



**WHAT DO YOUR
EMPLOYEES WANT,
THINK, AND FEEL
ABOUT WORKING
WITH YOU?**

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Introduction

What do top-performing companies such as Facebook, Google and Apple all have in common? The answer is: [a strong investment in employee experience \(EX\)](#).

EX goes a lot deeper than perks and flexible working hours – it's made up of every interaction an employee has with an organisation, from the first communication during recruitment through to the day-to-day of their employment and beyond.

Unfortunately, employees of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are more likely to be unhappy at work than employees at larger organisations, potentially decreasing productivity and sowing the seeds of discontent among other team members according to the State of Work report by Employsure and Roy Morgan.

To help businesses create a positive EX and stay competitive in the “war on talent”, this ebook explores the five most common issues affecting employees in the workplace and how to fix them.

Chapter 1: Do your employees like, trust and respect you?

Trust is the foundation of any relationship, and always a two-way street. This chapter explores the importance of building mutual respect among your employees and how to tell if you're working in a high-trust environment.

Trust and respect are hugely important to company culture and job satisfaction, but they don't just come with the territory of being in charge. In fact, the State of Work report reveals one in 10 employees don't respect their boss, and one in four don't or aren't sure if they can trust them.

As a boss, it's up to you to lay the foundations for a high-trust workplace and set a standard for others to follow by operating and interacting with integrity, respect and openness – even when nobody's looking.

Five signs your employees trust you

According to Jonathan Wilson, Senior Employment Relations Adviser from Employsure, these are the five common signs you're working in a high-trust environment:

1. **People say no to you.** People who trust you will offer respectful disagreement, engage in discussion and, ultimately, rally behind decisions – even when they disagree.
2. **You use high-trust language.** Does your workplace say “we” instead of “I” or “you” when talking about successes or failures? Do you generally choose words such as “team members” or “teammates” over “employees” or “co-workers”, and talk about “leaders” more than “managers”?
3. **Information is open and easy to find.** Unless it's personal data or the salary specifics of other team members, transparency demonstrates trust in your people, and inspires trust in you.
4. **It's easy to give and receive feedback any time.** Professional development and personal growth thrive on feedback throughout the year, not just at annual review time. When trust is high, you'll notice a steady flow of positive feedback and respectful-but-challenging questions coming your way and being given informally among teammates.
5. **It's easy to connect with you.** In companies with high-trust cultures, top brass typically have open-door policies, so anyone in the company can schedule a few minutes to talk about product direction, career development, internal operations, and so on.

Keep your door open

The [State of Work report](#) found employees who have been with their employer longer than five years have the least amount of trust in their boss, and that full-timers are more distrustful than part-timers, casuals or contractors.

To uncover any issues in your workplace and improve EX, create an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their perspectives. Listening to your team and taking their observations on board will show your employees you respect their opinions, paving the way for more trusting relationships.

“Create an open-door policy where staff can communicate with you about their concerns without any fear of judgement or retribution,” Jonathan Wilson says. “Be proactive to involve yourself in understanding the issues that led up to the loss of trust between you and your team.”

Creating a high-trust workplace

- Listen to your team;
- Make it easy to connect to you;
- Use inclusive language; and
- A little transparency goes a long way.





Chapter 2: Do your employees want more money; and do they deserve it?

Money matters can cause a lot of tension, particularly if employees who are already receiving a fair remuneration package want more money. This chapter discusses the benefits of clearing the air through transparent pay structures and regular pay reviews.

It's important your employees feel they are being paid fairly. For one thing, adequate remuneration is a good motivator, with the State of Work report revealing almost half (45.3 per cent) of employees would work harder if they were paid more.

Unfortunately, one in four (24.6 per cent) SME employees believe they are being paid unfairly – but since more than 70 per cent of employees aren't comfortable or sure how to ask for a pay rise, chances are they may be stewing in silence.

Millennials seem particularly reluctant to bring up the subject of money. A significant 82 per cent don't feel comfortable or aren't sure how to ask for more, although 60 per cent say they would work harder if they got it.

Let's talk money

Through transparent pay structures and regular salary reviews, employers can encourage their employees to share their thoughts and feelings around remuneration and fair pay.

As well as clearing the air, these discussions will give you a chance to manage your employees' long-term salary expectations provide some context to those who may be overestimating their earning potential.

"Often an employee does not know what they are worth, and they may already be receiving a wage above the industry average," says Jessica Lestrage, Senior Employment Relations Adviser, "so before entering into negotiations make sure you understand what the standard for the employee's role is in terms of pay, and that you compare the position against a relevant Award rates and [pay guide](#)."

"By treating it seriously, being transparent and balancing the needs of the business, bosses can ensure a positive pay-negotiation process."

