



⚠ **From Stagnant  
to Unstoppable:  
How to Motivate the  
Modern Workforce**

**Your guide**  
to transforming demotivated  
employees into happy, growing teams



## △ From Stagnant to Unstoppable: How to Motivate the Modern Workforce

Personal productivity is an intrinsic part of organisational success. That's why today's leaders and managers need their people to be motivated to do the very best they can. But how do you spot the often subtle symptoms of an employee who is struggling to feel engaged with their day job? This in-depth report offers fresh insight and expert advice to help you identify demotivated employees and transform stagnating personnel into happy and productive people who enjoy being at work.

*“Throughout my whole career, I've always felt 100% motivated and inspired at work”*

...said no one ever.

It doesn't matter how well-paid, senior or high-ranking you are, we all know what it feels like to be disengaged and dissatisfied at work.

At an individual level, it can sap your energy and leave you feeling like your career is in a rut. Pretty quickly, your productivity can plummet.

At a broader business level, it can spark a low-morale epidemic. If your top-performing people are looking for a new job elsewhere, it could be because they're unhappy with their growth prospects and current role. In fact, recent research has estimated that approximately 59% of UK workers are looking for a new job.<sup>i</sup>



According to UK workers, nearly half of all jobs fail to provide decent career development.<sup>ii</sup>

i. <https://www.investorsinpeople.com/sites/default/files/IIP%20Job%20Exodus%20Trends%20-%202017%20employee%20sentiment%20poll.pdf>

ii. [https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/uk-working-lives-summary\\_tcm18-40233.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/uk-working-lives-summary_tcm18-40233.pdf) (pg6)



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And that means you need to look out for the signs. Low staff engagement is bad news for individual employees and it's bad news for your organisation.

Some studies suggest that only 13% of employees across the world are engaged and satisfied with their jobs.<sup>iii</sup> Any organisation that fails to act is missing an opportunity: businesses with highly engaged staff see a 20% uplift in sales.<sup>iv</sup>

So how can you spot the signs and turn dissatisfied employees into happy, productive superstars? PageGroup has teamed up with top career coach Sarah Archer to identify the seven telltale symptoms of an employee who feels that their career is stagnating.

This essential guide helps you and your organisation remedy an unmotivated workforce and reinvigorate the growth of your team (and boost your bottom line in the process).










## Who is Sarah Archer?

Sarah Archer is an experienced career coach. Following 20 years working in HR in the commercial and voluntary sectors, she trained with Career Counselling Services and now holds an MSc in Career Coaching. Her work has been published by Coaching: an International Journal of Theory, Research & Practice, and she regularly writes for numerous national websites, including The Guardian and Mumsnet. In 2010, she founded the careers guidance website [CareerTree](#).

## Seven diagnosis areas for stagnation

Below are the seven key places to look for signs of stagnation.

1	 Team fit
2	 Communications
3	 Training
4	 Opportunity
5	 Promotion
6	 Leadership
7	 Business Performance

iii. <http://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/188033/worldwide-employee-engagement-crisis.aspx>

iv. <http://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/208487/right-culture-not-employee-happiness.aspx>



## 1

**SYMPTOM:** Your people aren't collaborating

**REMEDY:** Build a team, not a group of individuals

Today's globalised business environment is more reliant on strong teams that excel at collaboration than ever before. At their best, great team dynamics can bring randomly-assembled people together to form life-long friendships and produce fantastic work. Everyone working towards a shared goal, with a strong grasp of emotional intelligence, means everyone knows where they stand and everyone can contribute. That's when it works well. But it's all too easy for teams to go wrong.

### Get the balance right and be a diplomat

A lack of team togetherness and collaboration is often the first sign of employee disengagement. If the team fit **isn't right** (do you have a healthy balance of introverts and extroverts?) and workers are mismatched in personality, people tend to retreat into themselves. The result is an unproductive and demoralised team. In-fighting, regular arguments and stress can all be signs of poor team health.

Low morale in a close-knit team - even a happy one - can have a devastating ripple effect. It needs to be solved quickly. But how?

### Employee stagnation: Pain relief in three points...

#### ^ Get the right mix

One person's efficient process is another's frustrating barrier to getting things done. Review the current working styles of your team (including yourself) - do you understand your mix? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Are there any obvious red flags that could be leading to tension or demotivation?

