human Capital Framework

## Knowledge Check

Read the question provided. Record your answer. What are some reasons why it is important for organizations to maximize employee engagement?

Answer: See if your response included any of the following reasons. Employee engagement:

- Produces better results for the organization
- Directly influences many organizational outcomes that have a potentially large impact on productivity and culture
- Directly influences many organizational outcomes that have a potentially large impact on productivity and culture
- Leads to more employee involvement and commitment
- Results in higher customer satisfaction, lower turnover, lower safety risks, higher productivity, and high profitability
- Results in more trust, enthusiasm, and effort among team members, quality work products, and less stress

## Strategies for Assessing Engagement

### Use Employee Viewpoint Survey Results

The annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, or EVS, measures employee perceptions of workforce management as a means to evaluate employee engagement. The EVS contains an Employee Engagement Index, which covers the conditions likely to result in employee engagement and satisfaction. The index evaluates three areas: how employees perceive their leadership, supervisors, and intrinsic work experiences. Agencies have different methods of analyzing and distributing their EVS results. If your Agency is not currently providing you with team-level EVS results, ask that the results be provided to you so that you can see how your team members are doing and monitor their engagement over time. You may also consider using the results to develop an Action Plan for improvement. For more details on developing an Action Plan, select the Guide for Interpreting and Acting on Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey Results located in the course Resources, or contact your agency's EVS coordinator. Review each area of the Employee Engagement Index to see the types of questions the survey tries to answer.

## Leaders Lead

- Do leaders in your organization generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce?
- Do leaders maintain high standards of honesty and integrity?
- Do managers communicate the goals and priorities of the organization?
- Do you have a high level of respect for your organization's senior leaders?

## Supervisors

- Do supervisors/team leaders in your work unit support employee development?
- Does your supervisor/team leader listen to what you have to say?
- Does your supervisor/team leader treat you with respect?
- Do you have trust and confidence in your supervisor?

## Intrinsic Work Experience

- Do you feel encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things?
- Does your work give you a feeling of personal accomplishment?
- Do you know what is expected of you on the job?
- Are your talents used well in the workplace?
- Do you know how your work relates to the agency's goals and priorities?

## Observe Behaviors Associated with Engagement

Every day you have opportunities to watch your direct reports as they work and interact with you, their colleagues, and others in the workplace. These observations provide you with information about your employees' possible level of engagement. Here are a few behaviors you can associate with engagement. This is not an exhaustive list of engaged behaviors, but they are easily observable as well as activities that you can encourage.

## Techniques

Look for these engaged behaviors:

- Shows interest in improving performance. For example, the employee provides ideas and options for solving organizational challenges.
- Make an effort to build relationships with coworkers and supervisors. For example, the employee volunteers to help someone who is facing a big deadline, or the employee mentors a colleague.
- Talks with you to create individual career development plans.
- Actively finds ways to work smarter or more efficiently. For example, the employee identifies solutions to problems he or she encounters, or the employee participates in decisions that affect his or her work.
- Seeks to understand agency mission and goals.

## Knowledge Check

Read the question provided. Record your answer. Shaunna is a new employee. Though she's only been on your staff a few weeks, she has already formed several strong relationships with other colleagues. When you review her recent assignments, you see that her writing style is not consistent with the

Federal environment and requires significant edits. She expresses to you that she feels like she is failing and wants to know if there is any training that she can take to help improve her performance.

Do you think Shaunna is behaving in an engaged manner? Explain why or why not.

Answer: Although Shaunna is struggling with her work, she is exhibiting engaged behavior. She is making an effort to build relationships with coworkers and wants to improve her performance; both of these behaviors are associated with an engaged employee.

## Strategies for Maximizing Engagement

### Lead by Example

To inspire your direct reports to be engaged, it is important for you, as a supervisor or manager, to be engaged. Modeling the behavior you want your direct reports to exhibit can be a very effective strategy. Here are some tips for how to increase your own engagement. Understand your best strengths and commit to pursuing work that makes the best use of them. If there are aspects of the job that you are struggling with, such as leadership or communicating with your direct reports, take advantage of learning opportunities available through your organization. Your direct reports will notice that you are trying to be better, which will inspire them to be better. Take control of situations that need to be changed. Maintain a work-life balance by managing your energy and stress levels. Your direct reports will notice your stress and that stress will spread to them.

