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Ebook

Fast Forward 2021: Why The Future of Work Needs to Be Meaningful

Employee experience strategies from industry leaders

1   Build belonging and create connections in a remote work environment

2   How engineering and technical leaders can promote meaningful work through DE&I

3   Cultivate a company culture that sustains during times of uncertainty

4   Develop leaders who'll flourish during a crisis

It's hard to imagine that 2020 could have been worse for business, but it's possible.

In 2019, companies spent an <u>estimated $1.2 trillion</u> preparing for digital transformation. And for the most adaptable organizations, <u>Deloitte</u> finds that "2020 has helped us understand the importance of worker potential and choice." But there's still uncertainty about what comes next.

The pandemic will certainly accelerate the pace of technological disruption over the next decade. Organizations will continue to develop new digital transformation roadmaps. But there's a less tangible threat that will disrupt even the best-laid plans if it goes unnoticed.

Rapid workforce changes are causing employees to reconsider their priorities. New research shows employees are now open to <u>earning less money</u> if it means they get to do more meaningful work.

In this guide, you'll learn how four innovative leaders have connected their employees' daily work to company values and positively impacted business outcomes.

Executive Summary

In response to the pandemic, companies had to quickly adapt. Communication, collaboration, training — everything changed overnight. Quick and decisive action was key to supporting business continuity, employee retention, and productivity.

In this ebook, you'll learn:

Why technical leaders must make diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) a priority

How your employees' sense of belonging is key for morale and motivation

Why you shouldn't put workplace culture on hold during times of uncertainty

What a great leadership program can do for your employees and your organization

Meet the experts

Mark Levy
Employee Experience Advisor

Sahra Kaboli-Nejad
Head of Diversity and Inclusion, On

Angela McKenna
Senior Vice President of Talent, Salesforce

Jossie Haines
Director of Platform & Web Engineering, Tile

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Employees are willing to earn less if they feel their work is more meaningful

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Build belonging and **create connections** in a remote work environment

A sense of belonging is key to finding meaning at work. Employees with the highest levels of workplace social support also score <u>47% higher</u> on measures of workplace meaning. But how do you promote a sense of belonging in a remote environment? You can start by looking to those who've succeeded in building great workplace cultures.

<u>Mark Levy</u> has a track record of building employee-centric environments. From Best Buy to Levi Strauss, Airbnb to Allbirds, he's transformed the role of HR and blazed the trail many learning and development (L&D) professionals walk today.

Mark offers several actionable steps for you to create belonging, even in a remote setting.

Build bridges between employees and your organization

When people don't share the same physical workspace, it can cause uncertainty and confusion in communication. Keep the conversation open with your employees to ensure they feel connected and cared for.

Build bridges between employees and your organization with these suggested actions:

Get comfortable with uncertainty: This can involve sharing updates even when there's no clear outcome or decision.

Meet less, talk more: Try holding shorter meetings on a more frequent basis. Set up a Slack channel (or something similar) and set aside time for questions and answers to give employees a voice.

Ask for feedback: Use employee engagement surveys to ask what people need and what challenges they're facing.

No matter what, make a commitment to keep everyone in the loop, even if it's just to let them know that nothing has changed. "It's about being honest and truthful and vulnerable," Mark says. "People will really appreciate that. More communication, more listening."

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It's about being honest and truthful and vulnerable.

Mark Levy

Create the connective tissue between employees

In a shared workspace, chance encounters create a sense of belonging. Casual conversations build relationships between people in different teams and departments. That doesn't happen so easily in a remote environment.

"We have to figure out how we can replicate the ways employees ran into each other or scheduled lunches or coffees," says Mark. "That is not going to happen when people are sitting at their homes and sitting in front of Zoom." Employees are especially susceptible to Zoom fatigue and overwhelming exhaustion.

## So how might you fine-tune the tactics that worked in the early days of the pandemic?

Mark recommends leaders take an intentional approach to creating connections between employees. Here are some ideas:

Make magic happen: Replicate haphazard encounters across teams with scheduled lunches or coffees.

Bridge the virtual divide: Start communities of interest (parenting, cooking, etc.) with internal social channels.

Set the stage for interaction: Create fireside chats or workshops that provide structure to virtual social gatherings.

Give ERGs a platform: Lean on your employee resource groups. Ask them to lead events and share resources with employees.