The art of compromise

Interestingly, the State of Work report found that SME employees are more comfortable asking for pay increases than employees in larger organisations, even though small to medium businesses are generally less likely to be able to afford them.

Again, this is where encouraging those open discussions about money can help improve EX in your workplace, as you may be able to negotiate some non-financial ways to help team members feel more valued.

“Often an employee asks for more money because they feel they are worth it or feel they have not been recognised for their hard work,” says Jessica. “If the company is not willing or able to fork out more cash, then offering the employee perks could be a better option. These could include allowing the employee more flexible working hours, training or a new position where they feel their skills can be better developed. Keep these alternatives on the table during negotiations.”

Some other ways to reward employees:

- Flexible working hours;
- Training and development opportunities;
- A new job title; and
- Extra time off.

Chapter 3: Do your employees know what you expect, and will they go the extra mile?

Do your employees know what is expected of them at work? This chapter explains how you can boost job satisfaction and productivity by giving your team a little more direction.

Happier employees are [more productive employees](#), and studies show autonomy is the number one contributor to happiness.

But while autonomy is important, Brendon Rigger, Senior Employment Relations Adviser, stresses the need for employers to establish structured expectations as well – that is, if you don’t want your team spending significant amounts of time trying to figure out what it is they’re supposed to be doing.

“Everyone hates not knowing what to do,” says Brendon. “An employee is more likely to be productive when they understand what exactly is expected from them and they are given the training to perform such a task. Training gives confidence and confidence leads to employees that are productive.”

An autonomy framework

The key to boosting productivity in the workplace is to implement structures and processes that are flexible enough to allow room for autonomy while also reinforcing your expectations as an employer.



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“If people feel like they must be doing their work in a particular way, have to wear certain things in the office, and can’t be themselves, they are going to be less happy and productive,” Brendon says.

“Having honest conversations about the type of work they want to do, encouraging employees to choose a goal or idea and run with it, and letting them revolve their work around the lifestyle they want can create momentum in the office – encouraging employees to work harder on what they enjoy most.”

Do your employees feel valued?

People have a fundamental human need to feel appreciated, yet 16.4 per cent of SME employees don’t feel recognised for the effort they put in at work. Overall, one in five employees feels unappreciated at work, and more than half are dissatisfied with the level of appreciation shown.

Feeling valued increases job satisfaction and productivity, as employees will be more motivated to keep up or improve their good work. It doesn’t have to be in the form of expensive bonuses or even cost anything – the secret to unlocking more from your employees could be as simple as saying ‘great job’ or sending them an email acknowledging their efforts in the workplace.

In fact, the State of Work report also found half (50.3 per cent) of full-time employees would work harder if they received more recognition. About one in 10 (9.3 per cent) employees never receive feedback from their boss on how to improve at work.

The productivity checklist

To help accelerate learning and productivity, Brendon suggests employers check in with their team and challenge them to ask questions such as:

- Why am I working on this particular task or project?
- What else can/should I be working on?
- Is what I’m doing the best use of my time right now?
- Is there a way to do this more efficiently?





Chapter 4: What lines can't be crossed with your employees?

As the #MeToo and #TimesUp campaigns draw attention to unwanted and inappropriate behaviour, employers need to be extremely careful in regards to their workplace conduct. This chapter explores employee relations in the social media era and what to do if things take a wrong turn.

The line between friendliness and professionalism can be a fine one, but as a boss it's your responsibility to set a standard for personal boundaries in the workplace.

While it might seem harmless to like an employee's Facebook post or to unwind with your team over drinks, remember that it only takes one person to feel uncomfortable for an awkward situation to spiral into something much more sinister – potentially even leading to legal issues.

No place for romance

It might be the close working environment, but the State of Work found that more SME employees have had romantic feelings for a boss than those in larger organisations. However, employer-employee romances are a generally bad idea – they can destroy productivity, prompt accusations of favouritism from other employees, and potentially raise issues regarding the boss's position of power.

"Friendship between a boss and employee inherently creates a conflict of interest," says Sophie Joselyn, Senior Employment Relations Adviser. "Bosses are responsible for evaluating

the performance of their team members and they must be unbiased when providing constructive criticism, conducting performance reviews and salary negotiations, mediating conflicts."

If things end badly, the situation could get a whole lot worse, with potential consequences including claims of sexual harassment, even if the relationship was consensual.

Let's *not* talk about sex

Discussing your sex life at work can be considered sexual harassment if it makes other team members uncomfortable, and the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements have empowered people to speak out about such situations.

Interestingly, despite increased awareness these days, the State of Work report found one in five Australians have felt uncomfortable as the result of an inappropriate remark from a boss, and that more women (23.5per cent) have experienced this than men (18 per cent). Overall, millennials were more likely to have experienced a sexual comment from their boss.

