



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Laura leads the Limeade People Team, nurturing the company's award-winning culture of improvement while developing groundbreaking people practices and architecting employee engagement strategies for Limeade and its 100+ enterprise customers. Laura is also the founder and Chief Science Officer of the Limeade Institute, which conducts proprietary research, establishes market points of view and keeps a pulse on the latest employee well-being and engagement trends. Along with her team of Ph.D. organizational psychologists, business insights experts and data scientists, Laura works with Limeade customers to translate the Institute's research into actionable strategies and hands-on workshops to strengthen and evolve their employee engagement strategies.

A sought-after speaker and thought leader in the employee engagement field, Laura has spoken at major conferences, including the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions (NAHPC) Annual Forum, the HERO Annual Forum, Seattle Start-Up Week and many more. She has also been featured in Fast Company, SELF, Seattle Magazine and a handful of top HR publications.

Laura earned her Ph.D. in industrial/organizational psychology from Old Dominion University and a B.S. in psychology from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Jason Lauritsen is a keynote speaker, author, and consultant. He is an employee engagement and workplace culture expert who will challenge you to think differently.

A former corporate Human Resources executive, Jason has dedicated his career to helping leaders build organizations that are good for both people and profits.

He also led the research team for Quantum Workplace's Best Places to Work program where he has studied the employee experience at thousands of companies to understand what the best workplaces in the world do differently than the rest.

Jason is the author of the books *Unlocking High Performance: How to use performance management to engage and empower employees to reach their full potential* and *Social Gravity: Harnessing the Natural Laws of Relationships*.



WHAT EXACTLY IS EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE?

As a human resources expert, leader and employee in the industry, you've probably noticed the tendency to rename (or "re-brand") HR practices:

- Employment becomes Recruiting becomes Talent Acquisition
- Appraisals become Reviews becomes Conversations
- Training becomes Development becomes Learning
- Orientation becomes Onboarding

Same practices but with new, more modern names.

This has been going on for decades. So, when the phrase "employee experience" started appearing with increased frequency over the past several years, it would be no surprise if your first thought was "here we go again."

Employee experience (EX) has quickly achieved buzzword status in HR circles. 2018 was even declared, "the year of employee experience¹." Books have been written about it. Companies are focused on it. There's no doubt it has captured HR's interest and curiosity.

Given all we've seen, it's easy to assume that employee experience is a repackaging of a concept we are already very familiar with: employee engagement.

It's so much more than that.

The arrival of employee experience represents an advance in our understanding of how employee engagement occurs. Experience and engagement are not the same thing, but they are most certainly intertwined. **Employee experience represents a breakthrough in understanding and practice that can finally help us solve the riddle that is employee engagement.**

¹<https://www.forbes.com/sites/deniselyohn/2018/01/02/2018-will-be-the-year-of-employee-experience/#13e5d25e1c8f>

THE HISTORY OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

ENGAGEMENT is a measure of the degree to which an employee is willing and able to be their best at work — it's a byproduct and outcome of the employee's experience of work.

EXPERIENCE is about shaping what will happen — it's proactive instead of reactive. An employee's experience of work drives their level of engagement.

Historically, psychologist William Kahn first introduced the concept of employee engagement². It was a simple and powerful idea. According to Dr. Kahn's research, the conditions of work contribute to the degree which an employee will engage ("to express and employ their personal selves") or disengage ("withdraw and defend their personal selves") in their work.

For the past three decades, we've tried to measure, manage and cultivate employee engagement in the workplace with underwhelming results.

The Gallup Organization was among the first to create a survey to measure employee engagement. For the past twenty years, they have been using that survey to publish benchmark levels of employee engagement in the United States and around the world.

While their data shows that employee engagement has improved slightly over that twenty-year period, only **34% of employees surveyed in their 2018 U.S. sample were fully engaged at work**³.

