

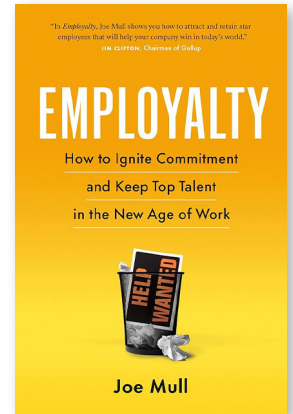


# Executive Book Summaries<sup>®</sup>

## Employalty

How to Ignite Commitment and Keep Top Talent in the New Age of Work

by **Joe Mull**



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### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

This is a book for business owners and executives who struggle to find and keep devoted employees. It's for those companies that want a more engaged workforce and a competitive advantage in hiring, quality, and performance. It's a book for leaders who want to make a case for changing how their organizations hire and treat employees. Because everything in *Employalty: How to Ignite Commitment and Keep Top Talent in the New Age of Work* by Joe Mull is anchored in the research and trends of what most employees want out of a job, it's also a useful tool for job seekers and career changers to better understand the conditions to seek out for the highest degree of professional happiness.

But the first thing to understand is that these three factors—an Ideal Job, Meaningful Work, and a Great Boss—work together to create a destination workplace. When they are each consistently present in the employee experience, commitment appears. That commitment, in turn and across a team, produces a multitude of desired business results, including retention, reputation, and revenue.

### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How the Employalty model is a framework for creating a positive work environment where companies can attract and retain top talent.
- Employees are demanding a better work experience and want meaningful work, good bosses, and a healthy work-life balance.
- Why companies need to invest in their employees and offer competitive pay, benefits, and flexibility.
- How leaders can create a culture of belonging so their employees feel valued and respected.

## Introduction

We are experiencing record-setting job switching and persistent staffing shortages across industries. Fewer people are entering the labor force, more workers are leaving, all while more and more jobs are being added to the economy. All three of these conditions are projected to continue for years.

There's another reason for so much job changing and understaffing across industries: a massive recalibration of how work fits into people's lives. Workers are demanding less suffering at work. They want more time, less stress, and better treatment. More than a decade of record-setting job changing across industries has made one thing clear: employees want a more humane employee experience.

## Employalty

Employalty doesn't mean "employee loyalty." Employalty is a portmanteau of the words "employer," "loyalty," and "humanity." Employalty is the commitment employers make to consistently deliver a humane, person-centered employee experience, because that's what leads people to the highest levels of commitment at work.

Employalty is rooted in the idea that people do the best job possible when they believe they have the best job possible. Treat them better than they would be treated elsewhere, and they'll join and stay. When people join, stay, care, and try, every metric you pay attention to in your organization is positively impacted.

Employalty also creates a competitive advantage in hiring. When the people who work for you describe your organization as the very best place to work, you attract a better caliber of candidate looking for their best place to work—and you also keep good people, so you lose less time and money replacing and retraining.

The era of trying to find the best person for the job is over. You must now create the best job for the person.

We know what employees are looking for. Nearly every piece of research published in the last twenty years on attracting, keeping, and inspiring employees has pointed again, and again, and again to three primary factors: commitment appears when employees get to do their Ideal Job, doing Meaningful Work, for a Great Boss.

As we work to create destination workplaces, we must understand that while commitment isn't fleeting, it is both

fragile and variable. Each person in your organization has their own internal scorecard.

In 2021, Americans quit their jobs in record numbers. But people weren't just quitting their jobs. They were changing jobs. So, let's be clear: the Great Upgrade as it should be called, has been around for a decade, has increased year over year, wasn't caused by the coronavirus, and is expected to continue until who knows when. This is not a blip or a fad.

Engineering your employee experience to align with the changing needs and values of the workforce isn't just about doing something altruistic. It's a business decision. A strategic one.

Dehumanization is the perception and treatment of people in ways that ignore and diminish their intrinsic worth as humans. In the workplace, dehumanization occurs when workers are viewed solely based on their role or functionality.

