



# KEEPING THE HUMAN IN THE WORKPLACE

Driving Engagement in an AI World

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# Today's Journey

01

## The Shift Is Here

The AI landscape and what it means for your business, even if you haven't adopted it yet.

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02

## The Cost of Disconnection

What the engagement data tells us about what your people need right now.

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03

## The Human Advantage

Three things you can teach your managers to do Monday morning.

# The Shift Is Already Here

*Whether or not you've adopted AI, your employees  
are living in an AI-shaped world.*

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# AI Adoption

## By the Numbers

**55%**

of small businesses using or testing AI,  
up from 39% one year ago

**96%**

of small business owners plan to  
adopt emerging technology

**8%**

have reached advanced adoption

**37%**

of companies replaced entry-level  
workers with AI in 2023

**44%**

more plan to follow suit

**70%**

of current work activities could be  
automated by GenAI (McKinsey)

Sources: Thrivv 2025, ResumeBuilder 2024, U.S. Chamber 2025, McKinsey

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# Standardize Before You Optimize

*You can't improve a process that isn't defined.  
You can't automate a workflow that doesn't exist yet.*

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# Sound Familiar?

## The HR Reality

### **Training depends on the manager**

One runs a structured 90-day plan. The one down the hall says "shadow Jessica for a week." Same company. Same job title. Completely different experience.

### **Job descriptions are inconsistent**

You ask hiring managers for updates and get three different formats, none of which match what the person actually does.

### **Comp gets undermined**

You build the structure, get the bands approved, get the data right. Then a manager shows up asking for an off-cycle bonus because they have a flight risk.

### **Knowledge walks out the door**

Nobody documented what they did. Someone quits, retires, or gets promoted, and the new person is starting from scratch.

# The Twin Gaps

## The AI Readiness Gap

We can't optimize what we haven't standardized.

Most SMBs lack SOPs, documented workflows, or consistent processes. AI needs a foundation that doesn't exist yet.

## The Leadership Pipeline Gap

We can't develop leaders if we remove the experiences that build them.

68% of executives worry about their leadership pipeline while automating the roles that built it.

*These two gaps are the same problem.*

If AI is taking over the  
transactional parts of a  
manager's job...

**What's left?**

*And are our managers ready for it?*

# The Engagement Story

## In Three Chapters

### Great Resignation

2021-2022

- 71M quit their jobs
- Top reason: feeling disrespected
- Workers had all the power

### Quiet Quitting

2023

- 50% met definition of 'not engaged'
- Doing the minimum
- Present but not there

### Great Detachment

2024-Now

- Engagement at 31% (down from 36%)
- 8M fewer engaged workers
- Stuck and they know it

*People didn't leave bad companies. They left disconnection.*

Sources: BLS, Gallup 2025, Gallup 2026, Pew Research

# 31%

U.S. employee engagement

Down from 36% peak in 2020

# 8M

fewer engaged workers

In the United States alone

# \$438B

lost global productivity

The cost of disengagement (Gallup 2025)

*Workers who switched jobs during the Great Resignation  
are less satisfied than those who stayed.  
What they miss most? Their co-workers.*

Source: Gallup 2025, 2026

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# Managers Are The Multiplier

*Managers account for 70% of the variance in team engagement.  
A disengaged manager isn't one data point. It's a cascading failure.*

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# The Manager Crisis

70%

of team engagement variance is determined by the manager

27%

manager engagement globally, down from 30%

44%

of managers have received ANY formal training

82%

of managers report experiencing burnout

**Under 35:** down 5 points. **Women managers:** down 7 points. **Individual contributors:** held flat.

Source: Gallup State of the Global Workplace 2025

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# Training Is Not Development

## Training Alone

**28% → 34%**

thriving

**+6 points**

## Training + Development

**28% → 50%**

thriving

**+22 points**

*Training is standardization. Development is optimization. You need both.*

Source: Gallup 2025

# The Belonging Gap

**40%**

of employees feel  
isolated at work

**56%**

increase in job performance  
when belonging is present

**50%**

reduction in  
turnover risk

**75%**

decrease in  
sick days

**94% of employees say they need a sense of belonging to do their best work.**

Sources: DecisionWise, BetterUp 2019, APA 2023

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# One Moment.

# 25%

immediate decline in team performance  
from a single micro-exclusion.

*If one moment of disconnection can do that much damage,  
what can one moment of genuine connection do?*

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# Your Size Is Your Superpower

*You have proximity, access, and the ability to see your people.  
But proximity is fragile. Remote work, turnover, and overwhelmed  
managers erode it every day. Being intentional is the difference.*

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# The Micro-Connection Moment

Turn to someone near you that  
you didn't come with today.

**"What's one thing you're looking forward  
to that has nothing to do with work?"**

**You have 60 seconds. Go.**

# That's a Micro-Connection

*A small, intentional moment of genuine human connection that signals: I see you. You matter here.*

**15 sec**

is all it takes

**\$0**

is all it costs

**4x**

more likely to be engaged  
when employees feel recognized

**70%**

of engagement variance  
is determined by the manager

*Your managers have the opportunity to create this feeling every day.  
Most of them don't. Not because they don't care, but because nobody showed them how.*

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# Takeaway #1

## See One, Say One

### **The Behavior**

Every day, notice one person doing something well and tell them. Out loud. In the moment. Make it specific.

### **The Science**

Recognition triggers oxytocin, the trust hormone. It creates neural pathways linking the manager with safety and trust.

### **The Business Case**

Only 23% get enough recognition. Those who do are 4x more likely to be engaged. (Gallup)

### **The Coaching Move**

"Before you leave today, tell one person something specific they did well this week. Do it tomorrow too."

# Takeaway #2

## Ask the Question Behind the Question

### **The Behavior**

When someone says "I'm fine," go one level deeper. "What would make this week better?"

### **The Data**

Only 16% of employees say their last conversation with their manager was extremely meaningful. (Gallup)

### **The Business Case**

Meaningful feedback gives 4x the engagement lift vs. having the "right number" of days in the office.

### **The Coaching Move**

One meaningful conversation per direct report per week. That is the silver bullet. (Gallup)

# Takeaway #3

## Protect the Human Moment

### The Behavior

Before you automate, ask: what human interaction does this eliminate? Does it build capability, connection, or trust?

### The Principle

AI should eliminate drudgery, not development. The messy human moments are where leaders are built.

### The Paradox

68% of executives worry about their leadership pipeline while automating the roles that built it. (HBR 2024)

### The Coaching Move

"If we automate this, what human experience goes away? How do we make sure people still get it?"

# The Case for the Human

The case for the human isn't efficiency. AI will always be more efficient.

The case for the human isn't consistency. AI will always be more consistent.

**The case for the human is the ability to make another person feel seen.**

*Behind every algorithm, there's a heartbeat.  
Your job is to make sure your people can still feel it.*



# THANK YOU

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