



e-book

# 5 proven ways to *engage* your non- desk workforce



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For many industries, like manufacturing, hospitality, retail, healthcare, and consumer goods, a large portion of their workforce is “non-desk.” A recent [research from Google](#) suggests that non-desk employees make up approximately 80% of the global workforce.

Non-desk employees are often hard to reach at the best of times. They are rarely surrounded by culture-building engagement methods like traditional “desk” employees are. This guide will share ways to reach and engage your non-desk employees, helping them, your business, and our world to thrive.

To help build this guide, we interviewed Leigh Thompson. Leigh is an expert consultant who works with business leaders to develop purpose led strategies that build positive workplace cultures and strong, thriving communities.

Previously at Sage Group plc, Leigh is the founder of gotPurpose, an organisation that helps clients to explore, develop and embed purpose and value led ESG frameworks aligned to their core business.

# What is a non-desk *workforce?*



# Challenges for *engaging* a non-desk workforce

Non-desk employees, also known as frontline workers, are employees in the field. For example, personnel in a store, field sales representatives on the road, factory workers, plant manufacturers, hospital staff, restaurants, and hotels.

Non-desk employees are typically not as well connected to company HQ. 83% of non-desk employees have no corporate email address. Their disconnected nature is through no fault of their own—it's just the type of environment their role demands.

**Some of these challenges may sound familiar to you. Not to worry, you're in the right place to start overcoming them.**

- Your non-desk workforce doesn't have a company email address which makes getting information to them tricky.
- Your non-desk workforce rarely uses email as it's not necessary to do their work.
- Your non-desk employees struggle to take a few hours off due to workload or contracts; it makes options like volunteering hard to do.
- Your non-desk employees are on the road or customer-facing a lot which means keeping up with HQ is a low priority for them.
- Your non-desk employees don't want to miss sales goals or billable minutes by engaging in non-work related activities.
- Your non-desk teams may work in shifts and not be able to gather simultaneously, making it difficult to organise and communicate synchronously.
- Understanding your non-desk employees: their wants, needs, and expectations of the company is a struggle.

Employee engagement strategies for these types of employees need to be a little different. However, just because they're out of office doesn't mean their need for Purpose is any different from a desk employee's.

So, let's dive into how you can reach and engage non-desk employees, how other companies have done it before you, and how you can hit engagement KPIs using purpose-led initiatives.

# How to reach non-desk employees?



# 1. Provide *access to tech*

You'll need to consider access to technology for communications. Does your workforce typically have internet access? If not, how can you help provide that to them in an economically-conscious and inclusive way?

For example, providing a small IT suite at a factory, a smart-phone stipend for travelers, or community tablets, like iPads, in break rooms.

# 2. Try *physical comms*

Don't underestimate the power of physical communication tactics. If your non-desk employees are concentrated in one place, try methods like roll-up banners, posters, or digital screens to reach employees and encourage them to engage with larger efforts.

# 3. Host *'in-person'* meetings

Only 56% of deskless employees in the US feel connected and engaged with their employers. If you can, then hosting meetings is a great way to build team morale and communication.

Especially when it comes to Purpose topics; team huddle announcements, webinars, or video calls are a great way to make it real for those employees that don't get to see their impact every day.

# 4. Link *your resources*

Get creative with the ways you get information into your employees hands. Things like digital forms and surveys that are sent to their inbox can be a great way to increase engagement and ask employees what they want.

If your workforce doesn't have a company email, then give them easy to remember links. Or, try printed QR codes employees can scan and jump straight to your online engagement efforts.

## 5. Introduce *personal device schemes*: Bring-Your-Own-Device

Lastly, if your non-desk employees have smartphones they use in their day-to-day, what tools are out there that you can use and capitalise on to make their communication process smoother and more enjoyable with your business?

If they don't have smartphones already or are unlikely to want to use their personal device, can you introduce a work phone stipend to your company benefits plan?

Once you've supported access, you can introduce communication apps and platforms to spearhead your employee engagement efforts.

The biggest challenge you've most likely experienced with your non-desk workforce is a lack of internal communications.

Research shows that only 1% of business spending is on tech specifically for non-desk employees. One thing you'll notice throughout each of these engagement methods is the importance of mature or developed internal communications processes.

That being said, Purpose and communications go hand-in-hand, you can easily use your purpose program rollout to communicate with employees—that's the power of technology.



# 5 ways to *engage a non- desk workforce* and examples





# 1. *Define Purpose* company-wide and cascade it across all levels

Different cultures and countries have different ideas of what purpose means. If you're managing purpose-driven efforts across different places, there's a high chance you'll need to unify the idea of what Purpose is.

Unless you can develop a purpose-driven mission that resonates with everyone—which is highly unlikely—you won't have all employees immediately aligning with it. It's your job to align - and cascade it effectively throughout the organisation to employees regardless of where they work.

When considering the demographics of the causes or beneficiary groups you want to help, it's important to think about how these will be received across all areas of the organisation, especially those that operate across different countries and cultures.

For example, one of the areas you might choose to focus your social impact work on could be military veterans. While this will be extremely popular in countries like the US, colleagues in Europe may struggle to connect with it.

