

50 Top Tools for Employee Engagement



50 Top Tools for Employee Engagement

A complete toolkit for improving
motivation and productivity

Debbie Mitchell



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For my mum and dad
Together they are a shining example
of true commitment to something that matters.
They demonstrate that it's not always easy,
but prove it's definitely worth the effort.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Debbie Mitchell is an organizational development consultant specializing in employee engagement, coaching, talent management, change and human resource (HR) support. She works with businesses both locally and internationally that include consumer electronics, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs) and pharmaceuticals as well as those in the transportation, insurance, not-for-profit and education sectors. Prior to this, Debbie held in-house HR and organizational development (OD) roles for British American Tobacco for 10 years, and has experience of HR roles in retail, public sector and manufacturing.



PREFACE

I've worked as an HR professional for many years. I've worked in a variety of industries and sectors as an in-house personnel manager, HR manager, HR business partner (HRBP) and latterly as a specialist in OD, change management and engagement. Since 2011 I have been working as an independent consultant, facilitator, coach and occasional interim HRBP or OD specialist. My experience has taken me across the public sector, retail, the space business, small manufacturing and FMCG.

My first step in my HR career came thanks to an inspirational boss who recruited me into a small personnel team in the National Health Service (NHS) – my first role out of university – with no substantial experience but a lot of enthusiasm. Early on she inspired me with her own interest in the broader business, not just for traditional personnel activities. She was well respected in the organization; she worked to deliver great service but at the same time contributed to service reviews and trust-wide health-service initiatives as a credible senior leader, not as a token personnel representative contributing solely about the people agenda. She led me to water and encouraged me to drink – within weeks of starting I was getting on with the job. She encouraged and supported me but I was empowered to figure out some of it for myself. She could have left me with interviews and admin – but instead I was covering the full range of (then) personnel services – and then some! Alongside this I was encouraged to work with functional groups and teams on continuous improvement projects – my first attempts with a flipchart and a pen. At the time, we didn't call it facilitation – but it was. And that really was the start of this book.

Over the years, I have facilitated more workshops than I can remember. I have worked with groups for the purposes of team building, problem solving, strategy setting, strategic alignment, business improvement, strategy cascade, innovation, leadership development, project kick-off, project progress reviews, lessons-learnt reviews, group coaching and group mediation. In doing so I have experienced, borrowed, gathered, tweaked and created a range of tools, exercises and activities for various purposes. The portfolio of tools I have been using has grown and evolved over time, and I have found through experience that some can be adapted to use quickly, cost effectively and with good results for employee engagement.

Now operating as a consultant, I work with leadership teams, managers and emerging high-potential talent, and one of the most frequent topics of conversation is about how to engage employees. I have facilitated workshops where I have been told that managers just don't have the time, skill, senior support or resources to do it. This book of tools is intended to bust the myths, to remove all the excuses and to enable managers – and HR professionals – to get on and do something. Simply. Cheaply. Quickly. But effectively.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A heartfelt thank you to Denise Farmer, for an inspirational start to my career.

Thanks go to all those I have had the privilege of working with over the years since then, during my employed career and as a consultant, using these tools, and others, to facilitate fabulous people.

I have worked with some amazing leaders who have inspired me, as well as some demanding leaders who have challenged me, and in difficult situations that have tested me, and in exciting and positive situations that have motivated me. All have helped me to build a skill set, a wide portfolio, a deep set of experiences, and have inspired me to bring together the tools for this book – I appreciate the trust and empowerment I have been given to work with their challenges, and I appreciate having had the opportunity to learn from them, the good, the bad and the ugly!

My thanks go to all those employees who have willingly – and those who have reluctantly – taken part in workshops, training sessions, kick-offs, away-days and team building. Some have made themselves look daft in the name of development, some have been vulnerable, others have been supportive of team members, and some have been strong advocates of their experiences, of their teams and of their organizations. To all those who have been in a meeting room or open-plan space, and given it a good go, I thank you.

To the amazing Vivienne Palmer, whose initial idea for the Pinspiration board was lovingly stolen and adapted for this book.

I appreciate the help offered by Alan Kelly in trying to identify an IP source for dialogue sheets. Alan's website contains some great information and downloadable examples of dialogue sheets: <http://www.allankelly.net/presentations/dialoguesheets.html>.

