

# Supervisor Tool Kit

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## Enterprise Management Development Academy Team 2

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## Employee Engagement

**Lavigna, Robert J. *Engaging Government Employees*. New York: AMA, 2013.**  
**Print**

This book is a comprehensive look at all aspects of public sector employee engagement. It spends significant time comparing private and public sector employee engagement, and detailing studies done gauging employee engagement. The author skews much of the information regarding addressing and improving employee engagement toward an agency wide scale. However, I found that much of the information and suggestions could be tailored very well to the first line supervisor, which much of this audience is or is aspiring to be. Taking the intended audience of the presentation into account I broke down some of the salient points of the book into four important take away topics that could or would be helpful for supervisors to consider when addressing employee engagement. There are direct quotes from the text and there is a fair amount of paraphrasing, where I have taken the information presented by the author and applied it to, in my own words, the needs of a first line supervisor.

### 1. What is employee engagement and why is it important?

The book defines employee engagement as: *“a heightened connection to work, the organization, mission and/or coworkers”*. So how do we define the definition? Employee engagement is sometimes gauged by “the smell test” or by “I know one when I see one”. Basically, an engaged public employee is someone who understands the importance of their work and how it fits into their program, division, agency goals, and then seeks to excel. Engaged public employees find personal satisfaction and pride in their work and feel valued by their employers. Another definition given by the book is: *“Engaged employees plan to stay for what they give, disengaged stay for what they get”*.

And why are engaged employees so important? The author cites several studies that have indicated that *“organizations (including government agencies) with engaged employees perform better than those with disengaged.”* The book also links employee engagement to better productivity, customer satisfaction, and retention. A study of federal employers

linked employee engagement directly to higher rates of achieving strategic goals, fewer days of sick leave, and fewer equal employment opportunity complaints. In its most basic sense employee engagement levels seem to directly correlate with employee happiness, production, and work quality.

## 2. Barriers to public employee engagement

The book fondly recalls days gone by when public service was a widely respected and sought after profession. It has been hailed as a “noble calling” by former presidents (George H. W Bush) as recently as 2011. However, we all have had first-hand experience with the recent statewide and national attacks on public service professions. Our work has gone from highly respected occupations to widely criticized by our political leaders and public alike. In addition to the recent changes in public perception of civil servants the author lists many more barriers specific to public employee engagement. I included in the presentation several that I thought were most important to this audience. They include: Frequent change in political and agency administrations/heads, hard to measure goals, limited financial tools and incentives, and public visibility of government actions. The first and last of those refer, again, to the political nature of our jobs. We are at the whim of the voting majority as to who we work for, and are accountable to each taxpayer for what we do. These pressures can cause a person to disconnect with agency initiatives (“just wait, it will change”), and not be willing to work for betterment in fear of public scrutiny. The middle two listed above deal with the very nature of government agencies. Many of us “don’t make widgets”, meaning it is difficult to quantify our successes sometimes. That ambiguity can affect employee engagement. Budgetary constraints, pay equity issues, and staffing shortages have long been an issue within government agencies and by my estimation will continue to plague government for years to come.

## 3. Responding to the Barriers

What can we, as first line supervisors, do about our staff’s potential lack of engagement? For the presentation I attempted to mine from the book what tools and behaviors that a front line manager/supervisor could most likely employ to affect the engagement levels of their staff. As managers we need to be adept in the art of public relations. Meaning, we need to be cognizant of the big picture benefits our and our staff’s work contributes to. We then need to channel our inner cheerleaders and use that big picture thinking to remind our staff how important the work they do is. In my experience staff can get bogged down in the specifics of their work, sometimes forgetting the good things they are contributing to, hearing how what they do has the potential to improve other people’s lives can be very uplifting and engaging. Also along this same vein is, ensuring a connection to the organizational mission. Staff yearn to understand how the work they do correlates with the overarching organizational strategic goals and direction. This will foster a sense of purpose and potentially a deeper connection to the work. It’s important as a manager to remind staff (and those that manage us) that what we do makes a difference; we have positive impacts on the lives of the people we serve.

Beyond those overarching type behaviors there are potentially some very specific incentives we as first line supervisors can offer our staff to work to improve engagement. We can offer staff, to the extent possible, “a seat at the table”. Involve them in the decision making process by consulting with them about decision items, or forming a work group to make recommendations to management. We can (depending on organizational policy) offer flexible work schedules to those who are engaged and performing well. Many people see flexible scheduling as a very valuable incentive, especially those with young families. We can give them clear and achievable performance objectives and be sure recognize and praise those that exceed their objectives. Ambiguity in objectives can cause staff to question the meaning of what and why they do what they do. Public recognition for a job well done can be a powerful motivator, potentially causing other less engaged staff to seek to excel. We can also create a safe, secure, and positive working an environment. Employees are more likely to be engaged if they feel they have the support of their supervisor if ever called into question.