### Techniques

- Capitalize on your strengths. For example, consult your training office about assessment tools such as “360” assessments or style indicators.
- Seek learning opportunities. For example, solicit feedback from direct reports and peers in addition to feedback from managers, seek out mentoring or support for your peers, or attend agency sponsored learning events and encourage staff to attend.
- Take control of situations. For example, see the need and approach your manager with solutions.
- Maintain work-life balance. For example, take advantage of your organization’s work-life programs and resources, such as telework, flexible schedules, Employee Assistance Program, childcare or elder care subsidies, Parent Support Group, smoking cessation programs, and gym membership discounts. Respect your employees’ personal time (for example, refrain from sending emails late at night or on weekend).

### Leverage Emotional Intelligence

Employees harbor many expectations that are important to them, such as having a manager or supervisor who cares about them as people, receiving recognition for good work, having a shared vision, having adequate resources to be successful, having defined and clear expectations, being kept informed, and feeling that their input is valued. Delivering on employee expectations requires high emotional intelligence in leaders and consistent demonstration of emotional intelligence competencies that promote engagement, trust, and loyalty. Developing the components of emotional intelligence in yourself helps you improve your employees' engagement. Review each component to learn how to enhance your emotional intelligence.

## Self-awareness

The ability to be aware of one's thoughts and feelings and to articulate them

Tips for improvement:

- Be aware of how your actions impact your employees' engagement.
- Be open (self-disclosure).
- Take time to self-reflect and take corrective actions where necessary.
- Work with a coach/mentor to help you address areas of weakness.
- Be intensely curious.
- Ask for feedback.

## Self-management

The ability to control impulses and channel heightened emotions when dealing with difficult situations

Tips for improvement:

- Recognize emotional triggers.
- Understand where your emotions are coming from and why.
- If you feel you are in an emotionally charged situation, take a 20 minute break (or more) to compose yourself.
- Verbalize how you feel and make requests of others.

## Empathy

Caring about what others are going through and being able to imagine what it must be like in their shoes

Tips for improvement:

- Understand without necessarily agreeing with another's position.
- Understand your employees' emotions, needs and concerns and how these could be affecting engagement.
- Demonstrate empathy by:
  - Listening without interruption
  - Asking thoughtful questions
  - Being curious and interested in their story
  - Validating what you are hearing
  - Suspending judgment
  - Showing compassion

## Relationship Management

Communicating effectively and encouraging diverse perspectives

Tips for improvement:

- Develop relationships with your direct reports to help you recognize signs of decreased engagement.
- Diffuse conflict and interpersonal tensions.
- Be a positive influence.

- Inspire and develop others.
- Deliver difficult messages without leaving people feeling damaged.

### Foster Job Autonomy

Job autonomy is the amount of control, choice, and discretion that employees feel they have in how their work is accomplished. Employees with more autonomy feel a greater sense of responsibility in their work. Foster job autonomy in your employees whenever you can. Use a competency-based employee management approach that ensures new hires have the skills and abilities to do the job and that opportunities exist for skill development. Match tasks to employees with the appropriate qualifications or interest, or to employees who will benefit developmentally from the new assignment. Encourage employees to take ownership of their work by trusting them with appropriate decision-making authority and holding them accountable. Provide challenging work assignments that provide employees with opportunities to learn, grow, and make significant contributions. Give employees some control in determining how their work is performed. Finally, create an environment that recognizes employees for innovation and involves them in finding solutions to problems.