Despite years of focus on employee engagement, two thirds of employees don't have the kind of experiences at work that invites them to share their full potential. Ultimately, the way we've been conditioned to approach engagement isn't enough. The playbook is pretty clear, to improve engagement you have to follow these simple steps:

1. use a survey to measure employee engagement
2. analyze the survey data to identify the issues
3. take action to fix the issues and make things better

While this can be a very effective way to improve working conditions for employees, it alone isn't enough to create a highly engaged workforce. Organizations tend to rely on leaders and managers to know what to do to improve engagement — with over-focusing on the survey and reporting and under-focusing on the action. The "survey and fix" cycle can be good for incrementally improving engagement over time. But, it's not effective for addressing bigger, more systemic issues that might be interfering with an employee's ability to be their best at work. This process only fixes things that have already harmed engagement and most organizations don't even do this well. What about preventing it before it happens?

To create the kind of organization where a majority of employees are fully engaged requires designing and creating an engaging experience at work for each employee, every day. This is the opportunity of employee experience.

² <https://www.talenteck.com/academic/Kahn-1990.pdf>

³ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/241649/employee-engagement-rise.aspx>



WHAT IS EXPERIENCE?

Experience is a common word. We use it to describe a variety of things in our lives — everything from a camping trip, to your time as a college student, to a trip to the store might be described as an experience. And it's natural for us to notice and talk about our experiences.

Can you think of a significant recent experience that stands out in your mind? How did you describe it to others?

One of my most memorable recent experiences happened while I was traveling for work. I had found my way to a sports bar near my hotel to grab some dinner and watch a basketball game. It was a nice place with all the necessities — friendly staff, good food and big TVs.

About thirty-minutes into my visit, a man stopped beside me to chat about the basketball game I was watching. He introduced himself as the owner of the restaurant. We talked for a couple minutes, then he said "Thank you for coming in tonight. I really appreciate your business." Then he headed off to greet other guests.

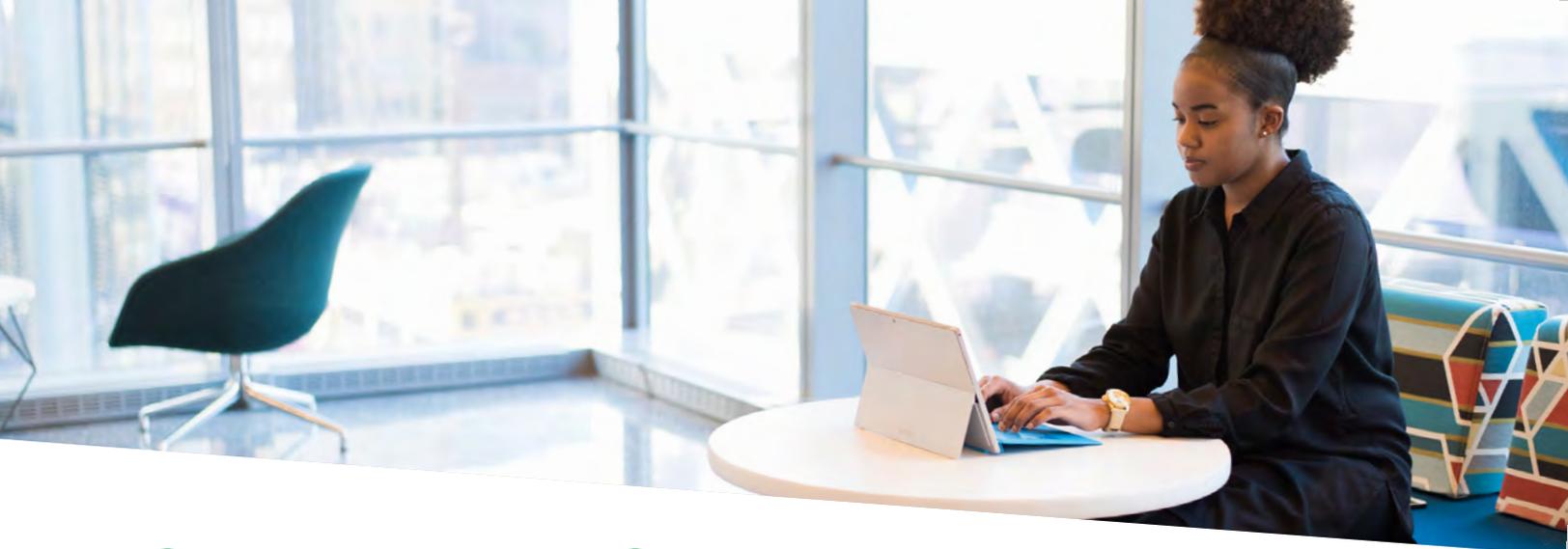
Jason Lauritsen

He stopped by a few more times before I left to check on me. Each time, he thanked me for my business. It felt very genuine and heartfelt. I left the restaurant that night feeling more valued as a customer than probably ever before. It was a great experience. I'll go back any time I am in the city.

