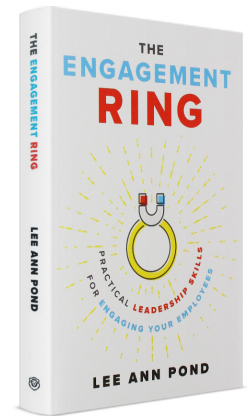


The Engagement Ring

Practical Leadership Skills for Engaging Your Employees

by **Lee Ann Pond**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Employee engagement affects everything from the overall experience in your workplace to your organization's bottom line. Helping employees become happier and more fulfilled at their jobs is absolutely critical, and it starts with leaders. You have a major role to play in your employees' engagement, but how can you increase that engagement in a powerful way?

That's where *The Engagement Ring* comes in. RING stands for Relationships, Included, Needed, and Growing—and it's the foundation for Lee Ann Pond's transformative approach to leadership and increased employee engagement.

This book helps leaders help their employees, by providing them opportunities to develop stronger relationships in the workplace, feel more included within the company and within their teams, feel needed by the organization and valued for the unique skills and accomplishments they bring to the table, and find opportunities to grow and develop within their role both personally and professionally.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to build strong relationships between employees and their teammates and leaders.
- How to help employees feel they belong and are always in the loop.
- How to help employees feel they can grow personally and professionally in their role.

Introduction

Having spent the last fifteen years in the corporate “C” suite, with authority over several departments including human resources, Lee Ann Pond was ultimately responsible to make sure the entire workforce had good bosses in place. Developing programs to train those leaders led her to the concept of employee engagement.

In these roles, she discovered that the end game of leadership is engaging your followers. *The Engagement Ring* details actionable skills and techniques needed to engage your employees.

Employee Engagement

One-third of all employees would forgo their annual raise if it meant their current boss would be fired. Half are looking for another job at any given moment. Unengaged employees cost \$550 billion a year in extra sick days and lost productivity to U.S. corporations.

Employee engagement is important to an organization’s success because it positively affects productivity, turnover, and profitability. It’s about employees wanting to go above and beyond what is required, and most of an employee’s individual engagement is due to their relationship with their direct supervisor. There are specific steps that supervisors can take, which will enhance their employees’ engagement. The first is learning how to ‘act’ professionally.

The Engagement Ring

The elements of engaging your employees or members of your team form what’s called the Engagement RING.

Relationships—with their direct leader and their teammates

Included—the feeling of belonging and being ‘in the loop’

Needed—with a sense of purpose to their job and pride in the mission

Growing—opportunities to grow personally and professionally

Within this ring lies a group of values such as communication, feedback, delegation, coaching, measurement, and goals. When teams feel trusted, heard, valued, and connected, they’re more engaged—and more likely to produce excellent work as a result.

R is for Developing Relationships

The most important relationship at work is between each employee and their supervisor. You should be meeting with each employee on a regular basis to get to know them and their work more closely.

You should also be encouraging friendships between members, which helps build camaraderie and higher engagement. That said, remember that employee engagement is the responsibility of the supervisor, not the employee. If your teams aren’t getting along, your employees don’t feel comfortable approaching superiors with ideas, or there are other signs of poor relationship building, your first question should be how you can improve as a leader.

Do I Know You?

Author Patrick Lencioni says, “In order to be the kind of leader who demonstrates genuine interest in employees and who can help people discover the relevance of their work, a person must have a level of personal confidence and emotional vulnerability. Without it, managers will often feel uncomfortable, even embarrassed, about having such simple, behavioral conversations with their employees.”

When you first take the steps to have more close relationships with your employees, it may feel awkward at first. But you should have the conversations until they begin to feel comfortable—“fake it until you make it.”

Have a prescheduled one-on-one meeting with your staff weekly to connect. Take notes at the meeting and follow up. Find out what each employee does in their job, what their goals are, and what their dreams are. Have a spreadsheet and track your staff’s progress in the Engagement Ring.

Your BFF At Work

To be a successful leader, you need to create an environment that fosters camaraderie among your staff. You need to create opportunities to develop friendships, and sometimes that requires a certain level of creativity on your part. Icebreakers at the start of a staff meeting are a great way to encourage employees to get to know each other and interact.

That said, you need to beware of pitfalls of developing or maintaining personal friendships with employees. Always ensure that your relationship remains professional—connecting over personal social media like Facebook can sometimes distort the line between boss and employee.

I is for Being Included

Employees want to feel included in the important and ambitious work your company is doing. To do that, you can't adopt the 'gated community' approach to the company's work. While your instinct might be to withhold information from low-level employees, this can make them feel left out or disconnected from your company's mission.

Find ways to foster belonging, and seek opportunities to keep your employees in the loop whenever appropriate—as long as you're not compromising your company's security. Be as transparent as you safely can, and be sure to 'manage the grapevine.' That means being aware of what's being said from employee to employee.