But there's one other consequence of dehumanization that may be the most pervasive and harmful. It's the belief by a portion of society that those who would no longer subject themselves to dehumanization at work—and the suffering it creates—are actually of flawed character, a phenomenon called "The Myth of the Lazy".

Perhaps the most loathsome outcome of the Myth of Lazy is that many workers get blamed for the very suffering they endure. Every employee's quest for a job that allows for a better quality of life is also a search for a workplace that recognizes and honors their complete humanity. For some business owners and leaders, this will require a shift in mindset and beliefs.

## Ideal Job

If you want the highest level of commitment from your workforce, you must first and consistently commit to them, not just as employees but as human beings.

The radical disparities between what people earn and what things cost today have created suffering for many in the workforce.

After years of limiting pay, where businesses said, If we pay you more, we won't survive, the tables have turned. Now workers are telling businesses, unless you pay us more, we won't survive.

In 2018, leaders at PayPal discovered that many of their employees had a net disposable income between 4 and 6

# To attract talent and inspire commitment, you must create the best job for the person.

percent. The CEO set a goal to get employees' net disposable income up to 20 percent, a figure that is often recommended by personal finance experts. Employee turnover at PayPal has been reduced by half, saving millions in staffing costs. Their customer satisfaction has gone up, too.

Note that compensation involves more than just wages. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, the most sought-after employee benefits are flexibility, health insurance, paid time off, retirement, parental leave, and life insurance.

Generous pay translates to a higher sense of duty and a higher level of effort. What sustains it over time, though, isn't the dollar amount. It's the sense of being valued and taken care of.

But a manageable workload is not just about sticking to a forty-hour workweek or implementing a shorter one. It also requires us to manage the workload that employees carry during their allotted work time.

To attract talent and inspire commitment, you must create the best job for the person. What many crave more than just a hybrid or work-from-home schedule is the freedom to figure out for themselves how, when, and where to work.

To begin offering more flexibility to your employees, you'll first want to invite employees into that conversation, so you can engineer ideal arrangements together. If you want to grant employees more autonomy via flexibility, you and the employee will need clarity on individual expectations and outcomes.

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## Meaningful Work

Since the mid-1970s, a growing number of researchers have been studying the idea of Meaningful Work. What's abundantly clear in study after study is that when we perceive our work as being worthwhile, important, or valued, there is a correlating positive impact on work engagement, employee commitment, and job satisfaction.

To harvest all the commitment that Meaningful Work

creates, your organization must ensure people's jobs include purpose, strengths, and belonging.

By 2025, Gen Z and millennial employees will make up 65 percent of the US workforce. Among the highest priorities and most central values of these two generations is the idea that businesses should do more than sell a product and make a profit. They also want their employers to be agents of change.

When your organization demonstrates that it is truly impacting lives in a positive way, you're attending to one of the essential ingredients of Employalty. Your organization's mission must be specific, transformational, and rooted in emotion.

Purpose comes from the emotion that product or service evokes in customers when it's done well. For employees to experience Meaningful Work, you need to broadcast a specific emotional purpose that makes a difference in the lives of others.

Where most companies fall short on purpose isn't in finding the right language. It's that they fail to live that mission in their actions. This happens when decisions aren't driven by the mission. This action—managers consistently articulating how employees' work contributes to the mission—is among the most important in this book.

Another crucial tactic for fostering purpose is creating a culture of ongoing recognition. When employees are celebrated for their contributions, they experience purpose and, thus, Meaningful Work.

The very best recognition "programs" are those that trigger a manager or peer to directly acknowledge a specific and timely talent or contribution that someone made.

Purpose alone doesn't create Meaningful Work. Employees must get to do work that aligns with their strengths.

When we spend most of our time laboring to improve what we're not good at and don't enjoy, motivation decreases. While minimizing weaknesses can prevent failure, research suggests that it cannot inspire excellence.

Employees who are actively encouraged to use their strengths at work handle their workload more effectively, show lower levels of absenteeism, and describe higher job satisfaction.

As leaders, we must install ways for our team members to utilize their gifts. This requires intentionality on the part of the leader and adaptability on the part of the organization. Eschew the belief that, as job roles go, one size fits all. Every person on your team is a unique individual.

