How to Create a Sense of Belonging in the Workplace

By Brita Long

Do you remember a time when you started at a new school, moved to a new neighborhood, or joined a new team? At first, you probably felt like you were on the outside looking in. Do you remember when that changed, when you finally felt like you belonged to this new community?

That's an amazing feeling. No longer an outsider—you were now part of something bigger than yourself.

Feeling like we belong is a universal need in our homes and social circles—and creating a sense of belonging at work is no longer just a bonus, but a necessity.

In your company, this means ensuring your employees feel connected to their team.

What Is Belonging?

Belonging is often described as a feeling of connectedness or attachment to a person, place, thing, or group. But what exactly does that mean?

An exact definition of belonging will vary from person to person because it's a personal feeling that we all experience differently. However, to put it simply, belonging is when you feel like you can be your authentic self, no matter how different you may be from the people around you.

This is why it's important to cultivate a sense of belonging in the workplace.

How Belonging Impacts Employee Engagement

Employees who feel they belong in the workplace are more likely to be engaged and satisfied with their jobs. When workers feel like they're part of a community, they're more likely to be motivated and invested in their work.

Furthermore, a sense of belonging can lead to increased productivity and creativity. Employers can reap the many benefits of a happy and healthy workforce by creating an environment where workers feel like they belong.

Finally, a sense of belonging has also been linked to better physical health and overall well-being. Employees who feel they belong are less likely to experience stress and burnout.

When employees feel a sense of belonging in the workplace, companies flourish. One study found the following results of high belonging:

- 56% increase in job performance
- 50% drop in turnover risk
- 75% reduction in sick days

Now that you understand the importance of belonging in the workplace, let's talk about ways to foster a connected and inclusive workplace.

6 Ways To Build Belonging In The Workplace

Not every employee responds to the same efforts at connection and inclusion. That's why it's important to implement multiple ideas to foster belonging in the workplace.

Create Space For Intentional Conversation. When employees get to know each other on a deeper level, they build trust and connection, which leads to better communication and collaboration.

Create opportunities for employees to connect in a meaningful way. During a one-on-one conversation, ask how they're doing as a person, not just as an employee.

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During team meetings, set aside time for everyone to get to know each other. You could even open each team meeting with a different introspective question. Here are a few ideas from our Compass Culture Academy:

- What gets you out of bed in the morning? What is your driving motivation and purpose?

- What keeps you up at night? What are your fears, anxieties, and stressors as it relates to your team and their ability to achieve results?

- What are your biggest priorities this year? How do you need to grow in order to achieve them?

When employees feel they can rely on and trust their colleagues, they're more likely to feel comfortable sharing ideas and working together to find solutions. So if you want to create a sense of belonging in the workplace, encourage employees to socialize with each other outside of work.

Plan Regular Company-Wide Events And Activities. Events and activities during the workday are another great way to encourage employees to socialize and connect. Mix up what kind of events and activities you offer, keeping in mind that not all employees will be able to enjoy everything. Plan some activities for just your immediate team, but also work with leadership to plan events for the entire company. Here are a few ideas:

- Provide lunch for your team, and encourage them to eat together, away from their desks

- Do a strengths finder workshop with your team

- Host company-wide parties for special occasions throughout the year

- Organize volunteer opportunities for employees (and give them paid time off to volunteer)

- Set up employee resource groups (ERGs). Allow employees to meet during work hours

Even with remote employees, you can offer ways for team members to socialize. Set up a monthly trivia contest or book club.

Welcome New Employees With An Effective Onboarding Process. From the moment a new employee walks through the door, it's important to make them feel welcome and comfortable. Start by giving them a tour of the office and introducing them to their colleagues.

Then, ensure they have all the necessary resources to do their job effectively. Lastly, keep an open-door policy so they feel comfortable coming to you with any questions or concerns. By taking these simple steps to onboard new employees, you can help them feel like they belong from day one.

Promote A Culture Of Inclusion And Respect. Promoting a company culture of inclusion and respect can help foster a sense of belonging in the workplace. An inclusive workplace recognizes that different people have different perspectives, and it invites everyone to be themselves. One way to build an inclusive culture is with ERGs, which allow employees to interact with colleagues who have similar backgrounds.

When you have an inclusive workplace, employees feel like they can freely share their ideas. This leads to the next tip!

Give Everyone A Chance To Contribute. Employees want to feel heard. They want to know that their ideas and their feedback matter. You can give employees a chance to contribute in a few different ways.

First, if you're running a meeting, take time to ask everyone for their input. In the meeting invitation, set an agenda, and ask everyone to come ready with ideas, so your team members can prepare. If people are hesitant to start sharing, begin with your own ideas, and ask team members for their thoughts on your ideas. Then open up the conversation again, encouraging everyone to share their ideas.

It's also good to collect employee feedback on a company or team-wide scale. By sending out anonymous employee surveys, you give everyone a chance to be honest and candid with their thoughts about company culture, policy changes, etc.

Give Meaningful Feedback. Employees want to know where they're excelling and how they could do better. Take time to give meaningful feedback to your employees on a regular basis.

In addition, connect your employees' work to the overall impact on the company. When employees realize how much their work truly matters, they feel a sense of belonging at work.

Be mindful to show your appreciation to employees in multiple ways. Here are a few ideas:

- Writing thank-you notes to your team members

- Treating your team to dinner after a big success

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- Offering consistent and genuine gratitude to colleagues for specific work

A culture of appreciation starts with leadership, but it involves employees at all levels of an organization. When employees feel appreciated by both management and co-workers, they feel a sense of belonging at work.

References:
https://insightglobal.com/blog/create-belonging-in-workplace