Finally, to my husband, for never laughing at my dreams, for reading the book as it developed and for still buying it, even though he knows it inside out!

It is not the intention to claim ownership of any of the individual ideas in this book. They are a collection of tools experienced, created, developed and adapted over my career, and I thank all those who have inspired, contributed and participated. I will be pleased to acknowledge the copyright or origination of any material if this is known.



ABOUT THIS BOOK

Who should use this book?

‘In the United Kingdom 17 per cent of employees are engaged, 57 per cent are not engaged and 26 per cent are actively disengaged.’ (Gallup 2011–12)

If this statistic surprises or worries you, or if you are not surprised, but recognize the issues it presents, then you need this book.

It is intended for line managers and HR professionals alike. It is written to provide guidance and support at a detailed level to those who might need it, but to additionally provide hints and tips and methods of evaluation to those who have more experience of using such tools.

Whilst primarily targeted at those in small to medium-sized businesses, there may be ideas and suggestions here that will work equally well in large multinationals. There are only a few tools included here that might be better suited to larger organizations – the majority can be adapted for larger or smaller groups as needed, whether that means putting your whole organization into one room for an activity, or breaking your organization into manageable subgroups. The tools offer guidance on when this might be appropriate.

The principle, however, is that as the reader of this tool kit, and as a manager or supervisor in any function, you could implement some tools to help improve employee engagement among your team. Or function. Or the entire workforce.

The philosophy behind the book

Throughout my career, both in-house and as an external consultant, I have facilitated workshops where I have been told that managers just don’t have time to promote employee engagement. This book of tools is intended to bust the myths, to remove all the excuses, and to enable managers – and HR professionals – to get on with it. Simply. Cheaply. Quickly. But effectively.

Managers raise concerns with me that they don’t know *how* to work on employee engagement. As with many leadership initiatives, it appears to be more complex than it really needs to be. Understanding what it is in very

simple terms will help managers to understand the small things that they can do to positively impact employee engagement – but also to keep an eye out for the things they do that might negatively impact it.

Managers would raise concerns about the level of skill or specialist knowledge required to facilitate sessions, and may postpone activity or defer the implementation of engagement initiatives to their HR department if they have one.

I have often heard managers raise concerns that they ‘don’t have the time’ to get involved in employee engagement activities. My response is that you don’t need to allocate away-days, or long extended meetings – there are things that you can do in short, sharp but effective time buckets that will build employee engagement. Ideas for engagement activities can span from seconds (a meaningful ‘hello’ in the morning) to a full away-day – and everything in between.

And finally, when managers have built their knowledge of what employee engagement is, and how they can work on it, they will remind me that they will never get a budget for any such initiatives. Budgets are constrained to some degree in most businesses, and unless there is a clear return on investment, the extra that managers think they need in order to implement employee engagement initiatives will not be forthcoming. And so I remind them that there are so many things that can be done without significant direct cost. Of course all such activities will take time, and that must not be ignored as a cost to the business, but the cost or budget implications should never be a barrier for good employee engagement.

And so, the concept of the book was born – a guide or tool kit that would enable managers, regardless of seniority or specialist knowledge, to identify tools that can help them to increase the levels of engagement among their teams or their workforce, without recourse to specialist consultants, specialist functions, significant budgets or endless days away. Ideally, it wouldn’t matter what size or type of organization you work in – the tools are industry agnostic, and whether you lead and manage a small business of five or six people, or work within a multinational industry-leading business, you should find tools and tips in this book that are useful to you.

A particular feature of the book is that it provides some rationale for when and why to use each tool, in that it separates into different sections that highlight when to engage. You will note that engagement, in this context, starts prior to employment, and continues up to and maybe even beyond the point of leaving a business – it covers the full employee life cycle and the changes that happen throughout. It also focuses on some of the key moments, or contacts, for business, and identifies how you can use those

opportunities to engage with your teams. However, none of the tools are intended to be fixed to one stage or scenario. Table 0.1 in the Introduction shows how the tools might work in different scenarios or how they might work together to complement each other.

