

## NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

# MOTIVATION UP, ATTRITION DOWN: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

**Nano Tools for Leaders®** are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes—with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

### THE GOAL

Strengthen the bond between your employees and your organization.

### NANO TOOL

The success of your business depends on many factors, but arguably none matters more than the talent and performance of your workforce. That's because, according to the [Society for Human Resource Management](#), employees have a profound effect on those other factors (think customer satisfaction, company reputation, and overall stakeholder value), both positively or negatively, depending on their level of commitment and connection to your organization.

A renewed focus on engagement—which can significantly affect employee retention, productivity, and loyalty—is especially important in a tight labor market, in which you are competing for talent with rival organizations and the cost associated with onboarding new employees is at an all-time high. Improving engagement can also result in significant saving, as it has at beverage giant Molson Coors, where highly engaged employees were five times less likely than nonengaged employees to have a safety incident and seven times less likely to have a lost-time safety incident. By strengthening employee engagement, the company saved \$1,721,760 in safety costs in one year.

### ACTION STEPS

- 1. Assess key drivers of engagement:** Data from the General Social Survey (an annual project of the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center) suggests that job satisfaction is derived primarily from four factors: learning opportunities and variety, relationships with managers and coworkers, low stress, and extrinsic benefits (including pay and bonuses). Consider how well your organization meets these key drivers and which ones need improving.
- 2. Increase task engagement:** Offer work that is sufficiently challenging (uses a variety of skills); provides opportunities to learn new skills through stretch assignments and work on projects; and balances work demands including size of workload, emotional demands, and work/life conflicts to avoid burnout.
- 3. Create engagement through meaning:** Help employees understand how their particular roles contribute to the organization's overall mission; provide opportunities for secondments to nonprofits and allow them to engage in other corporate social responsibility activities.



- 4. Create opportunities for accomplishment:** Accomplishment is a powerful predictor of job satisfaction. Provide both the means to track progress on tasks and goals (consider using self-monitoring tools such as project-management and productivity-tracking software) and autonomy, which may involve allowing their input into the task, ongoing coaching, and clarity in setting expectations.
- 5. Manage your managers:** Leaders who support and encourage the engagement of others recognize that work relationships must be balanced, with equal or near-equal contributions from each party and clearly communicated expectations on both sides about each party's responsibilities.
- 6. Offer and enforce procedural justice:** Processes must clearly maintain equity and respect for each worker by being consistent and transparent, and by allowing decisions perceived as unfair to be appealed, with affected parties present.

## HOW ORGANIZATIONS USE IT

The U.S. government uses an "Open Opportunities" exchange to allow federal employees to take part in short-term projects in other departments (for a maximum of 20 percent of their time). These opportunities allow projects to benefit from expertise from other parts of the government while helping employees practice new skills and learn new areas of the organization. One participant noted, "I am bored [in my job]. I am currently a senior advisor, and I'd like to position myself in a way that I can do more internal [innovation] consultancy types of work. ... I am utilizing Open Opps to identify developmental opportunities to build my acumen in human-centered design, in assessment, and in change management."

Health care technology company Mendaera attracts workers who share the organization's interest in improving access to and quality of health care. But even with that mission front and center, Mendaera creates a culture in which all employees understand how their work contributes to the mission. They hold celebratory team events, connect on a personal level by sharing photos and videos through Slack, and stop work to share catered lunches together in the office. One employee says, "We recognize that in all functions we have to welcome iteration and not be afraid of changing direction. I think this requires a level of trust in your coworkers and openness about what we understand and what we still need to learn. Here, we've spent entire days at work specifically focused on learning about my coworkers, our communication styles, and how we work as a team."

360Learning, a leading learning-management system provider, shares performance data and promotions with all employees. For example, peers may review the performance record of colleagues who are up for promotions. The high level of transparency not only increases credibility and fairness in the evaluation process but also allows employees to benchmark their progress.

## CONTRIBUTOR TO THIS NANO TOOL

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## ABOUT NANO TOOLS

*Nano Tools for Leaders*® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, director of Custom Programs at Wharton Executive Education. *Nano Tools for Leaders*® is a collaboration between joint sponsors Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management. This collaboration is led by Professors Michael Useem and John Paul MacDuffie.