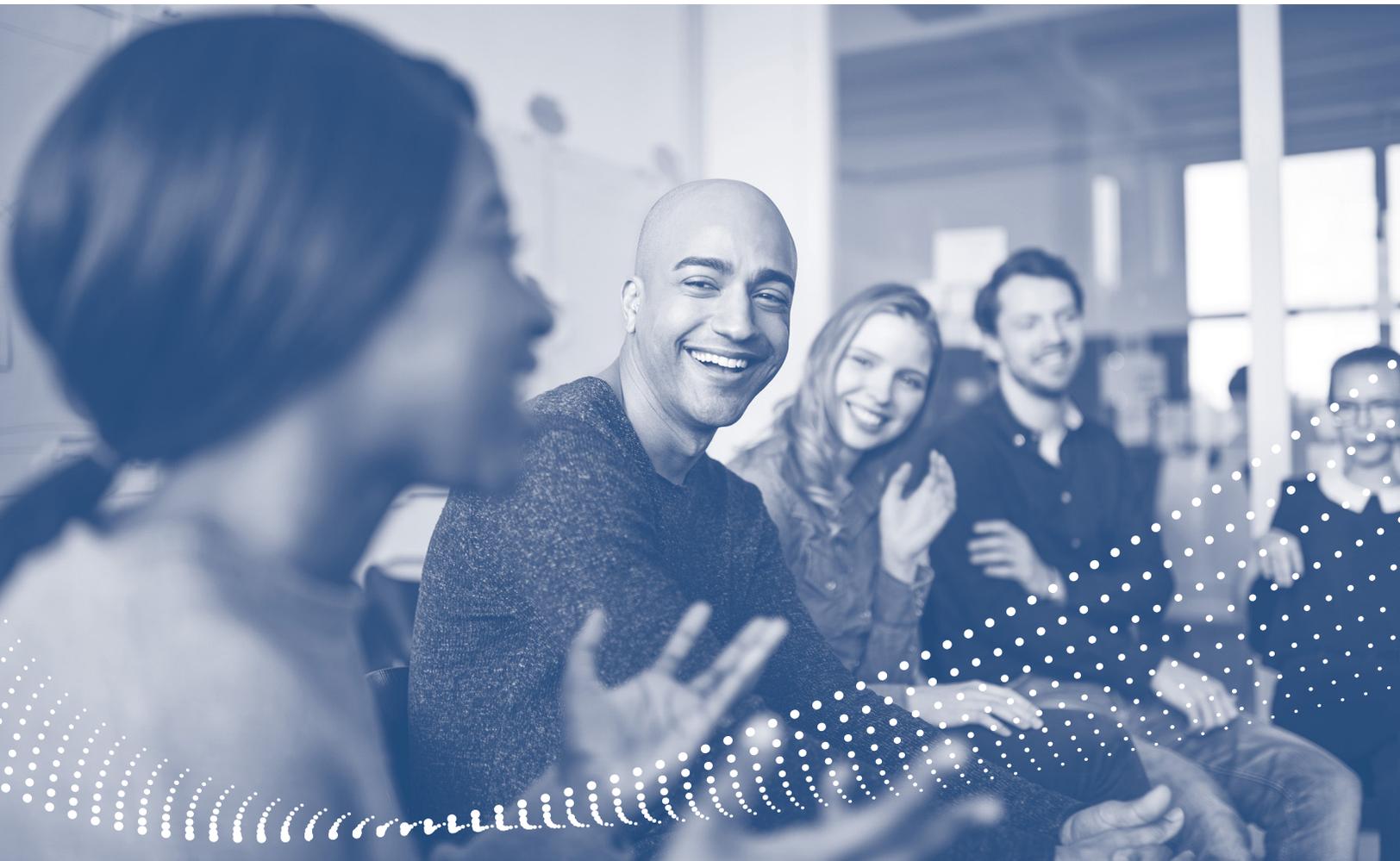


GIVE YOUR EMPLOYEES A VOICE

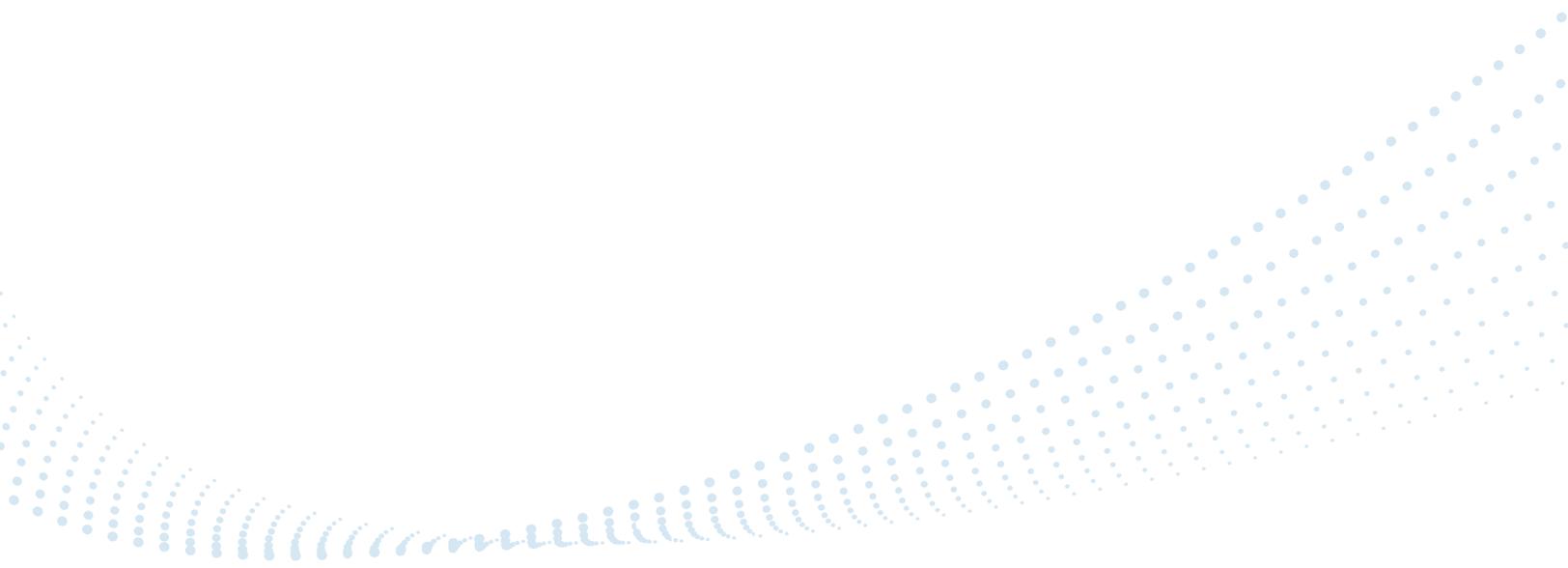
Six tips for using social media to
engage employees



INTRODUCTION

“Now more than ever, organizations have to somehow stay connected to their employees, so they have a sense of belonging,” says Jeff Willinger, director of platforms and alliances at Fujitsu. How can an organization achieve that across a disparate remote work environment? By leveraging social media in a way that empowers employee voices, so they feel listened to, involved, and recognized.

Here we present six tips from experts.



1. Answer the question: 'What's in it for me?'

It's easy to think of employees as one large audience or group. Yet when it comes to reaching them through social media, you may be better served to see that you are engaging different types of social media users.

"You can categorize employees into three buckets. The first are the early adopters and super users; the second are typical users, and the third is the fence sitter, who is saying, 'What is in it for me?' Those are the ones who will rarely if ever engage online," explains Mr. Willinger. "You have to ask yourself, what's going to move the needle for them? What's going to make them take action?"

Some, like the fence sitter, may never engage, but Mr. Willinger's point is that many organizations don't take the time upfront to consider what employees want and what will entice them to engage. It is not a "build it, and they will come" proposition, he warns. Consequently, you must find a way to answer the question: What's in it for me?

"Unless or until you unlock the answer to that question, engagement levels will be low. Some employees don't want to blog. They just want to do their job and go home. You may have to give them a carrot, like an Amazon Gift Card, or a company swag bag to encourage them to become more active," he says. That's where understanding your audience is helpful. For early adopters, having the chance to test out a new platform or lead the way as an ambassador may be just the right incentive.



“An engaged employee will evangelize the organization, like an unpaid ambassador,” Mr. Willinger says. “If you can get your super users on board first, get them talking, you can begin to get others to engage. Your social media plan should help to achieve that.”

2. Create a plan

Once you understand your audience, their interests, and needs, map out a content engagement plan. Consider whether you will engage internal audiences through external channels or keep the two separate. Many organizations have long segmented their communications by internal versus external audiences. Yet some experts believe those practices are falling by the wayside as our online activities blur.

Vicki Li, senior director of communications and creative service at Optum, says, “In a few years, there’s not going to be a difference between internal and external. We’ll have to operate across both, rather than thinking of audiences in siloes. That’s already beginning to permeate the strategies of most companies.”

