



# 6 WAYS TO IMPROVE THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

It's a situation many managers have faced: An employee who seems like a great fit for the job slowly loses interest, starts just doing the bare minimum and eventually leaves, unhappily. In many cases, the problem is that the employee's experience with the job or the organization had suffered, and the manager hadn't realized it, experts say.

During a recent [GovLoop virtual event](#), two government thought leaders discussed the importance of the employee experience and how to improve it. Here are highlights from that discussion.

The speakers:

- Kris Saling, Acting Director/Chief of Staff, Innovation Directorate, U.S. Army Recruiting Command
- Karen Gilliam, Agency Chief Learning Officer, NASA



## Look Beyond Performance

Gartner [defines](#) employee experience as “the way in which employees internalize and interpret the interactions they have with their organization.”

Consider the example of onboarding training, said Kris Saling with Army Recruiting Command. You know when an employee has completed the training, but do you know what their experience was like? What worked and what didn't?

The same could be said for other aspects of the employee's job or an agency's internal services and operations. Surveys can help measure those experiences.

“From a data perspective, we're collecting a lot more information about both effectiveness and employees' willingness and their satisfaction with all those different offerings,” Saling said. “It really captures all the little things that make them say, ‘Hey, I really love working here,’ or ‘Not so much.’”

This due diligence is important as agencies adapt to the hybrid workplace that has emerged in the past several years, said Karen Gilliam with NASA.

“Whether you're in the office, remote or hybrid, the way government employees work has dramatically changed over these past five years,” she said.

## Remember That Employees Have Options

Like every public-sector organization, the Army faces tough competition for talent, and pay is not the only determining factor. Even a strong mission like protecting national security loses its appeal if employees dread the start of each workday.

Because current and prospective employees have so many options, they are not likely to take whatever they're given and try to make the best of it, Saling said. And bad employee experiences eventually create big problems for agencies.

“If we want to have the most talented people come to our organization and do the critical work we need, especially on the national security side, then they've got to value their quality of life and their quality of work,” she said.



## Create a Listening Environment

There's no master playbook for creating a good employee experience because workers have different preferences and values. Leaders and managers must create various opportunities for employees to speak their mind.

“Use surveys, town halls, one-on-one chats,” Saling said. “Just get the pulse of your organization: What kind of stuff motivates them?”

But don't stop at listening. When you hear about something you can change to create a better employee experience, “act on it quickly and communicate that action,” she said.



## Create a Psychologically Safe Environment

Listening will work only if people feel comfortable asking questions and sharing thoughts, Gilliam added. If they don't feel safe expressing themselves honestly, "how are you going to know when that sense of well-being is being disrupted?"

At the organizational level, psychological safety also makes people more comfortable to speak out when they see the opportunity to recommend painful but necessary changes — to challenge your most cherished beliefs, in the words of futurist [Amy Webb](#).

For example, many organizations are still trying to figure out how to operate in a hybrid workplace. "As we maneuver and manage this new way of working, we really need to stop, pause, challenge our cherished beliefs," Gilliam said. "There may be another way, a better way, a different way."



## Keep Remote Workers Engaged

If you have teams that work remotely most of or all the time, take care to keep them engaged, said Gilliam. Remote employees are especially vulnerable to burnout, in part because they don't have the social structure that comes with working an office.

"The physical workplace is far more than just furnishings and real estate," she said. "As technology closes the divide between geographically separate people, it introduces some cracks in relationships and cultures."

NASA, which embraced remote and hybrid work long before the pandemic, has used multiple tactics to create a sense of belonging. They include:

- Incorporating time during team meetings for people to share both personal and work-related milestones and accomplishments, in addition to disappointments and challenges
- Establishing an employee resource group in which remote employees can discuss their experiences, share best practices and organize virtual activities
- Meeting remote workers at least quarterly to discuss what's working well and what could be improved

## Don't Expect Immediate Results

Creating a better workplace for employees takes time, so be patient, said Saling.

"It won't be something where you come in and give a speech and suddenly the organization is different," she said. "Keep consistent, keep communicating, keep listening, keep improving, make it part of your agency's DNA and not just an afterthought, and it will evolve into something lasting and meaningful."

To learn more about how to improve the employee experience, watch the [full session on demand](#).