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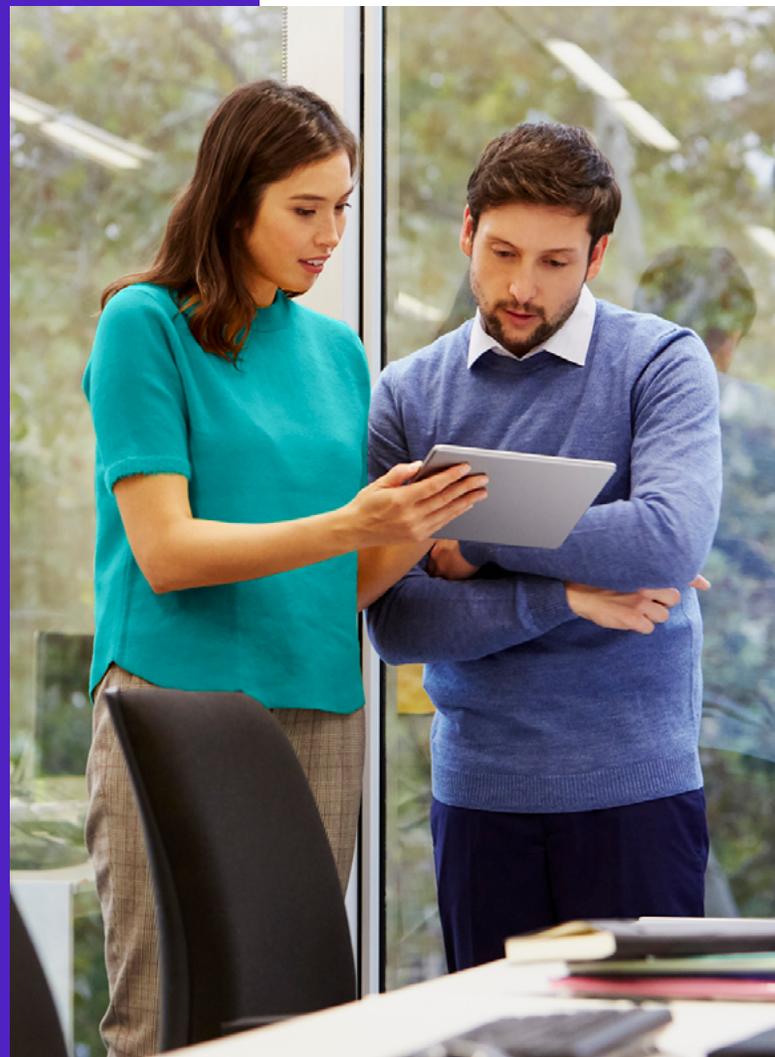
Help employees become your customers' hero

Psychologist Dr. Merete Wedell-Wedellsborg sees many of her clients losing their sense of meaning in work. "The paradox is that during the emergency, the sense of purpose seemed crystal clear: Act now. Safeguard the business," she explains in Harvard Business Review. "As the recovery unfolds, more fundamental and nagging questions arise: What comes after? What parts of our business and organization will even be relevant in the future? What must we do to prepare for a second or third wave? What is the new big picture?"

To bring a sense of meaning back to work for your employees, put customers at the center of the narrative.

If your company is thriving:
Keep thinking about how you can support your customers and anticipate their future needs.

"[Companies like Instacart and Peloton] really had an opportunity to get closer to customers, understand what was going on, and then figure out ways they could be helpful to address the issues and challenges," Mark says.

If your company is experiencing lower demand: You'll need to shift your focus. Can you make changes to your existing offering so it's more suited to the current environment?

"When everyone was canceling their Airbnb reservations, the company deployed more people towards customer experience so they could get closer to the customer," Mark explains. "This enabled them to find ways their products and services could solve challenges, which created a sense of purpose for employees."

Focusing on your customer will help give employees a shared sense of purpose. So when the going gets tough, look for ways your teams can make a positive impact using your products or services.

Encourage employees to become valuable members of your community

Most people want to work for more than a paycheck. They want to feel like they're making a positive contribution to the world around them. And the pandemic created opportunities for employees to reimagine their work.