#### ^ Take enough time

Take time out as a team to work through some of the existing issues - challenge individuals to put forward their own suggestions for smoothing processes etc. With their working styles in mind, also spend some time resetting and clarifying everyone's roles and responsibilities, and then making it clear the value that each brings to the team.

#### ^ Bring in new talent

This could be either by hiring someone external or making a switch internally. Sometimes a new team member or leader can provide a much-needed energy boost and kick-start a renewed sense of team cohesion.



### Archer's Analysis

*"Negative emotion is contagious so unhappiness can spread like wildfire through a team, especially when there are high stress levels and poor team cohesion to begin with. This can often go hand-in-hand with team members feeling there is a lack of recognition for their contribution, and that management does not value them. This disengagement may then impact and affect other teams."*

## 2

**SYMPTOM:** Team members voice feeling out of the loop

**REMEDY:** Improve communication and feedback

Communication. It's the root cause of so many organisational failings. But this isn't just about individual team members failing to communicate. It runs right to the very top; to keep people feeling engaged your core leadership team must regularly and clearly communicate to all levels of the organisation; they should always lead by example when it comes to communication.

And remember that email memos simply aren't good enough. Make sure you vary the communication methods, from video to company get-togethers to in-person meet and greets.

### The FOMO effect

If you don't communicate, employees will soon feel isolated. All of us have a fear of missing out – missing just one communication or important piece of decision-making could make an employee feel out of the loop.

The result? Rumours, office gossip, avoidable drama, and ultimately employees who feel disconnected from the wider business. But the fix can be simple.

### Employee stagnation: Pain relief in three points...

#### ▲ Communication is a priority, not a nice-to-have

Make time for communication, whether publicly in team meetings or through other channels such as email, SMS, work social networks and even screens, posters and notice boards. It might feel like a low priority but when weighed against the time needed to fix the negative results of poor communication, the case is clear.

#### ▲ Don't under-communicate

There is a fine line when it comes to frequency. Whilst over-communication can lead to employees switching off, under-communication can lead to a complete lack of knowledge across the workforce. For important matters, ensure you follow verbal communication with a recap in writing.

#### ▲ Give feedback

Make sure you give regular feedback, good or bad. But remember that positive feedback takes longer for the brain to absorb.



### Archer's Analysis

*"This is a common issue affecting businesses large and small. When managers are stressed and overwhelmed, often the first things to be cancelled are team meetings and one-on-one sessions, which leaves employees in limbo. It's then easy for employees to make assumptions in the absence of information about what is happening in the business. Plus dissatisfaction with a manager is often a key reason people leave their jobs."*



## 3

**SYMPTOM:** Your employees aren't progressing or have lost confidence in their abilities

**REMEDY:** Offer better training options to give them a renewed sense of purpose

There's a well-known story. You might have heard it. It goes something like this...

A CFO asked their CEO: "What happens if you invest in training and your employees leave?" The CEO replied: "What happens if we don't train them and they stay?"

Training has a double-hit effect: first, it ensures your people have the best possible skills to do their job, directly benefiting your organisation. Second, it sends a message to your employees - 'we value you enough to invest in you'.

It can be seen as a vote of confidence. Although tact is required - depending on the training course being proposed - some employees could take it as the exact opposite.

Training needn't be costly. With online platforms like LinkedIn's [linda.com](https://www.linkedin.com/learning), desk training is more accessible than ever. But variation is advised - offer a range of courses and formats, from online videos to off-site tutored courses.

### A sticking plaster won't do

Continual training development is required for continual employee growth. Take a strategic, planned approach. Don't throw broad-stroke training courses at employees and expect them to become re-engaged overnight. Assess both the individual's goals and your organisational goals and plan ahead to craft a training plan that fits everyone's objectives.

Employees without training get stuck in the same position, not able to progress or confident in pushing themselves into new tasks. Feeling dejected at their career prospects, they look elsewhere for the training they wanted. The training you could have supplied...



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## Employee stagnation: Pain relief in three points...

### ▲ Give your people the skills they want and need

With more focus on skills than ever, you should consider significantly increasing the amount of time you currently commit to career development planning.

### ▲ Do your research

The pace of change within the training landscape is incredible and you'd be surprised to discover the options available to suit every possible need. As well as exploring both internal and external trainings, make sure you vary the size of the sessions on offer. Group trainings can be useful for some topics, but others require a more individual approach.

