

# Finding Ways to Attract Hard to Engage Employees



## THE 1%: FINDING WAYS TO ATTRACT HARD TO ENGAGE EMPLOYEES

David Whitelaw Reid traveled nearly 10,000 miles from New York to Hong Kong. His trip ruined his Labor Day holiday plans, but he didn't mind. His job as the Executive Director of Global Talent Initiatives for the non-profit Asia Society is to help Fortune 500 companies in Asia develop solutions for their talent pipeline. He loves what he does. He brings company leaders together to tackle issues relating to developing, engaging and retaining Asian talent, and in particular, millennials overall and women in senior leadership. Helping leaders develop cultural agility and a global mindset are also key focus areas for Reid's team. And, depending on the country, some challenges can be bigger than others.

New research suggests Japan faces taller hurdles than its global counterparts. More than in any other nation studied, new data from [Steelcase](#) and research firm [Ipsos](#) reveals Japanese workers are dissatisfied with the quality of their life at work. Several studies show a lack of engagement, lack of trust and lack of feeling valued at workplaces in Japan. Here's a breakdown of just some of the numbers that set Japan apart.

## Steelcase Global Report: Japan

- **1%** – Describe themselves as highly engaged (compared to the global average of 13 percent). Lowest in the 20 country Global Report.
- **61%** – Describe themselves as disengaged. Nearly double the global average.
- **5.4 out of 10** – Score for quality of life at work (global average is 6.6). Lowest of 20 countries.
- **39%** – Say their company gets the best out of them (global average is 63 percent). Lowest of 20 countries.
- **34%** – Say their company values and recognizes them (global average is 56 percent). Lowest of 20 countries.

The tough statistics don't stop there. [Ernst & Young's 2016 Global Generations study](#) found full-time workers surveyed in Japan had by far the lowest levels of trust among the eight countries studied. Only 21 percent of employees had a great deal of trust in their employer, and only 22 percent had both a great deal of trust in their boss and their team and colleagues. The global average was more than double that.

All of these factors make attracting and retaining highly-skilled, highly-valued people a bottom-line business issue requiring needed attention. Reid says many companies in Asia use cash as king to lure and keep people leading to a “boomerang effect.” A company hires someone, they leave shortly thereafter for more money somewhere else and then return to the original company in a different, higher paid role. The costs associated with the “boomerang effect” are not always sustainable.

**“What some businesses are realizing is they need to find new ways to combat the competition when they don't really have the cash to constantly re-up against some of the well-resourced companies. How do you handle competition for talent?”**

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**DAVID WHITELAW REID** | Executive Director of Global Talent Initiatives for the non-profit Asia Society

Reid says in order to compete for the best people employee engagement tactics beyond compensation are likely to gain traction in Asia as rapid capital growth wanes. In Japan, that growth is already in decline. Yet, many Asian companies are still in the infancy when it comes to employee engagement.

“There's a long way to go in terms of maturity on employee engagement in some places in Asia. They are in the beginning stages of developing this out,” said Reid.

Research is uncovering ways to further engage people at the office. Steelcase's Global Report revealed a strong correlation between how engaged people in Japan say they are at work and how they feel about their work environment.

## Steelcase Global Report: Japan

- **55%** – Disagree when asked if they like their work environment. Highest of 20 countries.
- **37%** – Say their company has sufficient meeting rooms. Lowest in 20 countries.
- **16%** – Say their workplace has private space for focus or rejuvenation. Lowest in 20 countries.
- **94%** – Never work away from the office. Highest of 20 countries.

Employees in Japan are tied to their desks. And, overwhelmingly, they report not having the spaces they need to perform at their best each day.

The recent Ernst & Young study echoes these findings. Along with concerns about money and leadership, one of the top five factors it found led to a lack of trust between employees and employers was “a work environment not conducive to collaboration.”

The impact an environment can have magnifies when it came to millennials. One of the top five reasons millennials in Japan would quit a job, according to the Ernst & Young study, was “a work environment that does not encourage teamwork.” That factor landed at 71 percent, nearly tied with too much overtime and not enough wage growth.

Looking at this growing body of research, Steelcase global design experts suggest opportunities for engaging and supporting employees. One strategy: Create a variety of spaces throughout the workplace including rooms for small group work, social cafes, enclaves screened for privacy and large team areas to allow employees to choose the space that best supports the kind of work they need to do.

While Reid flies halfway around the world to build relationships between company leaders hoping to connect and solve problems, the employees who work for those companies want to build relationships too. After all, when you retire, what are you going to miss about work? The people, right? Creating spaces that help people connect and be their best at work can help.

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## New 360 Research: Employee Engagement in Japan, Brazil + Australia

Japan, Brazil and Australia are new additions to Steelcase’s growing body of research exploring the relationship between employee engagement and the workplace. Find out which country has the lowest report of highly engaged workers and discover key takeaways from each of the new countries studied.



**Rebecca Charbauski**  
Senior Communications Specialist

Rebecca, an Emmy-winning journalist, reports on global research impacting the places where people work, learn and heal. Over her career, Rebecca spent 17 years covering local and national news events on television and a variety of digital platforms. She directed a digital news group in Kansas City for three years before becoming news director in Grand Rapids, Michigan for more than five years. Prior to Steelcase, Rebecca worked with one of the four largest media groups in the United States to coordinate news coverage among 48 newsrooms from the east to west coast.

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