7 Steps to creating a 'Speak Up' culture in your organisation

A publication by **Work In Confidence**

Helping employees thrive at work

Achieving a successful speaking up culture will reap many rewards, for example, improving employee engagement, fostering innovation, addressing concerns or misconduct, and enhancing overall organisational effectiveness.

Listening is key to helping you build highly engaged teams, ensure a consistently respectful organisation, collect and act on great ideas from staff and spot and remedy any operational problems or challenges.

"Gallup estimates that low engagement costs the global economy US$8 .8 trillion and accounts for 9% of global GDP .

Leadership and management directly influence workplace engagement, and there is much that organizations can do to help their employees thrive at work."

Employee Engagement

THRIVING AT WORK
Engaged

13% 0

QUIET QUITTING
Not engaged

72% +1

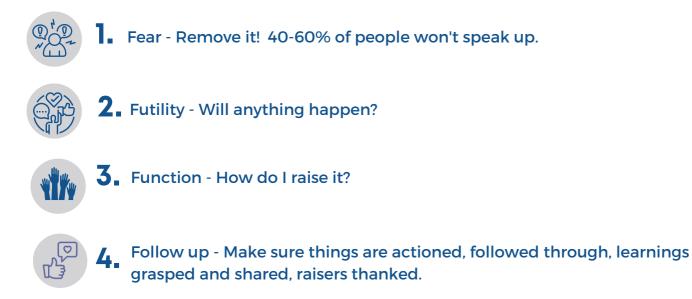**LOUD QUITTING**
Actively disengaged

15% -1

Source: State of the global workplace 2023 survey
Europe regional summary

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The four "F's"

Fear, futility, function and follow up, or the four 'F's" as we refer to them, represent the barriers to why people generally do not speak up in their organisation. To create a trusted, and safe speaking up culture you need to establish how you are going to remove these first.

1. Fear - Remove it! 40-60% of people won't speak up.

2. Futility - Will anything happen?

3. Function - How do I raise it?

4. Follow up - Make sure things are actioned, followed through, learnings grasped and shared, raisers thanked.

Understanding the source of silence in your organisation will help you start to implement change, leading to openness, and a willingness to want to have those crucial conversations.

HELPFUL TIPS

Confidentiality is crucial for employees to feel psychologically safe to raise concerns.

Assurance is required that they will be protected from retaliation for speaking up.

Emphasise your organisation's commitment to protect their identity, safety and well-being.

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7 Steps to creating a speaking up culture

1. Why you need to: Identify the reasons why creating a culture of open communication and feedback is important for your organisation. This includes improving employee engagement, fostering innovation, addressing concerns or misconduct, and enhancing overall organisational health.

2. Make it safe to communicate: Encouraging people to communicate regularly, honestly and openly means earning their trust and demonstrating that it is safe to open up. The best place to start is with yourself. Managers need to model the behaviour they want to see in their teams, communicating openly, and being role models.

Employees who feel safe to talk about their mistakes, ask questions or raise concerns openly, without judgement or retribution, are more likely to do so.

HELPFUL TIPS Clearly identify specific objectives and guidelines for your speaking up process. Clearly articulate what constitutes speaking up, what types of issues or feedback are encouraged, and the expected outcomes. Establish guidelines for respectful communication, confidentiality, and non-retaliation to ensure that employees feel safe and supported when speaking up.

3. Introducing new ways of communicating within your business can also help foster a more open culture. If you feel that your employees are more comfortable raising sensitive issues anonymously, then invest in a platform that allows them to do it.

This can include mechanisms such as suggestion boxes, anonymous reporting systems, dedicated email addresses, online platforms, or regular feedback sessions. Ensure that these channels are easily accessible, well-communicated, and user-friendly to encourage participation.

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Create effective communication channels that enable employees to voice their concerns or provide feedback

If you think a lack of inter-departmental relationships is the problem, organise a social event with team building tasks to encourage communication and co-working. You could even address it in small stages, creating ad-hoc employee teams, bringing smaller groups of people together to look for ways to cut costs, or develop new product offerings.

By providing multiple ways to communicate, each employee is more likely to find a method they feel safe and comfortable with.

4. Encourage and reward open and honest feedback: Honest and open conversation is essential if you want a successful company that can quickly respond to a fast-changing markets while still retaining happy, healthy employees. So give your employees an incentive to speak up.

Depending on the purpose, rewards can vary from a simple thank you or small gift, to giving them more responsibilities, promotions or even cash incentives.

All employees are different, which is why you should offer a variety, and tailor them to the individual employee to recognise and appreciate their efforts.

5. Train and Educate Employees: To build a successful speaking up process, provide comprehensive training and education to all employees. Offer workshops, webinars, and online resources which address the importance of speaking up, ways to effectively communicate concerns, and how the process works.

Train managers and supervisors on active listening, responding appropriately, and handling reported issues in a fair and unbiased manner.

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6. Build team communication: Confidentiality is crucial for employees to feel comfortable speaking up. Ensure you embed strict protocols to protect the identity of individuals who report concerns or provide feedback.

Communicate these policies clearly and assure employees that they will be protected from retaliation for speaking up, emphasising the organisation's commitment to employee safety and well-being.

HELPFUL TIPS Consider grouping employees by project instead of department, this helps to create a team mentality among employees and minimises the 'us v's them' mindset.

7. Regularly measure and improve your speaking up process: Building a speaking up process is an ongoing effort. Continuously evaluate the effectiveness and make necessary improvements based on feedback and outcomes.

Encourage employees to provide suggestions often for improvement and monitor the impact of the process on the overall organisational culture.

Regularly communicate the progress made and highlight success stories to reinforce the value of speaking up.

By following these seven steps, you can lay the foundation for a robust speaking up process in your organisation, fostering a culture of open communication, trust, and continuous improvement.

Designate a responsible team or individual to handle the process professionally and impartially.

Good example in the NHS are Freedom to Speak Up Guardians

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Building an effective organisational culture is the key to engaging and retaining your people. In fact, it really all boils down to some very simple concepts:

- Treat your employees as individuals, rather than a collective.

- Demonstrate your strong company culture, knitted together by great recruitment and education, genuine rewards and open communication, creates a community of people all pulling in the same direction – your direction, and ensuring your business is the place to be for everyone you're trying to sell to.

Don't get caught out by common engagement misconceptions. Get it right and the productivity boost will far outweigh any money you spend on it. For a deeper dive into how to build a successful speaking up process - download our e-book

How WorkInConfidence can help

Listen, Learn and Act
Intelligent employee engagement for organisations of all sizes.

- ANONYMOUS SPEAK UP
- EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEYS
- DISCUSSION BOARDS
- HR CASE MANAGEMENT REPORTING

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