When I asked you to think about a recent experience, what came to mind? What did you recall about the experience first? For me, I remembered how I felt during and after the experience. And when I describe the experience to others, those feelings play the lead role in the story. It's probably the same for you.

Experience shapes how we feel. In my story, the experience left me feeling positive and wanting to have that same experience again in the future. The opposite can also be true. One bad experience can lead you feeling overlooked, frustrated or in many other ways you want to avoid in the future.

The opportunity in understanding experience is that it can be designed with the intention to make you feel a certain way.



HOW EXPERIENCE WORKS AT WORK

Every experience we have, whether it's going to a restaurant or spending a day at work, is made up of a series of moments that together shape how we feel about the experience. The moments can range from walking into the building, meeting a coworker in the hallway or participating in a performance review.

Each moment can have a positive, neutral or negative impact. When we have a great experience, it's usually because most of the moments involved were positive and few, if any, were negative. **At its core, creating a good experience is about creating positive moments and eliminating negative ones.**

But not all moments are created equal. For years, progressive organizations have designed experiences for their customers because they recognize that the experience they create can mean the difference between success and failure for their organization. In customer experience design, the moments that most significantly affect how you feel about the overall experience are called "moments of truth."

Sticking with the restaurant example, the time it takes your food to arrive and how your food tastes are both vital moments of truth. If these moments of truth are disappointing or fall short of expectations, it's unlikely you'll leave the restaurant feeling good about meal or that you'll be back in the future.

LIMEADE DEFINITION OF EX

The employee experience can be defined as how it feels to work somewhere. It's every interaction that you have with your company and coworkers every day.

The employee experience also includes moments of truth that have an outsized influence on how we feel about the overall experience. These moments might happen every day or just once in a while.

Examples of moments of truth might include:

- The first week on the job
- Any company communication
- All interactions with their manager
- Meetings
- Getting feedback
- Turning in work product
- Seeking out help

The key is to identify these moments for your employees to ensure they are designed to create and leave a positive impact. And to ultimately understand from a research perspective, which moments of truth matter more to outcomes we truly care about — like engagement and turnover.



MAKING A SHIFT TO EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

An employer who fully engages all employees at work requires a proactive focus on the work experience you are creating. By designing and shaping important moments of truth to have a more positive effect on employees, you can create an experience that invites employees to be their best.

The shift to employee experience is a break from how things have been done in the past.

As a consequence, the path forward must look different than it has in the past for HR. Here are three of the biggest implications of this shift:

1. DESIGN FOR YOUR PEOPLE

Design can be most simply defined as creating something with intention. When designing anything, whether it's a piece of clothing or a process for an employee, the process always starts with a period of discovery that can best be summarized in one question.

Who am I designing for?

Design begins with discovering the needs, wants, hopes and challenges of those for whom you are designing⁴. For employee experience, how well do you really know and understand the day to day

realities faced by your people at work and beyond? To accomplish this, it will require you and your team to engage with people in new and different ways.

This may include:

- Focus groups
- Open space meetings
- Individual interviews
- Online surveys with the goal of better understanding the employee's perspective and needs relative to their experience of work

Through this process, you'll discover things about your employees that you've never known or perhaps didn't really understand. You might learn that certain types of schedule flexibility are far more important than time off or that some technology tools actually make work more challenging and cumbersome instead of easier and more efficient. You may discover that their biggest work challenges don't even happen at work because they are caring for a sick parent or struggling to make ends meet.

Regardless of the insights, a clear picture of your employees' reality is a critical starting point to designing a more engaging experience.

⁴ <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/what-framework-innovation-design-councils-evolved-double-diamond>

2. DECLARE YOUR INTENTIONS

The traditional “survey and fix” approach to employee engagement is built on the question, “how do our employees feel about working here?” And while this certainly isn’t a bad question to consider, focusing on employee experience requires employers to ask a different and more actionable question:

How do we want our employees to feel about working here?

