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# Five Strategies for Building Transparency In The Workplace



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Leadership Strategy

*I write about Trends Shaping The Future of Work*

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In the frenetic 21<sup>st</sup> century, when employees [job-hop](#) at an alarming pace, customers' preferences change on a dime, and every week could bring a paradigm shift to the business world at large, what sets successful companies apart is one thing: loyalty. Loyal employees keep operations steady, prioritize long-term success, and preserve priceless institutional knowledge.

Achieving employee loyalty —is a goal that for many companies proves elusive. But increasingly, statistics point to one corporate principle that correlates with happy, loyal staff: transparency in the workplace. For Millennials as well as members of Gen Z generation, transparency and the ease of sharing knowledge and data is crucial to building trust in the workplace. Think of [Elon Musk](#) giving away Tesla's patents and you get a sense for the level of transparency our employees are starting to expect of us!

But all employees, not just our youngest, are eager to work for companies that demonstrate transparency and communicate this with a distinct vision, a culture of straightforward communications, and clear expectations for how they expect employees to serve it.

If those priorities are hard to understand, consider this: as a business executive, you expect and strive for your customers to be transparent with you: you want them to share their ideas and suggestions for new products and services and enhancements to your current set of products and

services. Employees expect the same level of transparency from their employer and from the management team they're encouraged to contribute to as consumers.

So, ask yourself this: how can you expect your customers to be transparent with you if you don't trust your employees enough to be transparent with them? Here are five **strategies** CHRO's should insist their companies pursue to build greater transparency, trust and loyalty in the workplace:



## 1. Hire and engage transparent employees

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It all starts with your employees, so build into your talent acquisition process strategies to attract, engage and retain employees who display the attributes of transparency in everything they do. How do you

find these employees? Start by searching their names in [Google](#), [Bing](#) and [Wikipedia](#) and see what comes up! Does this prospective employee have a blog? What are they posting online? Do they demonstrate transparency in credentials? Does Wikipedia mention any type of breach of integrity, such as misreporting certifications or degrees on a resume? Make transparency one of your criteria in searching for and hiring employees.

## 2. Encourage straight communications

One of the most obvious vehicles toward an open and transparent workplace is clear communication.

At [Percolate](#), a marketing technology company that advocates building transparency and full-scale engagement into office culture, "[talking still works](#)." Percolate's weekly meetings include every team member judging their previous week's performance and setting goals for the current one – sharing these insights with the whole team lets coworkers know how they can help each other, and it also means each member learns from the others' experiences.

Percolate similarly prioritizes communication with its customers, using "human language" in all of its documents and "slowing down" when it counts. [Noah Brier, CEO of Percolate](#), says "we also stress straight communication with our employees, we want every employee to understand our values and what we stand for. We do this by knowing, living and breathing the essence of the company mission by teaching our values to everyone who joins the firm and most importantly by giving employees tools to ask any question they want!"

## 3. Insist on proactive use of social media by leaders

In a recent study, the public relations firm [Weber Shandwick](#) found that 76% of executives are in favor of CEOs using social media, in a survey of 630 senior professionals around the world.

Weber Shandwick traced that preference to three themes: communication, reputation, and business results. Social media allows CEOs to narrate their own company's news, the PR firm says, giving them influence over the perception of the brand's "story."

#### **4. Consider eliminating layers of titles and opening up transparency in finances**

The gaming firm [Valve](#) boasts on its web site that it has been "boss free since 1996" and credits this 'boss free approach' for its award-winning games, leading-edge technologies, and a groundbreaking social entertainment platform..

At the Brazilian conglomerate Grupo [Semco](#), employees determine their own salaries – and their work hours – and they all own equity in the company. Almost all of the employees have the same title – Associate – and the role of CEO rotates between 6 or so executives every six months. When Semco implemented these policies, [costs fell, and profits went up](#).

To round out its transparent culture, Semco in fact opens *all* of its financials to perusal by any employee – and offers financial literacy classes for those not yet versed in the language of balance sheets.

[Marina Maher Communications](#) is yet another company embracing transparency as a strategic policy. The PR firm has never put titles on its employees' business cards, and shies away from the structure that job titles imply. "We always thought that limits people," as the company's HR director [Maree Prendergast told the Wall St Journal](#).

#### **5. Create an online forum for employees to ask any question of the leadership**

We've come to understand that millennials expect transparency in their employers – but it's no longer just a millennial priority. The demographics of [Instagram](#) point to a growing use of the photo-sharing site among an older demographic. [GlobalWebIndex](#) finds that 12% of smart phone users worldwide in 30-49 age group use Instagram, proving

the site is not just skewed toward Millennials. One company already doing this and allowing employees to ask any question of leadership is [HCL Technologies](#) , as profiled in a book by [Vineet Nayar](#), CEO of [HCL Technologies](#) whose title says it all: [Employees First, Customers Second](#).

Think about it: If you truly want to achieve the service quality evoked by the "customer first" vision, you need an "employee first strategy" and transparency in the workplace is an important first step. .

Readers, tell me, what have you learned at your companies? What does it take to create transparency in the workplace? What do you wish your employer did differently to promote these values?

Share here and let's start a dialogue.

*Jeanne Meister is a co-author of [The 2020 Workplace: How Innovative Companies Attract, Develop, and Keep Tomorrow's Employees Today](#).*



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