### ▲ Don't forget the long term

Take into consideration both soft and hard skills (including possible qualifications) when devising a plan of attack for your employees - and don't be afraid to throw in something that won't immediately impact their day-to-day. Sometimes aspiration training is the most rewarding.

## Archer's Analysis

*"When budgets are tight, training is often deprioritised. But having a robust talent plan in place is key to business growth. If employees can't see any opportunities for either learning or prospects then they will look elsewhere – risking a 'brain drain'. And the impact if they stay is a workforce that is ill-equipped to meet future business challenges."*





4

**SYMPTOM:** Employees are appearing lazy or complacent

**REMEDY:** Make sure they have a clearly defined career ladder

When an employee starts showing signs of a complacency or has stopped proactively seeking new projects to get involved in, it's often a sign they're not feeling engaged in the business. They may have lost hope in achieving a reward, progression or promotion. The best way to get them back and stop them leaving is to create a clear talent progression pathway. For small companies in particular, this can be tough. But offering clear, well-defined career progression to all staff is essential for motivation. After all, we all want to be working towards something.

### A career path treatment plan

All employees, however senior, need to grow and need a career goal to aim at. Some employees will be happy staying where they are for the long term. But they're a minority. You must plan for each employee's career growth. Giving employees new responsibilities is a good start. But climbing the career ladder is the ultimate goal for the most ambitious personnel.

Without a clear career path or chance to tackle new challenges, employees become dejected. This will manifest itself in their work ethic, making them appear lazy, demotivated, and lacking in punctuality. Always have a plan for each individual employee's career growth, and make sure they know you've got a plan. Discuss it with them, get their feedback, and listen to what they say.

### Employee stagnation: Pain relief in three points...

#### ▲ Keep records

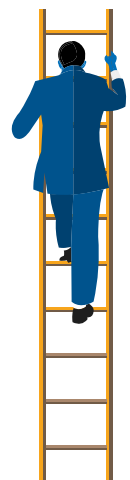
Commit to updating a long-term diary of how employees are progressing. Do you know when their last promotion was, and when they're aiming for their next? You should.

#### ▲ Plan and review, plan and review, plan and review

Build career development plans for all your people - and then set aside time to regularly review their progress.

#### ▲ Think sideways

Not everyone wants to pursue a straightforward path up the ranks - consider the options for a horizontal move as well as a vertical one when planning your employees' next steps.



### Archer's Analysis

*"Allowing your career to plateau may suit some employees for a while, but most people seek either promotion or a professional challenge in their careers. Boredom kills productivity, which is bad news for profitability, and if a company develops a reputation for poor progression then it could make it harder to recruit key staff."*





5

## **SYMPTOM:** Employees have stopped pushing for promotion **REMEDY:** Think beyond the money

If an employee has stopped asking for a promotion or has lost their usual competitive edge, it could be a sign they're on the lookout for jobs elsewhere. They are no longer thinking about what the future looks like at your organisation.

### Throwing money at the problem isn't the answer

An immediate pay rise might be a short-term fix – particularly if there is evidence that your current salaries don't align to industry averages. However, money doesn't always necessarily fulfil the basic need to be important, to be in a role that the employee sees as valuable. That relies on a host of other factors, including - but not exclusive to - reward and remuneration.

Before jumping straight to a payout, make sure you understand where the dissatisfaction is coming from. Again, a simple lack of communication could be the underlying cause of the problem. Is the employee's career path well-defined and has it been properly explained to them? Do they know when their next promotion (and pay rise) might be coming? Many will be prepared to wait – they just need a realistic timeframe.

Remember that we're all a part of the job market. If you want to keep a key member of your team, a competitive salary is important, but it is just one part of a much bigger picture. For employees who are thinking about jumping ship, an upgraded job title and better career progression can be enough to sway them. If you do end up having to spend money, however, it is helpful to remind yourself that motivated employees are more productive and are more likely to make a more positive impact on your organisation's bottom line as a result.



### Employee stagnation: Pain relief in three points...

#### ▲ Do your research

Find out how your salaries compare to the [industry average](#) – are you paying the going rate?

#### ▲ Are your benefits really a benefit?

Include your benefits package in your review process – companies have an opportunity to really stand out from the crowd and show employee value through the so-called 'extras' they offer. You can explore the top most wanted benefits according to employees [here](#).