### Techniques

- Ensure new hires have the requisite skills.
- Be thoughtful about matching tasks to employees.
- Increase employee participation in decision making. For example, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) management solicits employee input on work processes through a number of means including focus groups, team recommendations, and employee surveys.
- Provide challenging work assignments.
- Involve employees in determining how their work is performed. For example, give employees the opportunity to select work, or ensure that Individual Development Plans (IDPs) are not rigid; employees should know that an IDP is a living document that can be changed as needed.
- Create an environment that promotes creativity and innovation. For example, respect the diversity of your employees' opinions. Create a space for collaboration and brainstorming. Establish a review process for innovative ideas (for example, a suggestion box or a generic email account where suggestions are sent). Encourage employees to nominate coworkers for recognitions. Establish a public space to display photos and details of employees who have achieved something truly special. Ask senior leaders to write personal notes to employees who deserve recognition.

### Align Performance Expectations with Agency Mission

To improve engagement, ensure that your direct reports understand how their jobs apply and contribute to the agency's mission. The 2009 MSPB survey results reported that this was true for 78% of fully engaged employees. Establishing a clear line of sight between the employee's role and the larger organization's mission and success helps employees find more meaning in their work. Some techniques include modeling the values of your agency and making the agency's values and mission visible.

### Techniques

- Live and work by your agency's values. For example, show accountability by being willing to accept responsibility for your actions. Show integrity by matching your behavior to the principles

advocated by the organizations. Treat employees fairly and consistently. Ensure that performance objectives are tied to the mission so that employees see their contributions.

- Make the agency's values and mission visible. For example, post them in highly visible places. Reinforce them by incorporating them into monthly staff meetings. Ask your direct reports what the agency's values mean to them; use their responses to relate the values and mission to the work they do. Communicate to employees that the agency is accomplishing its mission. Share your executive's performance plan with your employees.
  - The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) uses its social media sites to help employees connect to the agency's work and its impact on the country and society.

## Enhance Communication

Communication is one of the biggest keys to establishing and maintaining employees' relationships with their supervisors and their feelings of connection to the organization. There are several communication techniques you should consider that are important to increasing engagement. When you are hiring employees, ensure a good job fit by clearly communicating what will be expected of them on the job. Share happenings in the organization with your direct reports. They want to know what is going on and how their jobs might be affected. Sharing this information will build trust. Provide ongoing formal and informal feedback about performance in the context of performance management. Use the virtual work environment to promote a culture of feedback through email, social media, online videos, and events. Finally, seek out opportunities to improve your communication and coaching skills to more effectively interact with your direct reports and help with their development.

## Techniques

- Ensure potential employees understand job expectations. For example, have current employees participate in candidate interviews to explain what it is like to work in the organizations and to develop a rapport with the candidates. This will help both parties determine whether there is an appropriate fit. Make sure to clearly define all job expectations.
- Share the organization's status. For example, hold meeting with your direct reports soon after management meetings; if they do not hear it from you, they will hear it through other sources.
- Provide ongoing performance feedback. For example, improve the experience of your employees' progress review. Create performance goals that are clear, accountable, measureable, and focused. Commit to helping your direct reports fulfill actions and goals on IDPs. Make sure your direct reports have the resources to complete their goals. Provide actionable feedback. Hold employees accountable to their performance goals to demonstrate the importance of their work and that you are interested in helping them succeed. Talk with employees to identify learning and development needs and ensure training is provided.
- Promote sharing of feedback and ideas through the virtual work environment. For example, Use an online collaboration/crowdsourcing approach to enhance two-way communication and promote knowledge management.
  - The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and a number of other agencies use online platforms to get ideas from employees on how to improve the workplace and have processes in place to review those ideas and keep employees informed of actions being taken.
  - At the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), senior leaders identify specific problems which are then sent out to the employee community as a challenge.



Employees whose ideas are accepted receive a certificate and a Challenge coin in recognition of their effort.

- Improve your communication skills.

### Create a Positive Work Environment

Creating a supportive work environment is another effective method for maximizing employee engagement. Let's discuss some techniques you can try. Make sure that employees feel valued. You may wish to review Getting Onboard, a Model for Integrating and Engaging New Employees, located in the course Resources. Mentoring can help assimilate new employees, allowing them to discover their personal fit within the organization and career development opportunities. Strong relationships with your direct reports can lead to increased trust, better communication, and an enhanced understanding of your direct reports' needs. Strive to add some fun to your workplace, through team-building events or activities. Finally, encourage employees to take advantage of flexible work arrangements and work-life policies. A simple way to do this is to use these policies yourself. Seeing you take advantage of these opportunities to improve your work-life balance will assure them that it is acceptable.

