



Investing in Relationships: Effective tactics to get to know your employees

[Shawn M. Galloway](#)

April 11, 2024

Have you heard the story where the supervisor asks the manager, “What happens if we invest in developing our people and they leave us?” The manager replies, “What happens if we don’t, and they stay?” Are you investing in the most essential foundation for your people — your relationship with them?

A sturdy foundation is essential in construction to ensure the stability and integrity of the entire building. Similarly, when managers take the time to get to know their employees, they establish a solid foundation of trust and lay the groundwork for optimal performance. This foundation becomes the bedrock upon which strong relationships are built, providing a sense of security and support.

Just as a strong foundation enables a building to withstand external pressures, strong relationships with employees create a supportive environment that helps them navigate challenges and perform to the best of their ability. Employees who feel valued and understood are more likely to be motivated, engaged, and willing to go the extra mile.

Like a solid foundation for the rest of the structure, strong relationships with employees also create a platform for growth and development. Managers can provide the necessary support and resources to help employees reach their full potential by understanding their individual needs, preferences, and aspirations.

Similar to how a well-built foundation ensures the longevity of a building, allowing it to withstand the test of time, strong relationships with employees create a lasting bond that transcends the daily tasks and challenges of the workplace. These relationships foster loyalty, commitment, and a sense of belonging, leading to long-term employee satisfaction and retention.

To achieve this, you must learn key aspects about your employees, such as their preferred names, family members' names, or at least who is important to them, interests outside of work, communication preferences, learning styles, and how they like to be recognized for their outstanding performance.

By learning these important details about your employees, you can foster mutual understanding, trust, and collaboration.

Building trust through personal connection

One of the main reasons to get to know your employees on a personal level is to establish trust. You show respect and acknowledge their individuality by learning their preferred name and using it consistently. Additionally, understanding their family members or those who hold importance in their lives outside of work demonstrates that you value their personal well-being. This personal connection builds trust and shows that you care about them as individuals, not just as employees.

Tapping into discretionary effort

Employees who feel valued and understood are more likely to go above and beyond their regular duties. By taking the time to learn your employees' preferred communication styles, you can effectively engage with them in a way that resonates. Some employees may prefer face-to-face conversations, while others may prefer written communication. Adapting your communication style to meet their preferences enhances the connection and encourages open dialogue, leading to increased discretionary effort.

Understanding learning styles

Every employee has a unique learning style, and understanding this can significantly impact their performance. By learning how your employees prefer to learn, whether it's through hands-on experience, visual aids, or written instructions, you can tailor your training and development initiatives to maximize their potential. This customized approach ensures that employees grasp new concepts effectively and shows that you are invested in their growth and development.

Recognizing outstanding performance

Recognition is a powerful tool for motivating employees and boosting morale. However, recognition is most impactful when it aligns with individual preferences. By taking the time to understand how your employees prefer to be recognized for their outstanding performance, whether it's through public praise, private acknowledgment, or tangible rewards, you can tailor your recognition efforts to meet their preferences. This personalized approach reinforces their value and encourages continued high performance.

Achieving optimal performance

You create an environment that fosters strong relationships, trust, and engagement by actively getting to know your employees and tapping into these key aspects of their lives and preferences. When employees feel valued, supported, and understood, they are more likely to give their best, go the extra mile, and consistently deliver outstanding results. Investing in building these relationships directly translates into optimal performance for both individuals and the organization.

Taking the time to get to know your employees on a deeper level is essential for building strong relationships, fostering trust, tapping into their discretionary effort, and ultimately achieving the best performance. Let's explore several effective tactics managers can employ to understand their employees better and strengthen these relationships.

Regular one-on-one meetings: These meetings are valuable for building a deeper connection with each employee. Use this time to discuss their goals, challenges, and interests. By actively listening and engaging in meaningful conversations, you can demonstrate your genuine interest in their well-being and professional growth.

Employee surveys: Conducting employee surveys is an excellent way to gather feedback on work-related topics. Additionally, these surveys can inquire about employees' preferences, needs, and suggestions for improvement. By giving employees a platform to voice their opinions, you show that you value their input and are committed to creating a supportive work environment.

Casual conversations: Taking the time for informal, casual conversations can help you connect with employees on a more personal level. These conversations can occur during coffee breaks, lunches, or quick check-ins. You can build rapport and strengthen your relationships by showing a genuine interest in their lives outside of work.

Team building activities: Organizing team-building activities or outings provides opportunities for employees to interact in a relaxed and social setting. These activities foster a sense of camaraderie and help break down barriers between team members. By participating in these events, you can actively engage with your employees and get to know them in a different context.

Employee profiles: Creating employee profiles or bios that include personal and professional information effectively enhances mutual understanding within the team. By sharing these profiles, you encourage employees to learn about each other's backgrounds and interests. This knowledge can foster empathy and create a more inclusive work environment.

Welcome rituals: Implementing welcome rituals for new employees can help them feel valued and integrated into the team. This could involve introductions during team meetings or a small welcoming event. By making an effort to introduce new employees and facilitate their integration, you set the stage for positive relationships from the start.

Recognition programs: Acknowledging and celebrating personal and professional milestones is crucial to show that you value and recognize individual contributions. Whether it's birthdays, work anniversaries, or achievements, recognizing these milestones demonstrates your appreciation for your employees' efforts and fosters a sense of belonging.

Open door policy: Maintaining an open-door policy is crucial in creating an environment where employees feel comfortable approaching you. Encourage employees to share their concerns and ideas or simply have a chat. By being accessible and approachable, you promote open communication and build trust within the team.

Interest groups: Facilitating or encouraging the formation of interest groups within the workplace can help employees connect over shared hobbies or interests. Whether it's a fitness group, book club, or any other shared interest, these groups provide opportunities for employees to bond outside of their regular work tasks. By supporting these initiatives, you demonstrate your commitment to fostering a sense of community within the workplace.

Training and development discussions: During discussions about career development and training, take the opportunity to understand employees' aspirations, strengths, and areas for growth. By actively engaging in these conversations, you can demonstrate your investment in their professional development and show that you care about their long-term success.

Mentorship programs: Implementing mentorship programs where more experienced employees can guide and support newer team members is an effective way to foster relationship-building. These programs create natural opportunities for employees to connect and learn from one another. You encourage a supportive and collaborative work environment by facilitating these mentorship relationships.

The key to deploying one or many of these tactics is to be genuinely interested in your employees as individuals, actively listen to what they share, and create an environment where they feel comfortable expressing themselves. Building these connections contributes to a positive and collaborative culture and creates an environment where employees feel valued, supported, and motivated to excel. Building strong relationships with employees benefits not only the individuals themselves but also the organization's overall success.

Remember, investing in your employees is an investment in your team's long-term success and growth. Sure, enabling employees to excel and perform at their best might lead them to explore other opportunities, or you can choose not to invest in this important relationship, and they will not only stay but remain at their current levels of performance and happiness at work.

Shawn M. Galloway is CEO of ProAct Safety and an author of several bestselling books. His latest book is *Bridge to Excellence: Building Capacity for Sustainable Performance*. As an award-winning consultant, trusted adviser, leadership coach, and keynote speaker, he has helped hundreds of organizations within every primary industry to improve safety strategy, culture, leadership, and engagement. He also hosts the highly acclaimed weekly podcast series *Safety Culture Excellence®*. For more information, call (936) 273-8700 or email info@ProActSafety.com.