



5 things I've learned about stakeholder engagement



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1. Focus on the right stakeholders

Always take some time to understand who are your key stakeholders. Bear in mind that your most important stakeholders are not necessarily those with the highest positions in the organization. Ask yourself two questions. Firstly, are you providing any service that directly impacts what they do? Secondly, will what they say or do help you/your team reach your goals for the organization? If the answer to either or both of these questions is no, then they should not be your primary focus in the stakeholder engagement process.

2. Understand what they value

Engagement starts with understanding what your different stakeholders need, but this can be a broad set of requirements. Finding out what they value and what helps them succeed and exceed at what they are delivering for the organization will take the engagement to the next level.

3. Talk to them in their own language

Take the time to research/notice their communications styles and their language – every group tends to have a common shorthand for talking about their work. Using their own terminologies reflected back in conversations shows that you not only have been listening but that you actually heard what they said. It helps make you an insider.

4. Build a relationship

Don't start a project, gather your stakeholders, get their buy-in and then never speak to them again. Engagement is a continuous process, so always start it with that intention. Build a relationship as you would any other in your life. Recognize too that you may not always agree on every individual issue. Like a cute puppy which is easy to love when you first pick it up, it's always harder to find them as cute when they are grown and have just chewed your favorite shoe.

5. Buy them a coffee

You cannot engage with people over email. Find a way to have a face-to-face conversation, and a conversation in which they do most of the talking. Your methodology for doing this may depend somewhat on office culture. Taking someone for a coffee or having a meet up over lunch is a much better way to start the engagement process. Sometimes your only choice is to do this remotely via Zoom or Teams etc. It is harder to forge virtual relationships. But at least set the tone of how you want to approach the get together, and invite them for a virtual coffee rather than a meeting.

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