"If you feel an employee is beginning to cross boundaries, or alternatively you recognise you have crossed a line, the best thing to do is to have an honest, transparent conversation right away," says Sophie. "Establishing clear boundaries will help ensure that friendly rapport between the boss and employee doesn't cross the line of professionalism."

Tread carefully online

The online world has its own set of rules for social conduct, potentially blurring the boundary between professional and personal relationships.

The State of Work report reveals bosses and employees in smaller organisations are more likely to be connected on social media and, overall, more than one in four (26.9 per cent) employees have their boss on Facebook. Even if you are careful about how you post on these platforms, remember that you may be exposed in other areas. For example, 113,580 working Australians have seen their boss on Tinder, and 151,440 millennials have seen their boss on a dating website.

So what are the rules for interacting with employees in the online world? It depends on the relationship of the people involved, their sex and age, the industry and culture of the workplace.

“Everyone has different limits – everything from emotional, mental, physical, etc. – so be clear about what your workplace limits are,” says Sophie. “Consider your environment – it serves as your context, and can have a strong influence on your behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions.”

Sophie’s tips for setting personal boundaries with employees:

- **Keep socialising to work hours.** Grabbing lunch with employees, team happy hours, and office holiday parties are all good for team building but avoid one-on-one socialising out of work hours – going out to a bar on a Saturday night, for example.
- **Keep conversations positive and professional.** Don’t vent or discuss office politics and avoid getting into deeply personal information.





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Chapter 5: Favouritism and bullying: What's your reputation as a boss?

Favouritism and bullying are toxic for workplace morale and EX. This chapter discusses how to assess your reputation as a boss and what to do if your employees suspect you play favourites or act like a bully.

Employers who show preferential treatment to some team members are venturing down a dangerous path – one that's bound to lead to disgruntled employees, if not complaints of unfair treatment and discrimination.

Alarmingly, the State of Work report revealed almost half (47.3 per cent) of employees believe favouritism is present in their workplace. Worse still, bullying also appears to be major issue, with one in three working Australians having felt bullied by a boss, and one in four admitting they have cried because of their employer. Overall, more women (38.2 per cent) have felt bullied by a boss than men (30.1 per cent).

Play fair, not favourites

It is [illegal to discriminate against an employee based on protected attributes](#) – for example, race, sexual orientation, pregnancy, age, and so on – and having favourites can easily invite these sorts of accusations.

To avoid complaints, employers must take steps to ensure all their employees feel they are being treated and recognised

equally, and that they have the same opportunities for development and promotion as everybody else.

“Being aware of favouritism or discrimination and developing a strategy to fairly reward and recognise employees can ensure your workplace is fair and productive,” says Nicola Scott, Senior Employment Relations Adviser. “As an employer, you have the authority to help define procedures and policies in your workplace.

“In giving feedback, setting the right tone is important. Managers are often ill-equipped for performance management and blundering into a meeting with some direct observations about an employee's failings could be inviting trouble.”

Rather than making accusatory statements, try drawing out the employee's point of view by asking questions such as:

- How do you think you are going?
- Have there been any issues in the broader environment that have prevented you from doing your best?
- Do you have all the resources you need to do your job?

Again, make sure you take your team's experiences on board: “Show that you have changed your management or leadership style in wake of these developments,” says Nicola. “Action always speaks louder than words.”

What's bullying and what's not

Bullying can describe more than verbal abuse, offensive language or intimidating behaviour – it could also be isolating an employee, changing work schedules to deliberately inconvenience them, or repeatedly overloading someone with meaningless tasks or impossible-to-meet deadlines.

But despite what some employees may think, warranted negative feedback and reasonable disciplinary action are not to be confused with bullying.

“Managers may think they are performance managing, but workers can read it as bullying,” says Nicola. “Sometimes the problem stems from a lack of understanding about what is bullying, and what is not; other times, the accusation can be a defensive tactic against criticism.

“As an employer or manager, you can make decisions about poor performance, take disciplinary action, and direct and control the way work is carried out. Performance management is part of being a manager, and sometimes this comes with the need to deliver advice, and feedback – both positive and negative when necessary.”

What counts as bullying?

Nicola says the Fair Work Commission has found that performance management has amounted to bullying in the following examples:

- When investigations have been conducted in an unfair manner;
- When rude or inaccurate rumours have been spread about the employee; or
- When vexatious allegations have been made against a worker.

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With social media making it so easy for people to go behind the scenes of company culture, organisations of all sizes need to review their core business practices from an EX perspective if they want to remain competitive in the war for talent.

Aside from the obvious benefits for employees, companies with a focus on EX were found to have more than twice the average revenue and more than four times the average profit compared to others, and also appeared to foster higher levels of productivity and innovation.

But EX goes beyond bonuses and short-term engagement boosters – it's about really considering your business from an employee's perspective and creating a positive working environment where they feel comfortable, confident and capable day to day.