Teams play a significant role in whether an employee experiences Meaningful Work. What we know is that, in addition to purpose and strengths, employees derive fulfillment—and therefore commitment—from one more set of experiences that is central to feelings of Meaningful Work. It's a set of experiences that we'll capture in a single word: belonging.

Deloitte's researchers describe belonging as one of the most important issues for attracting, retaining, and activating employees in today's workplace.

According to Jeremy Schmidt, "The companies that are attracting talent show an empathetic and compassionate culture. People want to be treated fairly and equitably and be able to bring their true selves to work. We need to create an environment where everyone can feel 150 percent comfortable to be their authentic selves."

Belonging doesn't just lead people to stay. It's part of the cocktail of conditions organizations must foster to drive employee engagement, and thus higher performance.

When we discuss making workplaces comfortable for all, we're attempting to create an environment where employees don't experience exclusion. Organizations that establish this kind of culture are twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets, three times as likely to be high-performing, six times as likely to be innovative and agile, and eight times as likely to achieve better business outcomes.

It's not uncommon to discover that someone on the team could be described as toxic. This person engages in back-channel communications, public or private criticism, cliques, keeping score, demeaning or dismissive comments, and pitting people against each other, among other troublesome behaviors that are detrimental and must be addressed.

Research clearly shows that diverse teams drive more revenue, make better decisions, catch more errors, and innovate more often. Team members must feel connected to the people they work with. The employee resource groups that

companies have installed are one powerful way to enhance connection and, ultimately, belonging.

Connection also occurs when employees build meaningful relationships with co-workers over time. Connection occurs when team members form more sophisticated relationships with one another.

If you lead a hybrid or fully remote team, it's imperative to innovate in these aspects of belonging. How? We must get people laughing together and learning about each other beyond work topics. Beyond these virtual tactics, the number one recommendation for helping virtual teams form better connections is to try and gather in person at least twice a year.

The third element of belonging is contribution. When the individual talents, ideas, and efforts of team members are known to a team, there is understanding across the group of how that person is helping the team succeed. Be careful, though, to spotlight more than just accomplishments. Here, time and traits matter.

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## Great Boss

75 percent of people who quit a job say their boss is part or all of the reason why. How bosses treat the people they supervise is the single biggest influence on employee commitment. If an individual contributor is able to work to their fullest potential, it's because their boss has engineered the environment that makes it possible.

Too often those doing the hiring believe that if someone was great in a job, they'll be good at leading others who do that job. Again and again, this proves to be untrue.

So, who should we be hiring to lead teams? Decades of research in engagement, organizational development, and motivation point to three factors: coaching, trust, and advocacy.

Coaching is the act of helping someone sort through what they know, think, and feel to determine their next actions. A good coach listens intently, asks questions, and leaves the responsibility for determining next steps to the other person in the conversation. At the heart of coaching is setting aside judgment in favor of curiosity. Coaches operate with the assumption that people are both decent and capable.

Coaching is the transcendent leadership skill.

Gallup's research has found that one meaningful coaching conversation each week can have a profound impact on engagement and retention.

## Great Bosses engage in ongoing advocacy for the person first, position second.

Employalty is about creating a more humane employee experience. Next, leaders must grant and earn trust.

To be a leader who earns trust, David Horsager says, several patterns of behavior are required. Chief among them is pairing competence with humility. Here the trait of knowing what you don't know is critical. Trust is also rooted in people believing what you say. For this reason, leaders and business owners must follow through on their plans and keep their promises. We must also be transparent whenever possible. Additionally, to nurture commitment, leaders must grant trust to employees often before it is earned.

In organizations where employees enjoy high amounts of trust from their leaders, workers report 74 percent less stress, 106 percent more energy at work, 50 percent higher productivity, 13 percent fewer sick days, 76 percent more engagement, 29 percent more satisfaction with their lives, and 40 percent less burnout.

Where trust is lacking, innovation can be stifled; where trust is given, innovation can flourish.

Start with the belief that your employees have integrity. Treat them as humans with scruples and employees with talents. Then define goals, discuss progress periodically, give feedback, and provide support. That's the trust recipe.