### Techniques

- Demonstrate employees are valued. For example, invest in a strategic onboarding program that begins before the employee arrives and extends for several months after. Ensure meaningful work is available. Introduce each new employee to coworkers and chains of command. Praise your direct reports when deserved.
- Seek out mentors for your employees, if they are interested.
- Build relationships with your employees. For example, drop by employee meetings; ask questions about the discussion and offer your insights. Hold listening sessions with employees regularly. After they have shared with you, it is important that you respect this by telling them how you will use the information to change or improve your own performance. Walk the halls; make time every week to talk with each of your employees informally – greet them and ask how things are going.
- Make work fun. For example, create a “Morale Group” which plans events to motivate staff and boost morale. Host a monthly birthday celebration for employees with a birthday that month. Organize team-building activities such as bowling.
- Reinforce flexible work arrangement and work-life policies.

### Use the Human Capital Framework

It's important to remember that employee engagement is one piece of strategic human capital management. The five systems that comprise strategic Federal human capital management are outlined in the Human Capital Framework: Strategic Alignment, Leadership and Knowledge Management, Results-Oriented Performance Culture, Talent Management, and Accountability. These systems are interrelated to serve a common purpose of producing a world-class and engaged workforce. Access the Human Capital Management page on the Office of Personnel Management website to learn more about the Human Capital Framework. The Reference Materials link provides a variety of resources on the human capital systems to assist supervisors and managers in achieving their desired outcomes, including increasing employee engagement. You can use these resources to help you implement engagement strategies. For example, the Talent Management tab includes a file entitled “Incentives and Employee

Recognition” that describes the policies related to the topic and contains links to websites with additional information.

## Knowledge Check

Read the question provided. Select all that apply.

How can you support your agency’s initiatives to increase employee engagement?

- A. Encourage your direct reports to use work-life balance policies.
- B. Discuss, with your direct reports, agency initiatives with which you disagree.
- C. Encourage employees to take advantage of training and professional development opportunities.
- D. Identify employees that are disengaged and encourage them to leave the agency.
- E. Ensure your direct reports are knowledgeable about their role in supporting the agency’s mission.

Answer: The correct answer is A, C, and E. These strategies increase employee engagement and simultaneously support your agency’s initiatives. Encouraging employees to use work-life balance policies engages your direct reports by showing them that they are valued. Providing training and professional development opportunities engages your direct reports by allowing them to grow and develop. Educating your direct reports about their role in the agency’s mission engages them by helping them to find meaning in their work.

## Learning Activity

### Directions

Read the following scenario. You will read through a sequence of possible actions you can take to support your direct report and best enhance his level of engagement.

### Scenario

You have noticed that one of your direct reports has missed several days of work over the past few weeks, which has interfered with his ability complete tasks on time. You ask him what is going on and he tells you that his mother is ill and cannot be left home by herself. He is unable to work on days when there is no one else to stay with her.

What should you do? Select the best option and read through each scenario.

- A. Refer him to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for resources about in-home nursing care. Encouraging your direct reports to use the EAP is a good option, but it is also important to respond in a manner that conveys personal concern and sensitivity to his need to stay home. It is important to convey interest in your direct report’s well-being. How might you convey interest in his well-being?
  - a. Ask questions that convey your concern about his current situation, in addition to providing him the EAP resource.  
Asking questions such as how he is coping with the situation, whether his mother is improving, etc. shows interest and empathy in his situation. This will help open a dialogue about ways you can help him stay engaged with his work while he is dealing

with the current health and care situation of his mother. What are some ways you can conduct this dialogue?

- i. Ask him if he is able to work on the days he has to stay home with his mother, or if the care he has to provide for her prevents him from being able to do any other work during the day.