Longing for Belonging

Humans have an innate need to belong to a group. They also need to be seen and appreciated for their individual strengths. When people don't feel appreciated or included, they can experience significant emotional pain. It can affect all aspects of their lives and work, and has been shown to dramatically decrease productivity and work engagement.

The ability for employees to feel like they belong begins with their leaders. A leader should set the tone to make employees feel they belong to the team. That can look different for different leaders, but it needs to be a conscious and strategic effort rather than an afterthought.

There is No 'I' in Team

Team building isn't something that will just happen on its own. A great team dynamic must be created purposefully. You can use the three Cs to create great teams—communication, collaboration, and community.

Stories about the team's successes (and failures) can become part of the history and culture of the team, and should be documented and shared as appropriate. You can also set up special activities to help create a history and stories and to motivate your team to become more engaged with each other than ever.

We Need to Talk

It's important that you carefully manage communications within your teams. If you don't, your employees will make up their own version of how things transpired.

This can be a careful balance to strike. You must be as transparent as you can while also ensuring that you keep confidentiality ranges as appropriate. It's easy to stray too far onto one side of the spectrum.

Meanwhile, you need to make sure you're "in the know." When word is travelling around your team or organization, you should know about it. If you've put in the work to establish transparent communication early, you'll be rewarded with a good view of what's being said.

The best approach is to be authentic and empathetic, and listen by being silent when appropriate.

Hey Coach

While teams need autonomy to thrive, they also need to be taught and guided. Coach your team to develop skills so that they can ultimately solve their own problems. This level of coaching requires patience, practice, and effective listening skills. Counterintuitively, the best leaders use listening and silence to coach effectively.

N is for Being Needed

How do you make your employees feel truly needed? Too many employees feel like they could disappear from the company tomorrow and hardly anyone would notice or care. So how can you make employees feel as essential as they truly are?

The key is to connect them to the mission. They need to feel powerfully tied to what your team or organization is trying to accomplish. This starts with a strong onboarding process, and also includes conducting semiannual stay interviews where you encourage employees with feedback about how important their work has been.

If a staff member does decide to leave, you should always allow them to leave on good terms.

Job GPS

You should bring the mission of your company to life in your employees' eyes with stories, acronyms, or shortened versions, so that they can easily remember and connect to that mission. Use the mission and each employee's position description in order to work out their direct connection to the mission. From there you can create goals with the employees that connect their daily tasks to their role in the mission. You can also work with the employees to create daily goals they can in turn use to measure themselves and their performance relative to the company's mission and goals.

I've Got You, Coming and Going

Integrate each new employee into the organization with an onboarding process within your department. Make stay inter-

views part of your process to obtain positive and negative feedback about the employees' experience at your company and within your department. Be open to honest feedback obtained at these stay interviews, and be prepared to actually act on it. When employees do leave, keep a connection with them and encourage a positive lasting relationship so that these former employees will remain a champion of your organization.

G is for Growing Personally and Professionally

How can you help your employees grow both personally and professionally as a member of your team? It starts by not shying away from direct conversations you know need to happen, even if they're uncomfortable. You should give consistent feedback, both positive and negative, as needed. Find stretch assignments to help delegate to staff and allow them to grow. All along the way, provide and encourage developmental activities on a regular basis.

Say What?!

Sometimes you'll need to have difficult conversations with employees. Use the SAS method— See the situation from the employee's point of view, Assume the employee had positive intent, and Script and practice the discussion.

Describe the behavior, the effect on the organization or department, and the expected behavior in the future. Remember that there is no place for anger in the workplace. Be ready with phrases to remove yourself from the situation when anger flares up.

To give bad news, use a short phrase to let them know bad news is coming, give them the news, and then allow them some space for grief or disappointment.

How Am I Doing?

Feedback is one of the most effective skills for engaging employees, but it must be handled properly and tactfully. The purpose of feedback is to mold future behavior, not simply to express frustration or let an employee know they did something wrong. Both positive and negative feedback should be given based on a somewhat scripted way to avoid going outside the scope of your feedback or saying things you don't mean. When possible, look for opportunities to give more positive than negative feedback to employees.

Delegation is an Education

You should delegate if you want to grow your employees, stretch their skills, take work off your plate, and leverage the output power of your department. When delegating, match your employees' strengths, skills, and interests to the tasks. Find something to delegate to staff at every level, and move to more complex tasks as employees' skills develop.

Delegation shouldn't be mandatory— always ask the recipient. Then, avoid micromanaging the task and let go of control. Your staff may just surprise you with their success.

Bloom Where You Are Planted

Opportunities for personal and professional growth at work benefit both the employee and the organization. You should consistently meet with employees to find out how and where they want to grow, and then formalize those plans. Find ways to track and monitor progress for each staff member.



Lee Ann Pond is the founder and CEO of Engaging Leadership, a firm dedicated to helping organizations engage their leaders, teams, and employees for peak performance. She is also the creator of the Engagement Ring, a framework for helping leaders understand the core tenets of engagement. With an MBA, executive coaching certification, and fifteen years of C-suite experience, Lee Ann is an expert at merging leadership development with employee engagement.

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