#### 4. Taking action to improve engagement

How do we begin? Can we simply hand out some flexible schedules and pats on the back and watch employee engagement take off? Doubtful. As a manager there are some things that we must do before we can expect to have a positive effect on employee engagement. First, the book and I would argue, and foremost we must gain the trust of those who work with us and those we supervise. By being fair, honest, and following through we can begin to gain the trust and credibility needed to give weight to our employee engagement message. Another very important piece is being willing to have the difficult conversation with those that need it. Staff that are under performing or not meeting other expectations are not in hiding. Their peers likely make note those they see not putting forward a high level of effort. Addressing those concerns fairly and swiftly is very important for team moral and respect for a manager. Be accessible, approachable, and a good communicator. Communication really is the key to any good supervisor / staff relationship, and with that good relationship a more receptive approach to the employee engagement message. The last point from the book I outlined is, be a leader. As a manager / supervisor people look to you as a role model. “Practicing what you preach” is an important part of our positions. As a supervisor our charge is to lead people, to help them achieve not only our program, division, and agency goals, but also to achieve a level of engagement that gives them the personal satisfaction and happiness they desire.

## Time Management

### **Mancini, Marc. Time Management: 24 Techniques to Make Each Minute Count at Work. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007. Print.**

This book was a 48 page quick read. The main point of the book is to give tips to more effectively and efficiently manage our time to reduce stress and frustration. One of the best points of the book from a management perspective was that it is important to remember that not every system or strategy or technique will work for everyone. While some strategies apply to most people in most situations, such as setting priorities, planning ahead and delegating, others must be adapted to your individual style. It is important to remember that everyone is different and works differently so will need different methods to be successful. While acknowledging different methods work for different people, book provided different suggestions that would enable the reader to do more with less and more easily. The bottom line to any time management system is to know how to use your time. Some of the best tips were to be reasonable about how you spend your time and what you can accomplish. It encourages the reader to develop a time management style that suits them. It identifies goal setting to be essential to time management. One interesting idea was to create a "not-to-do" list, which includes low-priority tasks that can be delegated or tasks for others that they can do themselves. It also looks at procrastination and the factors behind the procrastination to figure out what needs to be changed to get the task done. The book also gives basic steps for delegating. It also gives tips for saying no, such as giving a good reason, being diplomatic, and suggesting a trade off or some other way to help. The final most helpful strategy was keep track of your things. It gives strategies for desk management and how to organize your paper to make it easily retrievable in the future.

#### Take Aways:

- Not every system, strategy or technique will work for everybody
- Goals are essential to time management.
- Learn how to delegate
- Most important word in time management may be "no."

### **Morgenstern, Julie. (2004). Making Work Work: New Strategies for Surviving and Thriving at the Office. New York: Simon & Schuster, pp 71-140**

The three chapters with the most useful information that can be applied to any workplace are "Competency Three, Choose the Most Important Task", "Competence Four – Create Time to Get Things Done", and "Competency Five – Control the Nibblers". One very valuable point was that you can stretch time by planning. The author gives several strategies to help organize work and the work day. One strategy is to capture all of your to-dos in one place. Her argument is that is the only real chance at choosing the most important tasks. After that it is determining what is the most important in relation to the other things on the list. In addition the list can then organize by deadline, how long the task will take and the importance of the task. The author suggests avoiding emails during the first hour of that day and using that hour to do your most important task. The author gives strategies for email management and warns against multi-tasking. She also encourages the reader to pay attention to natural energy cycles and plan

important projects around times that you know you will be able to accomplish a lot in a shorter period of time. Finally, the author identified "nibblers" that steal time. These included perfectionism, procrastination, interruptions, and meetings. To control perfectionism, it suggests handling your need for perfectionism by practicing to do one thing less than perfectly, imposing deadlines on yourself and limiting the number of revisions you grant yourself. For procrastination, the book suggests first getting to the heart of what is causing the procrastination. It suggests breaking down projects into smaller tasks, do a fast and sloppy version, focus on the pay off, set time limits and choose the best time of the day. For interruptions, the suggestions are to choose 2 to 3 people who can interrupt at anytime and defer others to a better time, rehearse a few comfortable phrases for handling interruptions, and ask how long it will take. Finally to make meetings worth their while- schedule at convenient times and make sure they are neither too long or too short, have a clear agenda, and include the right mix of people.