A Deloitte report on 2021 workforce trends suggests, "The growing prevalence of worker agency and choice during the pandemic showed that, when given the chance to align their interests and passions with organizational needs, workers can fulfill their potential in ways that leaders may never have known they could, positioning the organization to thrive in the long term."
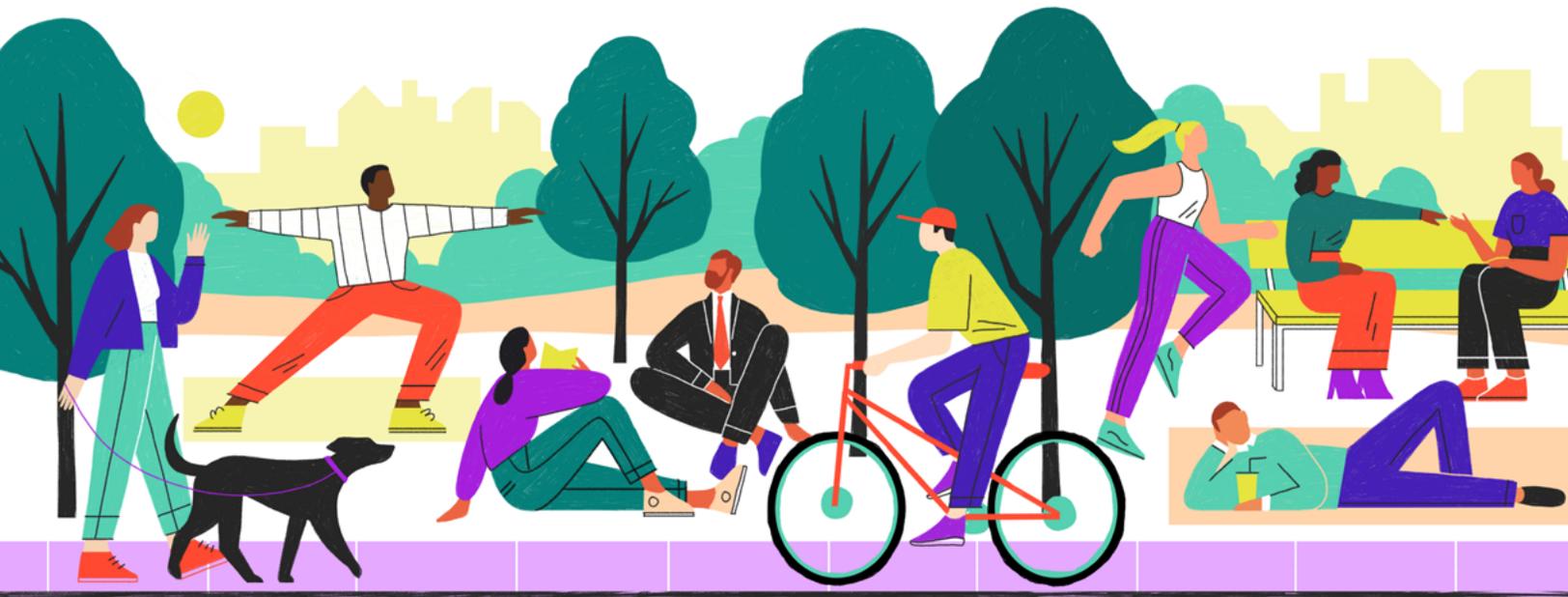
Companies can use their resources to make a positive impact. For example, Allbirds had a surplus of shoes, so they donated 500,000 pairs to frontline workers. This built connections between employees, customers, and the community. Employees felt proud because they knew Allbirds was doing something meaningful.

Consider your company's products, services, or offerings. How can they be leveraged to make donations or solve a current challenge? Even if you can answer this on your own, encourage employees to look for ways to contribute to the community.

Keep in mind that meaningful work isn't just about how you respond in times of crisis. It's also about the everyday actions that set the tone for your company and team culture. We'll explore these more in the next section.

Pro Tip: Upskill your workforce to thrive remotely

Give the people at your organization the skills and tools they need to thrive in a remote environment. From mindfulness to resilience, time management to focus mastery — mental health and productivity skills help today's workers face the unfamiliarity and uncertainty of the modern work environment. Well-being was the top-ranked skill for 2020 according to Deloitte's Human Capital Trends study.

Does your organization offer Udemy Business? If so, encourage your teams to choose from any number of courses dedicated to self-mastery. Some of the fastest-growing topics include anxiety management, resilience, and time management.

2

How engineering and technical leaders can **promote meaningful work** through DE&I

When employees find meaning in their work, they tend to stick around. Harvard Business Review reports that employees who find work highly meaningful are <u>69% less likely</u> to plan on quitting their jobs in the next six months.

