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## FIRM MANAGEMENT

# How to Better Engage Workers in 2019

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Paul McDonald • Jan. 02, 2019



It's no surprise when even the most driven professionals find themselves switching off for a few minutes during the workday for any number of reasons, such as fatigue, frustration or a lack of clarity about an assignment. What might be a surprise, however, is the amount of time employees are mentally checked out while on the clock. A [recent Accountemps survey](#) found professionals spend 26 percent of their workday disengaged.

Obviously, this is less than ideal. Fortunately, you have several options to remedy the situation. Here are five steps you can take to re-engage your staff in the year ahead:

**1. Offer additional perks.** Cool benefits and incentives win employees over and boost motivation. A survey conducted for the [2019 Robert Half Salary Guide for Accounting and Finance Professionals](#) found the perks workers really want focus on work-life balance — options such as flexible schedules, a compressed workweek and telecommuting. Sought-after extras also include [additional vacation days](#), performance-based bonuses and other financial incentives.

Besides the obvious benefits of more money and personal time, perks and bonuses are effective motivators because they're tangible signs of appreciation. By showing you value employees' contributions, you're building loyalty and improving morale.

**2. Provide more interesting work.** Every job has its share of rote or uninspiring tasks, but, you, as a leader in your firm, can relieve monotony by automating repetitive processes. This helps employees reduce their time spent on routine tasks, freeing up time and resources for them to dedicate to higher-value tasks.

In addition to automation, try to vary your staff's assignments to push their abilities and help them learn something new. While you're challenging your team, look for employees who show leadership abilities and ask them to head up committees and task forces.

**3. Cut red tape.** Bureaucracy can hurt — and even eliminate — employee engagement. Imagine how frustrating it would be if much of your time were spent asking and waiting for permission before proceeding to the next step of a project. What is a manager to do?

Although you can't change due diligence or reporting requirements, you can — and should — reduce bureaucracy in other areas. For example, if a worker comes up with a great idea to streamline a process or improve client relations, is it difficult to make it a reality? Or is it easier for the employee to just forget about it rather than having to

jump through multiple hoops? A [workplace that supports innovation](#) and smart risk-taking is typically an environment with high worker engagement — and productivity.

**4. Foster greater team spirit.** Management often looks at metrics like productivity and engagement in terms of individuals: Who's hitting targets and who's not. But the chemistry between team members can be just as important. Strong team spirit means improved collaboration and a family-like atmosphere — the kind of [organizational culture](#) that helps attract and retain accounting talent.

If you have a bonus structure, consider a team approach so employees are working together to meet goals rather than against each other. Also, step up team building with activities like retreats and volunteer days. When employees develop a greater sense of appreciation for their colleagues, they feel more invested in their job.

**5. Improve communication.** You're not a mind reader, and neither are your employees. To discover the causes of their disengagement, check in with them regularly and listen to their concerns. You may find that there are fixable obstacles preventing them from hitting maximum productivity. Some common issues include slow computers, a noisy office environment and inadequate training.

Dialogue is great but only works if your team feels comfortable communicating with you about their productivity — or lack thereof. If you're having trouble getting them to open up, consider using an anonymous online survey or even an old-fashioned suggestion box.

Leadership is about getting the best out of people, which means motivating your staff is a responsibility that ultimately falls to a firm's management. Increase your own engagement with your team, and take action to encourage employees to give it their all — all the time.

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