



What SMBs need to know about purpose in the workplace

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Business leaders are key to providing purpose in the workplace; many of them just don't realize it yet.

Providing a sense of purpose is critical for any business; it's oftentimes the key motivator for getting employees into the office and doing great work each and every day. After all, when they feel like their work contributes to a higher good—whatever that may be for your specific business—they're more likely to stick around for the long term and do whatever they can to help the business succeed.

However, purpose can take on different forms depending on who you speak to. Researchers from PwC asked both employees and leaders what they felt were the top three reasons for having purpose in the workplace.

Employees

- Gives meaning to day-to-day work
- Builds a strong sense of community
- Creates energy around knowing business impact

Leaders

- Solidifies a reputation around growth and innovation
- Provides distinction and differentiation
- Drives awareness around social contributions



As you can see, there's a striking difference between these interpretations of what purpose means. On the one hand, employees often see it as a path towards personal—or even professional—fulfillment, whereas, on the other hand, business leaders tend to see it as a way to put a stake in the ground around commercial success. Neither perspective is wrong, per se; the motivation behind each is just a little bit different.

But it's become somewhat commonplace to talk about “shared purpose” these days—and this is a perfect example of why that's so incredibly important. While you can, as a business, define purpose in a lot of ways, it won't get you very far if that shared vision isn't embraced across the company. To achieve this, two things must happen: leaders need to communicate and listen.

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For employees to feel engaged in their work, they need to feel as though what they do is meaningful. The problem, as you may have guessed, is that less than half actually feel that way. They punch in and punch out only to receive a paycheck at the end of the day. While there are a lot of root causes for this, one of the biggest obstacles to overcome is that only a mere 27% of business leaders encourage managers to have conversations with their teams about why their work matters. As much as we all hate to think that creating purpose in the workplace is the direct offshoot of a trickle-down effect—starting with business leaders and working its way down the chain—someone simply needs to speak up to make “purpose” top of mind. There are too many things to get done in any given day for it to just happen organically.

A vast majority of business leaders (79%) believe that purpose is critical to business success, but only 34% use that purpose as a guidepost for decision-making.



So, as business leaders and managers, it’s your job—yes, we’re putting the spotlight on you—to close the “purpose” gap from above. Not only do you need to do a better job of communicating what purpose means to you, but you have to start actively listening to what purpose means to your employees—and actually take action it. Purpose doesn’t and can’t live in a vacuum.

Fortunately, there are a few ways you weave it into the fabric of your business:



Tell stories

Talking about purpose is one thing; seeing it come to life is another. If you have a great customer testimonial or employee story that perfectly encapsulates why your business does what it does, then by all means share it! There's no better way to showcase the value that your business brings than by shining a spotlight on it. It makes your business's purpose real.



Recruit with purpose

Your company's purpose shouldn't be a secret—nor should it come as a surprise once a new employee has been hired. Make it a core element of your recruiting efforts. Not only does this give you yet another channel for communicating the value your business brings to the world, but it's also a great way to find and recruit talent who are already motivated and energized by what your business stands for. Truthfully, providing purpose in the workplace is no different than building a strong workplace culture: you need the right team in place to make it happen.



Create meaningful dialogue

It's no secret that we are big proponents of continuous performance management. We encourage managers to check-in with their teams regularly to assess progress against goals and identify opportunities for growth and development. But these conversations can take on a human element as well. Managers should not be afraid to ask employees how they're doing (and mean it), how they are feeling about their work, and if they feel as though the work they do makes a difference. By adding a more human element to these ongoing check-ins, you can almost organically open the doors to conversations—that feel less forced—about purpose. And if that doesn't work, use these conversations as an opportunity to reinforce why the work your team does matters—and do it over and over again. The more you make it a part of the dialogue, the more your team will start to see the role it plays in achieving your business's broader goals. "Purpose" doesn't just happen naturally; it's a conscious effort that needs to be given just as much TLC as your other business goals.



If you're ready to create a
purpose-driven workplace but not sure
where to start, Cornerstone can help.

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