Take Aways:

- Planning helps you stretch time
- Put all your to-dos in one spot to help prioritize your tasks
- Plan your day and projects around your natural energy cycle
- Beware of time nibblers

**Felton, Sandra, and Marsha Sims. *Organizing Your Day: Time Management Techniques That Will Work for You*. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2009. Print.**

One very interesting point of this book was that it gets to the heart of time management. The theory is that time management boils down to self-management. Time management cannot happen without self-management. Although the book says the person themselves are at the heart of time management it also has the valuable point that they need good skills to manage themselves and their time. Because time management is self-management, people need to look at how different characteristics affect the use of time. For example some of people are more naturally organized than other and some of are able to focus more easily. These different characteristics can either help or hinder people with time management. That is why the control over time management lies within the person themselves. They have the power to either improve time management or let it continue to get away from them. The key is to realize that self-control can be empowering. Since most do not have control over bosses, size of their space, and coworkers, it boils down to governing themselves to control their environment. While people go through the process of time management, it is important to be realistic, focused, proactive, self-aware, persistent, and alert. One of the ways the book promotes doing this is to keep a time log. The view is similar to the ways dieters track their food or people working on budgets track where money is spent. It is hard to know where to start if the person does not know where there time is currently going. The book looks at multitasking to determine how it can and can't work. It looks at both perfectionism and procrastination in being roadblocks to time management and how to get past those issues. The chapter on delegation was also very useful, especially to the supervisor who is uncomfortable with delegating. The chapter on interruptions has a valid point that it is a matter of finding a balance for interruptions and that the reader needs to learn to manage them. It goes on to give several tips

to help manage those interruptions. It also gives strategies to take charge of time waters. The last several chapters deal with organizing your space and your papers.

#### Take Aways

- Time management is self-management
- Keep a time log so you can know where your time is going
- Use delegation appropriately to free time and build team members' skills

## Coordination and Scheduling

### Gantt Chart

<http://www.gantt.com/>

It is a visual presentation of:

- What the project is, listed by multiple tasks
- When each task begins and ends
- How long each task takes to complete
- Where tasks fit along the timeline; overlap, concurrent or continuous
- The entire project's start and end date

### Project Tracker

<https://products.office.com/en-us/project/project-and-portfolio-management-software>

- Team Members can report the progress of tasks, add new tasks, assign themselves to existing tasks, and assign their tasks to someone else on the team
- Team Members add information about project issues and risks as well as enables them to link issues and risks to specific tasks on the plan
- Team Members to store and work on project documents, view other projects across the organization, view updates that have been submitted for approvals, etc.

### Microsoft Outlook Calendar

<http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/outlook-help/calendar-i-outlook-calendar-basics-RZ010100073.aspx?section=8>

- Team Members can share calendars with other people who have a state outlook account
- Team Members create multiple permissions lists. For each list, you can choose from a wide range of access levels, from co-owner to edit to view-only
- Team Members can be assigned Tasks, follow up and reminders
- You can add or remove people any time

### Microsoft Sharepoint

<http://products.office.com/en-us/sharepoint/collaboration>

- Team members access by permission only
- Word Docs, Excel and pictures can be uploaded
- Team Members can checkout a Doc and work on it simultaneously
- Web based and accessible from any internet access

### Google Docs

<https://support.google.com/drive/answer/2424384?hl=en>

- Team members access by permission only
- Word Docs, Excel and pictures can be uploaded
- Team Members can checkout a Doc and work on it simultaneously
- Web based and accessible from any internet access

## Employee Development

### Department of Administration Training

<http://www.doa.state.wi.us/divisions/administrative-services/staff-development-and-training>

Courses vary throughout the year, but include a variety of topics. Some examples:

- Professional Development
- Personal Enhancement
- Retirement Planning

The DOA training website also includes links to other agency training resources that are available to state employees:

- Office of State Employment Relations (OSER)
  - New Supervisor courses in Human Resources and Leadership
- Division of Enterprise Technology (DET) Enterprise Training (business and IT skills training)
  - Online courses from SkillChoice and SkillSoft (year-long registration to access online materials and courses)
  - Instructor-led courses (currently offered by Inacom in Madison or Brookfield)

### UW Office of Human Resource Development

<https://www.ohrd.wisc.edu/home/>

Training classes and seminars on a variety of topics. Many online courses are available.