Clarifying this can help you decide which alternative work schedule would be most appropriate for him to be able to meet his work expectations and also take care of his mother. While this demonstrates you are interested in working with his situation to help him meet performance expectations, you should also consider soliciting his ideas on how to make this happen. Brainstorming work alternatives that allow him flexibility and help him meet performance expectations demonstrates your flexibility, your empathy with his situation, and an openness to hear his creative solutions. Additionally, engaging him in the solution may increase his perceived autonomy, enhance his intrinsic work experience, and increase the likelihood he will take advantage of the new arrangement and be engaged in his work.

- ii. Together, brainstorm work arrangements that would enable him to meet performance expectations as well as his mother's health needs.

Brainstorming work alternatives that allow him flexibility and help him meet performance expectations demonstrates your flexibility, your empathy with his situation, and an openness to hear his creative solutions. Additionally, engaging him in the solution may increase his perceived autonomy, enhance his intrinsic work experience, and increase the likelihood he will take advantage of the new arrangement and be engaged in his work.

- b. Together, brainstorm work arrangements that would enable him to meet performance expectations as well as his mother's health needs.

Brainstorming work alternatives that allow him flexibility and help him meet performance expectations demonstrates your flexibility, your empathy with his situation, and an openness to hear his creative solutions. Additionally, engaging him in the solution may increase his perceived autonomy, enhance his intrinsic work experience, and increase the likelihood he will take advantage of the new arrangement and be engaged in his work. What else can you do?

- i. Tell him you are there if he ever wants to talk about his situation with his mother.

Putting the ball in his court to come talk to you may make him uncomfortable and probably less likely to initiate a conversation about the stress he might be feeling with balancing work and taking care of his mother. As a manager, you should take the initiative to open up the conversation with him and ask questions about how he is doing and how he feels he is handling it. However, you still need to take the initiative to discuss his work performance and ways to remedy the situation.

- ii. Consider scheduling weekly meetings with him to ensure performance requirements are being met.

While you may think this demonstrates being flexible and showing concern for

his workload, he may perceive it as micromanaging or that you think he is no longer competent to perform the work at a certain level. The need to feel competent is a basic need that, if not met, may lead him to feel disengaged. It would be more effective to provide him with the necessary resources so he can continue to perform his current work from home and maintain a flexible schedule as needed.

- B. Offer to provide him with the necessary resources so he can work from home and maintain a flexible schedule as needed.

This is a good response to promote employee engagement if he can indeed perform his duties remotely. You are encouraging him to use work-life policies. You are being sensitive to the situation but also providing a good solution so that he can complete his tasks on time. What else can you do?

- a. Refer him to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for resources about in-home nursing care.

In addition to providing him the work resources to work from home, providing him resources that can help him deal with his mother's care shows you care about what he is going through and are willing to go the extra mile to help him with non-work issues – or at least give him resources. This demonstrates empathy with his personal situation, as well as an interest in improving his work-life balance, all of which promote employee engagement. What else can you do?

- i. Tell him you are there if he ever wants to talk about his situation with his mother.

Putting the ball in his court to come talk to you may make him uncomfortable and probably less likely to initiate a conversation about the stress he might be feeling with balancing work and taking care of his mother. As a manager, you should take the initiative to open up the conversation with him and ask questions about how he is doing and how he feels he is handling it. However, you still need to take the initiative to discuss his work performance and ways to remedy the situation.

- ii. Consider reassigning some of his current work or having him take on lower-level tasks for a short duration.

While you may think this demonstrates being flexible and showing concern for his workload, he may perceive it as a demotion or that you think he is no longer competent to perform the work at a certain level. The need to feel competent is a basic need that, if not met, may lead him to feel disengaged. It would be more effective to provide him with the necessary resources so he can continue to perform his current work from home and maintain a flexible schedule as needed.

- b. Tell him you are there if he ever wants to talk about his situation with his mother.

Putting the ball in his court to come talk to you may make him uncomfortable and probably less likely to initiate a conversation about the stress he might be feeling with balancing work and taking care of his mother. As a manager, you should take the initiative to open up the conversation with him and ask questions about how he is doing

and how he feels he is handling it. However, you still need to take the initiative to discuss his work performance and ways to remedy the situation. What else can you do?