In order to create a consistent experience for employees, you must first know what kind of experience you are trying to create. When you leave on a trip, unless you first decide where you were going, the chances of getting to a specific location is nearly impossible.

Declaring your intentions can be accomplished in a variety of ways. In some organizations, a set of clearly articulated values can act as the design principles for the employee experience. Other organizations go beyond values to describe the experience in more detail. Take HubSpot for example, an organization who has a detailed “Culture Code” that’s shared publicly online⁵.

The process of creating a clear articulation of your intentions is not a quick or easy one if you do it right. It will take time and should be an inclusive process that invites voices from all levels. The more involved your leaders and employees are in the process, the more likely it is that you’ll create something powerful and lasting.

⁵ <https://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/34234/the-hubspot-culture-code-creating-a-company-we-love.aspx>

As you undertake this work, there’s one element that you can begin building into your experience today — **care**. Recent research by the Limeade Institute shows that organizational care is related to engagement, well-being, inclusion and intent to stay, while also revealing the universal importance of ensuring an employee feels cared for at work⁶. This research also shows that a great employee experience depends on an organization’s support every step of the way, and care is the key.

LIMEADE DEFINITION OF CARE

Care is the provision of what’s necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance and protection of something. It’s looking after and providing for the needs of someone or something.

The Limeade Institute reveals that when employees feel cared for:

60% **plan to stay at their company** (as opposed to only 7% of those who don’t feel cared for)

95% **say they feel included in their organization** (compared to 14% of those who don’t feel cared for)

91% **say they’re likely to recommend their organization as a great place to work** (compared to 9% of those who don’t feel cared for)

⁶ https://www.limeade.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/LimeadeInstitute_TheScienceOfCare_Summary.pdf



3. THE HR SILOS MUST FALL

When you go to a restaurant to have a meal, a lot of things have to happen to create a great experience for you. The key moments might include the way your host greets you and takes you to your table, the cleanliness of your table, how quickly your waiter gets your drink, the quality of the food and the promptness of settling the bill.

Who is responsible for creating the customer experience?

As the customer, you probably don't think about or even notice each of these moments individually as you consider whether you'd recommend and return to this restaurant in the future. For you, it's one experience choreographed by a host of different people. The coordination it takes to create a great dining experience for you is largely invisible in the experience itself. Should that coordination break down behind the scenes, all you know as the customer is that your experience wasn't great.

Now, let's consider the employee's experience at work. Each day and each week of work is comprised of many moments of truth for the employee that are impacted or created by different people in different departments. At the center of it all is a single employee, having their own individual experience of work. Just like at a restaurant, a lot of coordination happens behind the scenes to orchestrate an experience. When that breaks down, the employee's experience suffers.



To create a great employee experience requires a new level of alignment and collaboration within HR and beyond. Historically, HR has been organized around HR processes or practice areas like benefits, well-being, talent management, diversity and inclusion, and internal communications. This allowed for greater HR process efficiency but when the different areas weren't aligned or coordinated, it often created a disjointed and frustrating experience for employees.

Designing the employee experience requires a shift in perspective. Instead of starting with what's easiest for HR, it requires starting with what's best for the employee. Through the lens of experience, HR silos don't make much sense. Employees in any one given moment might feel impacted by issues that relate to inclusion, well-being, development and communication. The employee doesn't care about all the silos. The experience in that moment was either a good one or it wasn't.

As an HR leader, it's important to challenge yourself to think beyond your silo. An engaging employee experience requires that all aspects of HR be in sync not only internally but also with facilities, IT and management to choreograph an experience that invites and motivates employees to willingly and happily contribute to their potential at work.

Employee experience includes every interaction employees have with their company, the people they work with and the tools they use — from the first day of work to the last. Making employees feel welcomed, valued, heard, trusted and cared for is crucial to the employee experience. The time to prioritize your people is now — and everyone (not just HR) must be involved in creating the employee experience. Discover what kind of experience you need to create and start by making that experience one that is rooted in care.

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Limeade is a software company that elevates the employee experience and helps build great places to work.

Limeade ONE brings together employee well-being, engagement, inclusion and communications solutions in a mobile-first experience. Recognized for its own award-winning culture, Limeade helps every employee know their company cares.

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