But there's more to meaningful work than your employees' job responsibilities. Gender, race, and ethnicity are important factors in the equation, too. <u>More than half</u> of women, for example, give up their careers in tech within 20 years — many leaving within the first three years.

<u>Jossie Haines</u>, Director of Platform & Web Engineering at Tile, has made it her mission to help women and people from underrepresented backgrounds succeed on technical teams. She advocates for inclusive approaches to management and people development. **Discover a few of Jossie's recommended actions below.**

Remove unconscious bias from hiring

Bias can affect all parts of the hiring process — often without us realizing it. We may unintentionally dismiss candidates because of their gender, race, or other qualities.

How do we overcome this? Jossie says, "As engineering leaders, we can apply empathy to create more fair and equitable hiring practices."

Requiring a CS degree can exclude countless qualified candidates. Jossie recommends rethinking your evaluation process. "I don't mean you have to lower the bar to a three-month boot camp with no experience," she clarifies. "I want to evaluate people for their actual abilities on things they're going to be doing on a day-to-day basis at their job."

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You also need to be vulnerable and be willing to admit mistakes if you want to encourage the same in others.

Jossie Haines

Want to remove bias from your hiring process?

Start with these recommendations:

Ask all candidates the same questions: "The questions and types of answers that would be satisfactory should be decided ahead of time, before interviewing for a role," Jossie says.

Evaluate them against the same criteria: "Even a person's name could accidentally trigger unconscious bias," she says. "A study had the same resume, one with a male-sounding name and one a female-sounding name. The male resume got positive feedback saying he was assertive and a go-getter. The same resume with a female-sounding name was told she was aggressive and pushy."

Define what you're looking for before you start interviewing: "Your job descriptions could be unintentionally deterring candidates," she warns. "Women apply for roles when they meet 100% of the requirements. So you could be inadvertently turning away qualified candidates with unnecessary requirements."

This thoughtful approach to hiring can limit the effect of bias on decision-making. Plus, it sends candidates a clear signal: You care about their actual skills and abilities. Your current team members will also be more invested in the hiring process if they believe it's equitable.

Diversify your candidate sourcing

If you're always going to the same places to source candidates, you'll end up with the same types of employees. This is why Jossie emphasizes sourcing candidates from diverse pools.

Jossie also recommends looking to your local community to see where you might make an impact and create partnerships.

For example, you could encourage your recruiters and employees to source job candidate leads from state schools, historically black colleges and universities, and community colleges. This is a win-win for you and your employees. When your employees connect with the community, they'll often feel a greater sense of purpose and meaning.

Take action

Connect with organizations where you can find diverse tech talent, including:

Women Who Code

Lesbians Who Tech & Allies

Techtonica

AfroTech World

Upgrade your 1:1s

According to Harvard Business Review, "Coaching and mentoring are valuable tools to help workers across all roles and levels find deeper inspiration in their work." This is why Jossie believes thoughtful 1:1s are one of the most concrete ways you can promote DE&I.

When tech leaders implement fair management practices, they empower everyone on their team to thrive.

Jossie reminds us that communication is a two-way street: "You also need to be vulnerable and be willing to admit mistakes if you want to encourage the same in others."

Take action

Make time for more meaningful conversations and ask questions like:

How are things (really) going?

What can you improve?

What motivates you?

What frustrates you?

Implement fair performance evaluations

Feedback is a critical piece of the DE&I puzzle — and key to helping employees find meaning in their work. If your team members don't feel like they can grow at your company, they'll find somewhere else where they can.

Jossie has observed how feedback can transform an employee's experience and future opportunities. "Women get less concrete technical feedback than men," she says. "They're encouraged to go into management roles because of their people skills and not because it's really what they want to do."

To overcome this type of bias, Jossie asks: "Do you have clear evaluation criteria and career ladders that will enable your engineers to have equity in their evaluations?"

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Jossie Haines

Conduct more mindful code reviews

Code reviews are an integral part of engineers' everyday work — and a common mechanism for sharing feedback. "This can create trouble," Jossie says. "Engineers aren't taught to deliver feedback. And yet it's something they're doing every day."

Here are two ways to help your team conduct more mindful code reviews:

Monitor the chatter: Make a point of reading through your team's code reviews. Are the comments coming from a place of curiosity and learning instead of blame?

Create a culture of healthy feedback: Teach your team what good, effective feedback looks like. And let them know you expect to see them give it regularly.