Your efforts need to be conscious of the entire workforce, their cultures and backdrops - so where possible, focusing on things that aren't too specific and that can be translated and interpreted locally is recommended.

It's important to then share your company-wide vision correctly from the start to avoid disengagement and needing to unpick people's perceptions or understanding further down the line.

Purpose communication doesn't just need to come digitally. Consider team meetings, communicated in print in staff rooms, displayed on team merchandise, and implemented into company naming structures. For example, naming different teams after different purpose missions.



## 2. Focus on *leadership storytelling*

84% of deskless employees agree they don't get enough info from top-level management, and 74% of those say that this senior communication is important for them.

From the top down, try to cascade the story of purpose through all levels of management. Middle management in particular often struggle with this because they're juggling many pressures from all directions and are in conflict with wanting to support purpose initiatives while still delivering against operational targets. Once onboard however, they often become some of the biggest advocates of the company's social impact work and CSR programs.

If you focus on finding and showcasing shining stars at this mid-management level they'll not only lead the way, but they'll also work with you to engage and inspire their peers to get involved. Seeing how engaged and motivated they and their teams are, and how being involved can accelerate the achievement of operational targets rather than distracting from them will encourage them to get involved too.

In addition, provide middle managers with toolkits, scripts and other resources to use in their weekly / daily team huddles to bring a verbal awareness to their teams.



## 3. Find your *non-desk ambassadors* or champions

**Find one person from every team that pushes the company's purpose initiatives alongside their day job.** You'll need to identify those who **have a real passion for the subject matter**—be it wellbeing, diversity & inclusion, purposeful volunteering, or something else.

To help you find your champions, **keep close contact with teams across all departments.** Speak at their team meets, get a hold of department calendars, keep your ears to the ground on any emerging initiatives, and reach out to organisers.

Once you've found these champions, they can help lead the way from the bottom up, inspiring others and sparking a greater interest in these topics.

**Gather champion testimonials** about why purpose initiatives are important to them, about their experience and the difference they make; then share these virtually or physically with their wider teams or department. **Hearing stories from someone working in the same area can sometimes resonate more than those from people you don't know or can't relate to.**

### **Develop a champion/ambassador recognition program**

Once you've found your champions, develop a recognition program. Offer physical and non-physical benefits of being involved to recognise their contribution towards driving the company's purpose agenda forward. These can range from certificates or recognition awards to spotlighting them on your company's social media channels or at internal meetings, or from offering vouchers and access to additional personal development or coaching sessions to making a donation in their name to their chosen charity.

This program can look how you'd like and how it needs to be to fit your culture best. Gather suggestions on how your employees want to be thanked. As long as it continues to inspire great work and serves its purpose, then this point is a winner.

## 4. Maintain *initiatives face-to-face* (virtually or in person)

Where possible, even if it's just a quarterly briefing, organise face-to-face meetings. Not only do these provide reassurance that people haven't been forgotten, when you call a face-to-face meeting it emphasises the importance of what's being shared so is less likely to be ignored. People are more likely to understand and engage rather than following up on an email that sits at the bottom of their inbox.

## 5. Find an *employer-employee balance*

The last piece of advice from Leigh we'll share is to find an employer-employee balance.

*"During my time at Sage we did a really good job at this. We balanced the company's aspiration and areas of focus with the hearts and minds grassroots causes that employees were passionate about.*

*We found the right balance. Everyone had five paid days to volunteer each year. While they could use all five days as they saw fit the hope was that they'd use some to support causes aligned to Sage's focus and the rest to support their own chosen causes and beneficiary groups."*

Sage took their employee engagement efforts a step further with a **match funding program** that means employees raising money for charity can have their fundraising total matched up to £200. This increased and strengthened employee engagement further because not only were they supported with time, but their chosen causes were supported financially too.

Initiatives like this sometimes work, and sometimes don't but if you follow these steps we think you'll be in with a good chance of success.

# Tie your employee engagement efforts together *with tech*

The good news is, investing in deskless tech is predicted to rise—with 31% of employers planning to increase their spend. It's important to optimize every communication channel you have in the meantime, things like face-to-face meetings, printouts, ambassadors—they all play an important part in your engagement strategy.

When you've got your tech on board, brand it and make sure it provides a smooth experience for employees, no matter which device they are using. Support your causes with case studies, great storytelling, and toolkits/templates to pull employees into the platform and greater purpose mission.

Onboard as many non-desk employees to your tech solution as you can with their work devices. If they don't have access to a device, be strategic on how you can get one into their hands, and show the benefits of your purpose platform as quickly as possible.

Remember, technology is only as good as the data and information you put in it. So fill it up, make it your own, and in turn you'll make your engagement strategies work. Support your online strategies with offline communications to give your engagement push the best foundations possible.



*“When you try to engage employees and say: ‘this is our cause and this is what we're going to do to volunteer with them or raise money for them,’ you'll only get so far. You'll only have a small portion of your workforce that's naturally bought into that cause. You need to show interest in causes important to your employees as well.”*



**Leigh Thompson**  
Founder of gotPurpose

Have questions?  
*We're here to help.*

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