- i. Ask him if he is able to work on the days he has to stay home with his mother, or if the care he has to provide for her prevents him from being able to do any other work during the day.

Clarifying this can help you decide which alternative work schedule would be most appropriate for him to be able to meet his work expectations and also take care of his mother. However, while this demonstrates you are interested in working with his situation to help him meet performance expectations, it might also be helpful to provide him with resources to deal with the stress of taking care of his mother, such as referring him to your company's EAP resource about in-home nursing care. This shows that you know he is in a stressful situation and that you care about his well-being.

- ii. Ask questions that convey your concern about his current situation, in addition to providing him the EAP resource.

Asking questions such as how he is coping with the situation, whether his mother is improving, etc. shows interest and empathy in his situation. This will help open a dialogue about ways you can help him stay engaged with his work while he is dealing with the current health and care situation of his mother.

- C. Discuss your performance expectations with him and determine whether you need to cut his work load if he is not going to be able to meet his work obligations.

While it is important to communicate with your direct reports about performance expectations, it is also important to address that causes of the problem or offer alternatives to help them deal with the situation. What else can you do to help him balance his needs to meet performance expectations and take care of his mother?

- a. Show interest and ask questions that convey your concern about his current situation, in addition to referring him to your company's EAP resource about in-home nursing care. Asking questions such as how he is coping with the situation, whether his mother is improving, etc. shows interest and empathy in his situation. This will help open a dialogue about ways you can help him stay engaged with his work while he is dealing with the current health and care situation of his mother. It also helps demonstrate your emotional intelligence to deal with the situation, as well as your knowledge about appropriate company resources of which he can take advantage. What else can you do to help him stay connected with work while taking care of his mother?

- i. Offer to provide him with the necessary resources so he can work from home and maintain a flexible schedule as needed.

This is a good response to promote employee engagement if he can indeed perform his duties remotely. You are encouraging him to use work-life policies. You are being sensitive to the situation but also providing a good solution so that he can complete his tasks on time.

- ii. Consider reassigning some of his current work or having him take on lower-level tasks for a short duration.

While you may think this demonstrates being flexible and showing concern for his workload, he may perceive it as a demotion or that you think he is no longer

competent to perform the work at a certain level. The need to feel competent is a basic need that, if not met, may lead him to feel disengaged. It would be more effective to provide him with the necessary resources so he can continue to perform his current work from home and maintain a flexible schedule as needed.

- b. Ask him if he is able to work on the days he has to stay home with his mother, or if the care he has to provide for her prevents him from being able to do any other work during the day.

Clarifying this can help you decide which alternative work schedule would be most appropriate for him to be able to meet his work expectations and also take care of his mother. This demonstrates you are interested in working with his situation to help him meet performance expectations. However, it does not show that you know he is in a stressful situation and that you care about his well-being. What else can you do to help him balance his needs to meet performance expectations and take care of his mother?

- i. Refer him to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for resources about in-home nursing care.

Providing him resources that can help him deal with his mother's care shows you care about what he is going through and are willing to go the extra mile to help him with non-work issues – or at least give him resources. This demonstrates empathy with his personal situation, as well as an interest in improving his work-life balance, all of which promote employee engagement. What else can you do?

- ii. Brainstorm work arrangements together that would enable him to meet performance expectations as well as his mother's healthcare needs.

Brainstorming work alternatives that allow him flexibility and help him meet performance expectations demonstrates your flexibility, your empathy with his situation, and an openness to hear his creative solutions. Additionally, engaging him in the solution may increase his perceived autonomy, enhance his intrinsic work experience, and increase the likelihood he will take advantage of the new arrangement and be engaged in his work.

- D. Ask him to let you know when he will have to miss work in advance and to keep you updated on how his mother is improving.

You are maintaining communication on a matter that is important to your direct report, but it is also important to address how he can perform his job under the current circumstances. What else can you do to clarify your expectations and keep the lines of communication open?

- a. Brainstorm work arrangements together that would enable him to meet performance expectations as well as his mother's healthcare needs.

