

Why the Fuss Over Employee Engagement?

Interview with NYT Bestselling Author Kevin Kruse

Kevin Kruse is an Inc 500 entrepreneur and Best Place to Work winner. He is a New York Times bestselling author of six books, including [Employee Engagement 2.0](#). His newest company, [LEADx.org](#), offers leadership training and professional development to anyone, at any time, free of charge.

JATHAN JANOVE: Is “employee engagement” simply the latest fad or is there something more to it?

KEVIN KRUSE: I think it’s often misunderstood, but definitely not a fad. I’ve been a student and practitioner of it for about 20 years, and I think engagement is one of the secrets behind so many of my companies. Engagement is when we feel emotionally committed to our employer and it’s mission. When we are engaged, we actually *care*.

JJ: How are American employers doing when it comes to fully engaged work environments?

KK: Terrible! Only about one-third of the workforce is truly engaged at work, and we’ve been stuck at this number for about two decades. This is really a shame as life is too short to be unhappy at work.

JJ: Why should employers care?

KK: There is strong research showing correlation between employee engagement and increases in performance and loyalty; these in turn drive revenue, profits and ultimately shareholder value. To me this is tremendously obvious. A sales person who truly cares about organizational results will sell just as hard on a Friday afternoon as she would on a Monday. An engaged service rep will be just as patient and helpful at 4:59 PM as he would be at 9:00 AM. An engaged factory worker will yank the cord to stop the line every single time a defect is noticed. How can *caring*—employee engagement—not lead to better business results?

JJ: What are the most important things an employer can do to increase employee engagement?

KK: Over 70% of how we feel about work is tied to our manager. The boss is the key. So increases in engagement have to come from the bottom up. Employers must measure engagement, but share those survey results with individual managers, and insist on action planning and insist on minimum results.

JJ: Are there any important “don’ts” employers should avoid?

KK: Don’t hoard the data in the C-Suite, and don’t think you have all the answers.

JJ: What’s the role of the C-Suite in creating fully engaged work environments?

KK: C-Suite leaders should lead by example, and make engagement one of the cornerstones of the organization. If you don’t provide the messaging, the training, the tools, and the follow-up, well, everyone will just focus on

the stuff that is urgent in the short-term.

JJ: What's the role of the HR?

KK: I think HR can be a true champion of engagement, and of course “own” the administration of the engagement programs. But HR is not the answer. Again, if you want to drive engagement, you need to *train* front-line leaders how to lead for engagement.

JJ: Any other tips, advice or suggestions for organization leaders interested in increasing employee engagement?

KK: Research shows that growth, recognition and trust are the top 3 drivers of engagement. We want to be challenged and to learn new things, we want to be appreciated by our boss and peers, and we want to “trust” that the future is bright. On a day-to-day basis, the CEO and other senior leaders can't impact those things very much. But your immediate boss is the filter of everything, and has incredible power—and incredible opportunity—to create a workplace that activates engagement.