

# Here's the Real Reason Your Employees Are Checked Out – And the Missing Link That Could Fix It

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Only 21% of employees are engaged at work, according to a global Gallup study. That means most people are physically present but emotionally checked out, simply going through the motions.

It's easy to blame burnout or post-pandemic fatigue. But a big part of the problem lies in how organizations communicate – how they welcome new hires, train employees, run meetings and celebrate success (or fail to).

Think about it:

- We create lengthy culture decks without explaining *why* those values matter.
- We overwhelm new hires with info dumps labeled as “training.”
- We run meetings on autopilot.
- We throw around buzzwords like “empowerment” and “alignment” without making people feel truly seen or connected.

And then we wonder why engagement is so low.

The truth? Engagement starts with connection – and connection starts with better communication.

That's where storytelling comes in.

Storytelling isn't just for marketing or TED Talks. It's one of the most powerful ways to build trust, share values and spark genuine human connection. If you're not weaving a story throughout the employee journey, you're missing one of your strongest levers for engagement.

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## Where storytelling makes a difference

### 1. Recruiting: Share the story, not just the specs

Recruiting shouldn't feel like filling out a resume checklist. Instead of leading with pay and perks, lead with *why* your company exists. What problem are you solving? What inspired you to start? When candidates hear authentic stories – especially from founders or early team members – they don't just see a job. They see a mission they want to join.

### 2. Onboarding: Make it stick through a story

Most onboarding feels like drinking from a firehose – policies, procedures, manuals – that quickly get forgotten. But stories are up to 22 times more memorable than facts alone, according to research. Wrap your onboarding content in stories: how your product changed a customer's life, challenges that shaped your culture, lessons learned along the way. Think of onboarding as the opening chapter in an employee's personal work story – make it compelling so they want to keep reading.

### 3. Engagement: Keep the story going

New hires start excited, but that enthusiasm often fades when storytelling stops after onboarding. Engagement isn't a one-time event; it's a rhythm. Make storytelling part of your team

culture. In meetings, invite people to share wins, challenges, or moments they felt connected to their work. Sharing stories builds empathy, energy, and belonging – even over Zoom.

#### **4. Recognition: Celebrate with heart**

“Great job” is nice, but “Great job, and here’s why it mattered” is powerful. Recognition tied to stories shows the whole team what behaviors and values are truly important to the company. It shows what “great” looks like, making appreciation tangible and meaningful. For example: “James stayed late to fix a customer issue, followed up the next day and turned frustration into loyalty. That’s living our value of going the extra mile.”

**Related:** Are You Recognizing Your Employees? If Not, They’re Twice as Likely to Quit

## **Engagement is built one story at a time**

Humans are wired for story. It’s how we understand the world, remember lessons and connect with each other.

If only 21% of employees are engaged, maybe it’s time to stop relying solely on policies, programs and PowerPoints – and start speaking to the human side of people.

Storytelling isn’t fluff or extra. It’s a strategic communication tool that transforms how employees relate to their work, their teammates and your mission.

So whether you’re hiring, training, managing or recognizing – start with a story.

Your people will thank you for it.

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