Brainstorming work alternatives that allow him flexibility and help him meet performance expectations demonstrates your flexibility, your empathy with his situation, and an openness to hear his creative solutions. Additionally, engaging him in the solution may increase his perceived autonomy, enhance his intrinsic work experience, and increase the likelihood he will take advantage of the new arrangement and be engaged in his work. What else can you do to keep him connected to work while taking care of his mother's needs?

- i. Refer him to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for resources about in-home nursing care.

Encouraging your direct reports to use the EAP is a good option, but it is also important to respond in a manner that conveys personal concern and sensitivity to his need to stay home. It is important to convey interest in your direct report's well-being.

- ii. Show interest and ask questions that convey your concern about his current situation, in addition to referring him to your company's EAP resource about in-home nursing care.

Asking questions such as how he is coping with the situation, whether his mother is improving, etc. shows interest and empathy in his situation. This will help open a dialogue about ways you can help him stay engaged with his work while he is dealing with the current health and care situation of his mother. It also helps demonstrate your emotional intelligence to deal with the situation, as well as your knowledge about appropriate company resources of which he can take advantage.

- b. Consider reassigning some of his current work or having him take on lower-level tasks for a short duration.

While you may think this demonstrates being flexible and showing concern for his workload, he may perceive it as a demotion or that you think he is no longer competent to perform the work at a certain level. The need to feel competent is a basic need that, if not met, may lead him to feel disengaged. It would be more effective to provide him with the necessary resources so he can continue to perform his current work from home and maintain a flexible schedule as needed. What other action can you take to keep the employee connected to work?

- i. Tell him you are there if he ever wants to talk about his situation with his mother.

Putting the ball in his court to come talk to you may make him uncomfortable and probably less likely to initiate a conversation about the stress he might be feeling with balancing work and taking care of his mother. As a manager, you should take the initiative to open up the conversation with him and ask questions about how he is doing and how he feels he is handling it. However, you still need to take the initiative to discuss his work performance and ways to remedy the situation.

- ii. Show interest and ask questions that convey your concern about his current situation, in addition to referring him to providing him the EAP resource.

Asking questions such as how he is coping with the situation, whether his mother is improving, etc. shows interest and empathy in his situation. This will help open a dialogue about ways you can help him stay engaged with his work while he is dealing with the current health and care situation of his mother. It also helps demonstrate your emotional intelligence to deal with the situation.

## Conclusion

This concludes the learning activity. During this activity, you were given an opportunity to apply some of the employee engagement strategies you learned about in this course to a real-life situation. These strategies include:

- Utilizing your emotional intelligence
- Fostering job autonomy
- Enhancing communication with direct reports
- Creating a positive work environment

## Resources

- [Engagement Strategy Techniques and Examples](#)
- [MSPB Report: The Power of Federal Employee Engagement](#)
- [Ten Years Of The Best Places To Work In The Federal Government® Rankings](#)
- [Guide for Interpreting and acting on Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results](#)
- [Getting Onboard, a Model for Integrating and Engaging New Employees](#)
- [Executive Excellence and Wellness through Strategic Leadership Course Information](#)
- [Telework Resources](#)
- [References](#)

## Course Conclusion

### Supplemental Resources

There are several supplemental resources to this course. In the course Resources are a variety of helpful information sources including job aids and reports. In particular, there is a job aid titled Engagement Strategy Techniques and Examples. This job aid provides extended details on the strategies presented in this course, as well as an added section on strategies for executives. If you are interested in gaining more hands-on experience for increasing your direct reports' engagement, contact your agency's training department. A supplemental classroom course called Maximizing Employee Engagement may be available.

### Summary

Congratulations! You have completed the Maximizing Employee Engagement course. In the employee engagement overview you learned about the increasingly important concept of employee engagement and its importance to an agency's capability to accomplish its mission and goals. Next you learned about techniques for assessing engagement in your direct reports. You also learned about all the ways you can increase employee engagement. In the learning activity, you put your newfound knowledge to the test and applied the engagement strategies you learned to a real life situation. Finally, in the course conclusion you were presented with supplemental resources for maximizing employee engagement. You may now [print your Certificate of Completion](#).