When you help your team deliver effective feedback and have difficult conversations in the context of code reviews, they'll expand that to other aspects of their work as well.

If you find you or your team members avoid difficult conversations, you're not alone — 37% of managers say they're uncomfortable giving direct feedback when they think the employee is likely to respond negatively. But learning how to ask for and deliver feedback is critical, especially when your company is experiencing uncertainty. We'll explore how to handle this in the next section.

Pro Tip: Give your engineering team a DE&I roadmap

Don't assume your teams will know which skills are valuable to help promote DE&I at your organization. Build a roadmap that shows them which specific skills you expect them to develop. Better yet — include DE&I learning goals in your employees' career development plans.

If you're a Udemy Business customer, good news! Learning Paths make it easy to create customized learning experiences. Learning Paths allow you to curate the perfect combination of Udemy Business courses, external materials, and proprietary company resources to help employees meet their learning goals faster.

3

Cultivate a company **culture that sustains** during times of uncertainty

The true test of a company's culture is its response to times of crisis or uncertainty. Do your leaders set an example that instills pride in employees? Or do they shy away from taking a stand or sharing information?

Employees want to see organizations behave in a way that's aligned with their own values. According to Harvard Business Review, "The sense of collective, shared purpose that emerges in the strongest company cultures adds an even greater boost to workplace meaning."

Sahra Kaboli-Nejad is the Global Head of Diversity and Inclusion at On. Her goal is to help design working environments that increase diversity, equity, and belonging to ultimately build a better world of work.

Here are Sahra's recommendations for how you can create a sustainable company culture.

Challenge the resistance to ask for feedback

When facing uncertainty, many companies are resistant to ask employees for feedback. There's a tendency to believe that you can put culture on hold until things smooth out. Sahra often hears things like, "We know our employees are going through change, and things like engagement are probably taking a dip. So we don't want to gather feedback right now because it's going to negatively impact our trend lines."

In reality, leaders shouldn't be hesitant about gathering feedback when times are tough.

"That's the most crucial time to be acting on and collecting employee feedback," Sahra says. "When you understand your pain points and act on them, you can be more successful both during change and in the long run. Employees look for leaders who are transparent and honest, especially when times are tough."

And, Sahra adds, "Your workplace culture is always there. It's a living, breathing concept. And it exists whether you want to measure it or not."

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Your workplace culture is always there. It's a living, breathing concept. And it exists whether you want to pay attention to it or not.

Sahra Kaboli-Nejad

Listen before you speak

During times of uncertainty, communication takes on even greater importance.

Now, you might be thinking, "We communicate with our employees all the time!" Even if that's true, remember — it's not only about blasting your employees with updates.

"A crucial component of communication is listening. And this often gets overlooked," says Sahra. You need to absorb what your team is thinking and feeling so you can move forward. And the only way to communicate inspiring messages is by knowing what matters to your people.

Culture Amp's 2020 benchmarks show this. Here are a few notable highlights:

↑80%

of employee engagement is up at companies where employees **agree** with the statement, "When I speak up, my opinion is valued."

↑32%

of employee engagement is up at companies where employees **disagree** with the statement, "When I speak up, my opinion is valued."

Don't allow feedback to be lost in translation

Not all employees need the same type of communication. Keep your audience top of mind so you deliver meaningful messages. HR and company leaders, for example, tend to focus on business rationale and corporate strategy.

But, Sahra says employees need more context. "Your employees want to know what the impact will be on them and how they'll feel," she explains. "They want to hear the story and not just an explanation of the business and financial status."

This is why gathering feedback is so important. It allows you to understand what employees are hearing and feeling.

Stepping up during challenging times might not come naturally to everyone. But you can help your leaders and managers develop the skills that will help them not just survive, but even thrive during difficult times. We'll explore this more in the next section.

Pro Tip: Embrace the power of healthy feedback

Udemy's VP of Learning Shelley Osborne is notorious for saying that "feedback is fuel." It's what you need to take your employees from where they are today to where they need to be in the future.

How can you promote a culture of feedback at your organization? Ask for it! When you make feedback a regular part of conversations, you can remove some of the fear that surrounds it.

If you offer Udemy Business to employees, explore the courses that provide frameworks for giving and receiving feedback, including Feedback is Fuel, led by Shelley Osborne.

4

Develop leaders who'll flourish during a crisis

During times of crisis, employees aren't just looking to their CEO for guidance. They're much more likely to be impacted by the actions and responses of their direct manager — the person they communicate with most. This is why it's critical to develop empowered leaders who can flourish in any environment.