In the coming sections the importance and business impact of good employee engagement will be highlighted. But the overall ethos of this book is to introduce some simple tools that are time and cost effective, and can contribute to delivering engagement among your workforce. There is no one single fix for employee engagement – it is not in any one single tool, but in mixing and matching according to your business needs, culture, size, etc (see Table 0.1 in the Introduction).

I mentioned earlier that these were tools, activities and exercises that I have experienced, borrowed, gathered, tweaked and created. In most cases, my research has not identified a specific person or organization to whom to attribute the development of any of these tools to (there are a few exceptions), but I do want to be transparent that these are not all original ideas – some have been observed, tried, tested and amended, others are adaptations and some are original creations. It is not the intention to claim ownership of any of the individual ideas in this book, and I will be pleased to acknowledge the copyright of any material if this is known.

By bringing these various tools and activities together in one place, by making them accessible to all at work, and by providing some suggestions on evaluation, I hope to enable and inspire managers throughout a variety of organizations to engage employees – simply, cheaply but effectively.

The structure of the tools

The book is organized in sections that highlight the need to – and some approaches to – engage employees at each stage of the employment life cycle, and also to support certain key activities on the business agenda. However this is a guideline – and you should look to use the range of tools as you see fit for your business.

Description

Each tool has a short description that explains in summary what it is and when it could be useful. This is intended to headline the tool for the reader and to provide some context as to how it might be used.

Best for

Each tool comes with recommendations about the audience with whom it is best used – but this too is a guideline. Don't be restricted by the suggestions, though – treat them as recommendations and not rules. You know your people, your teams and your managers so consciously consider, before you go ahead, whether the described activity would resonate with them and have a meaningful impact.

Best when

Each tool also comes with a recommendation about when it might be appropriately used. Again, this should be considered as a guideline not a fixed rule, but considering some of the other things happening in your business at the time will be worthwhile. To get the most from the tools you really need the timing, atmosphere and levels of commitment to be strong.

Resources

Most of these tools can be delivered in-house, by you. You don't always need external support and you should have the information here to help you to prepare, run and evaluate each intervention. For many of the tools, the cost is minimal. In some cases the experience can be enhanced with a small budget, but there are many tools in this book that don't require a financial budget. In some cases, spending some money can add to the quality of materials, or the surroundings of the event, but these are not conditions, rather just enhancements.

Process

The process described should give you a step-by-step guide as to how to utilize the tool. You can, of course, 'tweak' the process to fit your own needs, but stay true to the principle that the overriding purpose for each tool is to engage your employees. Be careful not to make adjustments that limit or remove the opportunities for your employees – even if that is not your intention. Consider any process points from their perspective.

Read the hints and tips before you kick off the process – you might find some useful additions or adaptations to the process.

Hints and tips

The hints and tips are adjustments or additions to the process that you might find useful. They do not fundamentally change the process but there may be ideas and suggestions to simplify, speed up, get more detail, manage different size groups, or suggestions that might require more time or more budget. However, none of these are essential to the running of the tool – don't consider them as barriers. They are only intended as suggestions. The process will run effectively using simply the process as described.

Evaluation

There is little point in utilizing these tools – or any other approaches that you have considered – if you do not pay attention to evaluating the effectiveness of your chosen method. If you don't evaluate or review, how do you know whether you are engaging your people or – in the worst case scenario – finding quite the opposite: that your actions are disengaging them.

To this end you will find some guidelines at the end of each tool on how to evaluate the impact it has had. These evaluations range from a typical happy sheet (did participants enjoy the event – see Table 16.2 at the end of this book) through to a deeper evaluation, assessing the impact of the intervention on your key business metrics, not just your people measures. In some tools we provide some great questions to ask. In others we provide a template for evaluation. And some of the tools are useful in evaluating the effectiveness of other tools, and these are highlighted too.

Taking action based on your evaluation is the important part of the evaluation process. If it worked do it more, and find ways to make it even better. If it didn't work, do it less, or do it differently.

Templates and examples

Some of the tools provide you with templates and samples too, so please feel free to use these if they work in your organization or to adapt them so that they can work for you.

Quick view

If you don't have time to read every tool, just turn to the Quick View table at the end of the book (Table 16.1), which provides a clear and fast way to decide which tool fits your engagement needs.