John Twombly, senior consultant at St Louis Children’s Hospital and BJC Healthcare, agrees that there is significant overlap between the two, but also recognizes that some content should be reserved just for employees. As an example, he says, “In any hospital or medical center, there is a lot of talk about employee parking. It’s a huge issue. But that’s not relevant to post on our external Facebook page, even though we have a lot of employees who like and comment on that page. There are strengths to having external as well as internal social media efforts.”

When you arrive at the right mix of content, by audience and channel, that’s when you can start to see the benefits of engagement.

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3. Think aspirational. . . “What If?”

As you make plans, one important factor to research is which technology, tools, and platforms you will use to make engagement and sharing easy. Ms. Li recommends looking well into the future and exploring all of the possibilities.

“You can’t bring in a collaboration or sharing platform to address only the problems of today. You’ll be in trouble down the road when it doesn’t meet your needs. You’ll then have to turn around to bring in another platform or tool and adjust everything around it,” Ms. Li says.

Instead, find the visionaries in your organization and work together to ask the “What if” questions.

“Maybe you’ve heard of TikTok. Even if you don’t want it today, maybe you will in the future. At least just consider it. That’s a level of organizational readiness that’s critical.” Along with that, she advises choosing vendors who have robust teams and back-end processes that will enable you to contemplate a future filled with What ifs?

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4. Get leadership on board

A key aspect of readiness is securing leadership support.

“You can bring all the tools, but if your leaders are asking, ‘How can I control it?’ then it’s not going to work,” cautions Ms. Li. “Before you jump into any social sharing, you have to do the groundwork to get leaders aligned first.”

“When trying to sell the merits of the social network, you can show managers that it’s a great way to recognize employees, not only within the walls of the organization but to a much wider group. The process of employee recognition costs virtually nothing. In addition, managers can also see who’s looking at and liking posts, and employees can be encouraged to like a post once they’ve seen it. Then the manager knows the word has gotten out to team members,” says Mr. Twombly.



5. Don't become the comment police

As you develop your strategy, Mr. Willinger recommends creating a governance plan for purposeful collaboration and engagement, recognizing that it is not uncommon for leaders to want control over social media.

“Some organizations may put too many restrictions on their social media policies. Sure, there are areas related to legal issues and compliance, and some policies are good. But there can also be over-reach, which can kill engagement. Maybe they make it too cumbersome to even get on the network in the first place. Or, they're concerned that comments will embarrass the organization or contain expletives. But it's more important to trust your employees,” Mr. Twombly says.

“You can't control it. It's about managing and being part of the conversation. You need to trust your people; after all, you hired them. Believe them. And trust goes both ways. If, as a leader, you ask them to trust you, then trust them in return. Many times, we want to control them, but they don't need it. Instead, do your job as a communicator, make sure they are well-informed, and let them do their job,” Ms. Li says.

To emphasize the importance of trust, Mr. Twombly notes that during the rollout of a newsletter, his organization purposely decided to have a comments policy with some guidance and discretion. In 5 years, there have been 5,000 comments, yet not once has he had to pull a comment due to it being inappropriate.

“You can have admins with the power to delete, but that rarely happens,” he says. “It's much better to trust employees and enable them to comment in real-time. If they see there's a waiting period before their comments go live, they see you've put up hurdles. That lessens your chance of hearing that employee voice. If someone is screening every comment, you have to ask, ‘Why are we penalizing our entire employee population on the small possibility that one employee might post something beyond the bounds?’”

6. Prepare to engage and listen

Once you're ready to let employees share, make sure you have a team that can be part of the conversation. If someone posts a question, they need to be able to receive an answer.

"If you're not monitoring in that way, and that person goes without an answer, it looks like you're not paying attention," Ms. Li says. "What's the point if you're not going to engage? It'll have the opposite effect of what you're really trying to achieve."

There are simple ways to manage those interactions. You can set specific times each day when a team member will check the accounts, just as you may do with your personal accounts. Depending upon how many platforms and how many employees, you may want to rely on community-based moderators.

As Mr. Twombly says, "I'll review a comment within 24 hours and respond, no matter how awkward the question may be. There are even a few instances of leaders who have amended policies due to feedback we received. When employees see that leadership is listening, even on those channels, that makes a big difference. All too often, we're so focused on what we're generating, what leaders are saying. Sure, that's important, but we also need to listen to staff. Otherwise, how will we know if what we're doing is useful to them?"

And isn't that the ultimate goal? To not only empower employees to use their voices, but to demonstrate that you're listening.



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