Senior Vice President of Talent at Salesforce Angela McKenna, together with partners in the Employee Success team, developed a robust leadership strategy anchored in "The Great Leader Method," which was planned to launch in early 2020, and a regular drumbeat of connection and communication across the leader community at Salesforce.

But as COVID-19 disrupted business, she and her team wondered if they should delay the rollout. After serious soul-searching, the answer was obvious: "Leadership has never been more important than it is right now," says Angela.

Here are Angela's recommendations for developing adaptable leaders.

Set clear expectations for great leadership

What does great leadership mean in your organization? Angela says it's essential to define this. **At Salesforce, The Great Leader Method centers around three expectations of leadership:**

Inspire your people: This idea can sound scary, but it doesn't have to be. "Being an inspirational leader is about holding space for people and including everyone's voices," says Angela.

Enable results: Enable impact through vision, values, methods, obstacles, and measures (known as "V2MOM"). "Every single person at Salesforce writes a V2MOM," says Angela. "It's key to the company's DNA." So leaders at Salesforce must use the V2MOM approach to drive results.

Develop yourself and your people: "If I'm not asking questions about myself, then how can I ever hope to create an environment or conditions for development within my team?" asks Angela.

Angela believes developing empathy isn't a "nice to have" skill — it's critical. "Being able to connect with people on a personal level is more important than it's ever been," she says. "When leaders build real relationships, their teammates and employees will trust their decisions. They'll have a deep understanding that will allow them to drive the business forward."

Spotlight leaders from across the business who model key behaviors

Leadership is about action, not a job title. So Salesforce strives to spotlight different people from around the business. Each month during the All Leaders Call, the Employee Success team invites different leaders from across the business to take the stage each time. These leaders share their tips on finding balance and driving results while leading with empathy. They also cover topics like self-regulation and managing others.

Angela recognizes that leadership insight doesn't always come from the top. "Your invitees don't necessarily have to be the most senior person in the company," she says. "Anyone who has a perspective can help leaders understand their impact is important for their development."

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Cultivate a leadership community that learns from one another

Great leaders don't exist in silos — they build relationships with others. Angela says, "The leadership community that we've created enables our leaders to help each other. We prompt them to share their own experiences, ask questions, and talk about what's going on for them. We create opportunities to do that through development programs, peer-led learning groups, and digital communities."

This approach makes leaders more invested and active in the community. And it means leaders get advice from their peers and not just the Employee Success team team. In other words, everyone wins! Accelerate your organization and move forward.
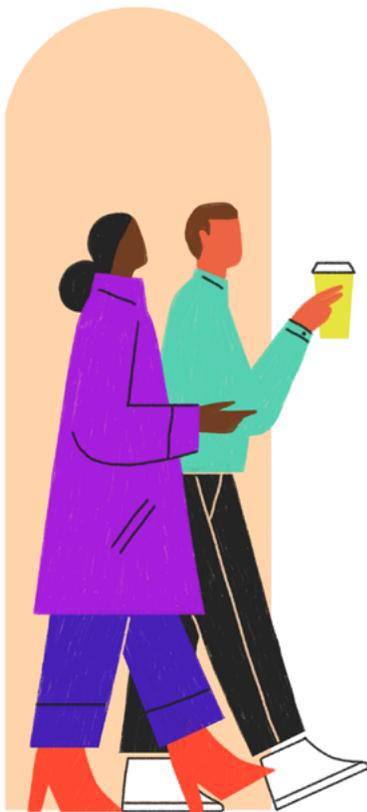
Great leaders don't exist in silos — they build relationships with others

Accelerate your organization and move forward

Throughout the twists and turns of the recent past, one thing has remained constant: Employees seek a sense of purpose in their work. Nine out of 10 employees are willing to earn less if they feel their work is more meaningful.

The impact of achieving this outcome is very real — when employees find meaning in their work, they're more engaged, more productive, and more likely to stick around. When you increase employee retention, it means you can spend less time on costly recruiting and onboarding efforts.

By helping your employees better understand themselves and their work environment, you enable them to thrive. The more they thrive, the faster your business can move forward.

Want to explore how you can accelerate your organization forward by promoting learning and professional development? **Get in touch** to find out how Udemy Business can help you create a meaningful work environment that drives real business results.

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Udemy Business

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