



Photo: Mango

We are all looking for competitive advantages. It's a simple principle in business. Yet, one of the most important things you can do to compete and build a strong brand is to hire—and retain—top talent.

So, how do you set yourself apart as a top company to work for in an age when every company is focusing on company culture and employee perks as a method for attracting employees? The answer is transparency.

A 2013 TINYpulse Employee Engagement Survey on employee engagement revealed transparency as the number one factor corresponding with employee happiness. In fact, transparency was almost three times more closely related to employee happiness than company culture.

An investment in transparency will go a lot further to set your business apart as a destination for top talent than catered lunches and ping pong tables. But how can you weave transparency into the fabric of your company?

Here are five simple, powerful tips for creating the type of transparency employees will stick around for:

1. Spend time with employees

Too many founders spend too much time hiding behind their office door. They mistakenly think the only way to maintain authority is to ensure employees only see them sitting behind an oak desk. The truth is, this kind of closed door reality only serves to create a barrier between your leadership team and employees.

Forbes contributor Lisa Quast explains, “Several reasons to have an open-door policy are to demonstrate to others your accessibility as a manager, to encourage an open flow of communication, to gain fast access to important or just happening situations or information and to maintain closer working relationships with employees.”

Embrace transparency by stepping out from behind the desk and getting to know your employees on a more personal level. Making an effort to step out and associate with your employees more regularly will create a personal connection that can lead to more engaged and happy employees — and improved employee retention.

2. Ask for feedback

In the past, “traditional” company protocol dictated that ideas, innovations, and suggestions came from the top down. This approach causes employees to feel alienated or under-appreciated. A better way is to openly and consistently ask for feedback from your team. Consider sending out a weekly or semi-monthly survey to employees. Ask them what they enjoy about your company, what improvements they would suggest, and how they rate managerial performance.



Survey tools like [TINYpulse](#) and [Survey Monkey](#) allow you to send lightweight, anonymous surveys that can be sent out automatically. Your team will appreciate having an anonymous platform to voice their feelings. This also provides a valuable opportunity to show them how much you value not only their work, but their suggestions.

3. Share your financials

Last year, Buffer made major waves by [publishing its salary formula](#) for the world to see – including the exact salaries of each employee. While this is an extreme example of transparency the truth is that making an investment in happier employees should include pulling back the curtain on your company's finances.

A great example of this is also at [97th Floor](#). Each month the Utah-based digital marketing agency holds an all-hands meeting where the company's monthly revenue is displayed openly. Salary ranges exist for each position and exact salary is determined by employee performance. While financials aren't shared with the entire world, opening up about company finances internally has proven to be a solid investment in team happiness and morale.

4. Set expectations with employees

Gone are the days when an employee expects to show up to work each day, receive a task list from her boss, and spend the day accomplishing goals that have been determined by her higher-ups. If you want to achieve real transparency, you should consider including employees in the goal-setting and [performance evaluation](#) process.

Allowing your team to outline personal goals and KPI's not only leads to greater engagement, but gives them the opportunity to become the expert. Workers who feel ownership over their performance metrics also feel more accountable to achieving goals by any means necessary. It empowers them. And it's a far better method than the traditional top-down method.

5. Speak candidly

Creating transparency in your business means speaking up when necessary. Pay attention to issues your employees care about, and address them. Some of these issues will be related to work, others will not. But this type of communication will signal to your team that there are no secrets.

For example, don't hesitate speaking to employees about why a co-worker was let go. It's common for remaining employees to [worry about downsizing as well](#), which can cause them to jump ship. Another example includes sharing how employees can cope with the Ebola "scare." While this is not a "workplace" issue, the truth is that your employees may be extremely concerned (after all, businesses are literally [selling out of hazmat suits](#) purchased by concerned "everyday" people.) Consider addressing the issue head on by educating employees on [the facts surrounding Ebola](#). It's a simple way to show employees you understand their concerns – spoken or unspoken – and want to ease their minds.

Making an investment in greater transparency does not require a lot of money or a lot of time. In fact, all of the tips above can be accomplished at a minimal cost. They simply require dedication and openness. And in return you'll get happier employees, translating into [a stronger bottom line](#) and better retention.