#### ▲ Is it really about money?

Don't assume a pay-rise is always the answer. Consider all the stagnation factors as part of your problem solving - how is the team fit? Is their work offering a suitable challenge? Boredom is always bad for business.

### Archer's Analysis

*"Money alone is rarely an issue for most staff. But it can become a de-motivator when other areas are also a problem. Employees may not be looking for salary increases if they have a challenge or stretch in their roles, or are part of a great team. If other organisational issues are causing unhappiness then lack of pay progression will be an issue too."*



6

**SYMPTOM:** Staff lack confidence in the direction of the organisation

**REMEDY:** Make sure your leadership team offers vision, direction and ambition

Here's a quick challenge. Think of three famous business leaders from throughout history. What's common to all of them?

We'd bet every leader on your list has a vision – a vision of how a business should be run, what a product should look like, of how to manage their people. In short, visionary leadership never goes out of fashion.

### Vision, direction, ambition

If your organisation's leadership is showing a lack of direction, sentiment will filter down to the wider business and employees will react accordingly. Far from being branding fluff, mission statements and organisational values become very important in communicating your vision – what are the organisation's short- and long-term objectives? Where do you see the organisation in one, three, or five years' time? Vision is key.

If employees are unclear of where the company is headed or lack confidence in the quality of leadership, they will often look for a steadier ship.

### Employee stagnation: Pain relief in three points...

#### ▲ Take control of the means of communication

You can't always change your company's vision – but you can control how it is communicated. Do employees need a refresh? Should this take the form of a simple email communication or is a longer in-person session needed?

#### ▲ Make it real

How much 'face-time' are employees getting with your leadership? Can you encourage this further through increased internal communications, like blogs, profiles, meetings, and town hall gatherings?

#### ▲ Consider mentoring

Outside of your own company, can you bolster your employees' access to leadership by finding them an external mentor?



### Archer's Analysis

*"Leadership sets the culture and performance of the organisation. Lack of trust in the senior team can create uncertainty for employees and could see top talent leave. After all, who wants to be associated with a business that has a poor reputation? Those employees that do stay often acclimatise to the low performance culture, and then become hard to shift in the longer term."*



7

**SYMPTOM:** Employees are leaving left, right and centre

**REMEDY:** Don't get left behind. Stay ahead of market developments

At least some of your leadership's vision should include a prediction on where the market will go in the months and years ahead. The only thing that's certain in business is that the market will change. A business that fails to stay ahead of change - to stay one or two moves ahead of the game - will fall into irrelevance.

If your organisation doesn't have the vision to stay out in front, your employees will sense it immediately. Employees want a career that has longevity - any sign of their employer falling behind and they'll start looking for an employer that's moving with the times.

### See the change ahead

Leadership and organisational agility - the ability to adapt to change - play a part in the race to stay ahead, but sometimes it's out of your hands. If the whole market slumps, then employees can feel the pressure, causing negativity. The leader's role becomes one of politics and strategy. Saying the right thing while steering the ship through rough seas. Your employees will trust you even more once you reach the calmer waters.

### Employee stagnation: Pain relief in three points...

#### ▲ Imagine a vision for the future

Be a visionary and think years ahead - ensure your leadership is setting out their plan for the company beyond the next 12 months.

#### ▲ Give industry context

Make sure your communications always set the broader industry context - employees need to know if your company's performance is the exception or the norm.

#### ▲ Show your working

It's ok to say you don't always have the answer, but you need to lay out a roadmap for success. If you're not at the destination yet, how do you get there? And make sure your people know each and every step. Otherwise they won't be coming with you on the journey.



### Archer's Analysis

*"Employees like the security of employment, and if the business looks less secure for whatever reason then that can be a trigger for them to reassess whether to stay or not. I see employees who have decided to change career because the area they work in is no longer a growth industry, and they want to future-proof their career."*

## Just what the doctor ordered

Good people are hard to come by, so it pays to look out for these seven signs of stagnation. From a team that doesn't work as a cohesive unit to bored and complacent employees that have lost their competitive edge, it's usually a case of 'it's not them, it's you'. You have the ability to make more of a difference than you think. It doesn't have to lead to a break up.

If you want more advice on how to keep - and recruit - the best employees, check out these resources to learn more.



[Management advice](#)



[Work better together quiz](#)



[Top skills 2018](#)

### Why speak to PageGroup?

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