### UW-Madison Continuing Studies

<http://continuingstudies.wisc.edu/>

Professional Development courses, including certificate programs and stand-alone courses

### UW-Madison School of Business

<http://bus.wisc.edu/cped/courses-for-individuals>

Courses and certificate programs with flexible scheduling. Website also includes some downloadable resources available without registering for any courses.

The UW School of Business also has a Center for Professional and Executive Development (CPED) site (<http://bus.wisc.edu/cped>) that has a listing of available certificates and online courses.

## Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)

MOOCs are a relatively new resource, offered by major universities throughout the country (and world). These courses are free and open to anyone, regardless of educational background or training. The University of Wisconsin has several degree programs that allow credit from MOOC courses.

Some providers include:

- Coursera: [www.coursera.org](http://www.coursera.org)
- Udacity: [www.udacity.com](http://www.udacity.com)
- edX: [www.edx.org](http://www.edx.org)

Providers similar to MOOCs:

- Khan Academy: [www.khanacademy.org](http://www.khanacademy.org)
- Udemy: [www.udemy.com](http://www.udemy.com)

## Dale Carnegie Leadership Training

<http://www.dalecarnegie.com/>

Online (via webinar) and in person classes on a variety of leadership topics. There are also online articles and downloadable white papers available for free.

## Lynda.com Online Training

[www.lynda.com](http://www.lynda.com)

Online training on over 10,000 topics. Video courses presented by leading experts, with exercise handouts for many topics. Videos are broken into smaller segments to allow for easy time-management of training and targeted topic training as needed.

Licensing required; individual licenses are available, but there are also bulk licensing options offered at a discount for government agencies.

## Utilizing and Navigating Political Opportunity

### Big Public Sector Reform Depends on Local Support

Clarence Stone, Marion Orr and Donn Worgs (2006). *The Flight of the Bumblebee: Why Reform Is Difficult but Not Impossible*. *Perspectives on Politics*, pp 529-546.

The authors argue that small opportunities often carry more weight than grand visions due to the fact that most public sector reform is highly influenced by the implementation at the local level. Using three cities as examples, Stone et al claim that implementation at the local level can take “big ideas” from the higher echelons of politics into workable solutions with the aid of community members. Alternatively, the big ideas may be swept under the rug as local level implementers wait with a “this too shall pass” attitude toward reform.

Using collaborations of local actors with a common or similar interest often produces more sustainable reform. This is because reform often runs contrary to human nature in that it requires us to think more globally rather than about the immediate day-to-day concerns that press on us. While the big idea should be the driving force behind the reform, the larger purpose needs to be considered in conjunction with the strength and ability of the community to support and accept the change.

Take Aways:

- Don't ignore local level implementation and how that can impact the outcome of a big reform.
- Often the most successful reforms come from grassroots efforts that involve many diverse groups.

### Stories Sell Ideas

Michael J. Graetz and Ian Shapiro (2011). *Death by a Thousand Cuts: The Fight over Taxing Inherited Wealth*. Princeton University Press Chapter 20: *Stories Trump Science*: pp 221-238.

Ideologies and political spin often trump hard facts and scientific data when selling ideas in the public sector especially with nuanced and hard to understand topics. The authors use the example of the estate tax (aka the death tax) to illustrate a political issue that conservatives often win the public opinion war on. When the estate tax has been discussed at the federal level, conservative operatives employ stories of family farmers and small business people who were vastly harmed by the tax. They renamed the estate tax as the “death tax” to conjure images of a scary IRS worker showing up at a grave to collect money. They also started calling it “double taxation” to further incense the public. While underlying economic facts show that only the richest of Americans are typically affected by this tax, the narrative constructed allowed middle class Americans to relate and empathize with the characters in the stories. This worked especially well in this case because tax policy is confusing to the general public and unpopular.

An effective political story must make people associate your preferred course of action with their preexisting dispositions. Another example of this is the story of welfare queens driving

Cadillacs that President Reagan used to push for welfare reform. This story outraged hard-working Americans and allowed welfare reform to pass more easily. When examined closely though, the facts didn't support the story as most welfare recipients were not going to get groceries in expensive cars.

Take Aways:

- While facts should be important to any public servant, utilizing a story that appeals to your audience may get you further than reciting facts and figures.
- Understand your audience and create a narrative that appeals to their preexisting understanding of the issue.
- Find a way to tell your story through a real person narrative because the public generally remembers stories more easily than statistics.