Beyond granting and earning trust, a Great Boss cares about his or her people beyond the tasks and duties of their job. Advocacy, put simply, is acting in another person's best interests. Great Bosses engage in ongoing advocacy for the person first, position second.

If having a Great Boss is a central ingredient to Employalty, then advocacy is a central ingredient to being a Great Boss. Advocacy also requires leaders to absorb blame and distribute credit. When failure occurs on a team or project, a Great Boss says "this is my fault." When accomplishments are achieved, a Great Boss is quick to say "credit goes to...," naming a person or team.

To compete for talent, Great Bosses must become common in your organization, from the CEO all the way down to front-line managers.

Nearly nine out of ten bosses believe they are leading well, yet fewer than two out of ten employees say that they are. This gap is everywhere.

Now more than ever before, employees from all industries are rejecting unnecessary suffering at work. As such, they are rejecting, in all forms, the prospect of working for a bad boss. If you want to have any hope of attracting talent, positioning them to become psychologically committed, and enticing them to stay, you must insist on better bosses.

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### Implementing the Employalty Model

The Employalty model provides the simple framework leaders need to find and keep employees, unlock their commitment, and level up your company's performance. Giving employees their Ideal Job doing Meaningful Work for a Great Boss is the blueprint to getting employees to join, stay, care, and try. It's how you turn your enterprise into a destination workplace.

Your first step should be to assess the current state of your organization against the Employalty Scorecard. First, you can ask your team members. In addition you should open a dialogue with your workforce to better understand what is and is not working well across the three factors of Ideal Job, Meaningful Work, and Great Boss. You can do this via focus groups, interviews, or by adding open-ended questions to your survey that ask employees to tell you more.

Once you've gathered insight, you'll next want to create a 30-day, 90-day, and 180-day plan.

Once you've created this set of plans, begin communicating with your employees. Introduce the Employalty concept to your organization. As weeks turn to months and you execute on your three plans, periodically reassess and adjust plans accordingly to ensure you are actually improving the employee experience in each of the nine Employalty dimensions. The clearest indicators to whether your organization is getting things right or wrong are applicants and turnover.

As you grow ever closer to creating the kind of employee experience that reflects all nine dimensions of the Employ-

alty model, it's time to start using that to your advantage. Highlight the conditions you've worked to create for your employees. Share them in job postings, on your marketing channels, on social media, and with your vendors and business partners. Once you've put in the effort to make your company a great place to work, tell everyone.

Remember, great employees follow Great Bosses, not just on the job, but out the door. Keep Great Bosses, and you'll keep great employees.

Over time, an Employalty movement requires a partnership between those who lead on the front lines and those who control the resources and strategy of the organization. Like cogs in a complex machine, if one gear malfunctions, the whole mechanism goes kaput.

After years of overwork and dehumanization, employees have gotten a glimpse of what's possible as some companies started engineering a better, more humane employee experience. Now that more and more workers are seeing a new way of working, they want only that, and those who cling to the old way of doing business are struggling to do business.

Companies that embrace Employalty understand that commitment is a two-way street. If we expect people to devote their time, attention, and effort to meeting our company's needs every day, we must devote ourselves to meeting our employees' needs every day.

When employees love what they do, how they do it, and who they do it with and for, their health, well-being, and quality of life soar. They respond to these conditions with emotional and psychological commitment. That commitment, in turn and across a team, produces a multitude of desired business results, including retention, reputation, and revenue.

Remember, people will do the best job possible when they feel they have the best job possible. Commit to them, and they'll commit to you.



Joe Mull has spent more than 15 years teaching leaders how to be better bosses. In demand as a keynote speaker and trainer, he is the host of the popular Boss Better Now podcast and founder of the Boss Better Leadership Academy. He is the author of two previous books, *Cure for the Common Leader* and *No More Team Drama*. Joe holds a Master's degree from Ohio University, has taught courses at the University of Pittsburgh, and previously managed training at one of the largest healthcare systems in the U.S. Joe resides near Pittsburgh, PA with his wife, three children, and a rambunctious dalmatian named Flash.

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