

ASSOCIATIONS NOW

Advice from certified leadership coach Kathy Zwarick Shanley, Ph.D, ACC, CAE, on **rebuilding team engagement when signs show morale is declining**.

What are some telltale signs that a team is unengaged? Teams may have a low level of communication, both among staff and between staff and leadership. They may lack trust in each other, be unmotivated, and have low levels of emotional intelligence. Often-heard phrases may include “No one appreciates what I do around here,” “Meeting my goals is all that matters to me,” and “Why even bother?” Predictably, this may lead to underperformance in tasks and projects and to staff turnover.

What initial steps should a leader take to build engagement? Leaders who focus on listening and being attentive—rather than directing and talking—are seen as more approachable, which leads to increased buy-in and engagement and more accountability. Leaders still need to provide information and identify resources to support their teams, yet with empowering questions, they will find conversations to be more collaborative. A few of my go-to empowering questions: What is the next step? What is preventing us from moving forward? How will you proceed if...? How could we improve the situation?

Once engagement goes up, what must leaders do to maintain it? It is all about action verbs. Leaders should acknowledge, validate, be forward-thinking, set expectations, inspire, champion, plan, prioritize, and challenge their team’s limiting beliefs that hold them back. The new telltale signs will be of an engaged team whose members are motivated, knowing their leader believes in them and will hold them accountable to greatness.

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