

7 ways to help your direct reports find more fulfillment at work

Beating their sales goal every quarter. Working for a cause they believe in. Making processes run smoothly. Being part of a well-functioning team. These are a few of the possible ways your direct reports might find meaning in their work. Why should you care? Because people who find their work meaningful are more likely to be excited about what they do, to give extra effort — and to stick around. These suggestions can help you connect your direct reports with what matters to them.



1. Empower them to solve a problem that bothers them.

Maybe a direct report gets fed up with your team's haphazard process for responding to customer complaints. Or with how much food goes to waste after catered company events. When they complain, that's a valuable signal to you as their manager: It shows you what they care about. Tap into that passion by empowering them to address what's bothering them. Research shows that making progress on something is one of the best ways to find satisfaction at work.

In a 1-on-1, let them know that you appreciate that they care about an issue and help them focus on the source of their dissatisfaction. Then together, identify potential steps they can take and resources they need to improve things. For more, see [With your team, identify one small innovation to try — and to build on.](#)

2. Give them exposure to customers impacted by their work.

If your team members don't work directly with customers and don't hear rave reviews of your product or see how lives were made better by the service your company provides, they can forget the impact their work has. Observing or hearing from the people your organization serves can remind your team of the difference their work makes and spark new ideas. For an injection of inspiration, you might:

- **Suggest site visits.** Lead a visit to a store or field office where your company interacts with customers.
- **Find ways to convey customer feedback.** Share customer-impact stories you hear in leadership meetings or customer feedback channels. Ask colleagues who work directly with customers to join your team meetings and share what they've seen and heard. If they run focus groups or do other customer research, ask if members of your team can observe.
- **Look for relevant customer conferences.** Pay for team members to attend a conference (in person or virtually) where clients and potential clients congregate so your team can understand customers' daily challenges and their experiences with your company or its competitors.

3. Encourage them to build stronger social relationships at work.

Over time, small doses of connection and camaraderie — engaging in lunchtime banter, sharing photos and memes, receiving words of encouragement when they're having a bad day — add up to a steady source of fulfillment.

To help direct reports strengthen their relationships with each other:

- **Set aside time for team bonding in meetings.** Take a few minutes at the beginning or the end of team meetings to invite people to share something about life outside of work. You might suggest a topic to get things started or let team members decide. Then let the conversation flow naturally. This time can be especially valuable for a remote or hybrid team that doesn't regularly interact in person. For more, see [5 ways to help your remote team feel connected](#).
- **Encourage them to connect with their peers.** Connecting with teammates or peers from other departments strengthens social bonds, encourages collaboration, and can spark new ideas. For more, see [This week, suggest your direct reports set up peer 1-on-1s](#).

4. Help them identify and pursue a new learning goal.

Most people have a need to keep learning and growing. If a direct report doesn't see opportunities to make progress, they're more likely to look for new opportunities elsewhere. To help them do work they find interesting and challenging:

- **Identify what the person wants next in their career.** Take time in your 1-on-1s for [career conversations](#). Together, come up with possible goals and next steps toward achieving them.
- **Give them assignments to build skills that align with their goals.** Let them learn in lower-stakes situations. For example, if your direct report wants to move into management, have them lead part of your team meetings or give part of a presentation you're giving, then offer coaching and feedback.
- **Provide them with additional support and resources.** Connect them with people inside or outside your organization who can offer training or mentoring. Or encourage them to join a committee, a project, or an employee resource group that allows them to learn about an issue, practice new skills, and make personal connections. You might also encourage your team to take advantage of attending classes, trade shows, or conferences that your organization offers employees.

For more, see [11 ways to help your direct reports succeed in their careers](#).

5. Find ways to connect their values to their work.

If your direct reports can align their everyday actions with their principles and aspirations, they're more likely to find their work satisfying. Talk to each direct report about what's important to them — at work and in their lives — and look for ways their work could support living the life they want to live.

For example, if a direct report cares deeply about making an impact on your customers, you can make a point of passing along positive customer feedback you hear or help them think of other ways for them to engage clients. If someone cares deeply about environmental sustainability, ask them if they would like to research and propose office conservation efforts. Or if a member of your team puts a high value on spending time with their children, arrange their schedule to allow them to attend after-school activities without feeling guilty about leaving work early.

For more, see [Highlight what motivates your direct reports when you talk to them about their work.](#)

6. Give them opportunities to coach and mentor others.

Many people consider teaching others as one of their greatest and most satisfying work contributions. Plus, helping others grow and take on new and more challenging roles can be a chance to explore a new and potentially more fulfilling role for themselves.

If your company doesn't have a formal mentoring program, look for opportunities for your direct reports to share their expertise. Could they lead part of your team's onboarding process, introducing new hires to your organization's processes and culture? coach a peer on a skill or mentor a junior teammate on potential career paths? help other teams better understand the intricacies of your team's work?

7. Build a team culture of appreciation.

Being appreciated for their work can help people feel like their efforts count for something. Genuine “thank-yous” should be a part of your daily vocabulary as a manager. But gratitude doesn’t always need to be your responsibility. A team where appreciation flows freely in all directions — not just from you to your direct reports — can feel less stressed, more connected, and more fulfilled. Consider creating a forum — such as a dedicated chat channel or time during a recurring meeting — where anyone can express appreciation for someone. Encourage people to be specific about the behavior they are praising and the impact it had. Not everyone is comfortable receiving praise publicly, so you can also encourage your team to express gratitude directly to each other.

For more, see [As a team, identify each person’s greatest genius](#).