

# Employee Relations: Future Proofing Engagement & Satisfaction

---

*HRM Insights Series*





Zuppo Consulting

## Executive Summary

Future proofing employee engagement and satisfaction involves a systematic approach to minimizing risk and maximizing your most important asset: **talent**. Identifying critical opportunities through employee relations best practices yields big payoffs in terms of people who will consistently do their best work and hold a positive view of their value in the organization.

Proactively assessing your organization's employee satisfaction and engagement amounts to preventative maintenance and represents a continued investment in your people. Based upon best practices, regular assessment and analysis, along with attention to the details, potential problems can be identified before they become issues. By creating a culture of continuous employee relations improvement, professional respect and open communication will boost organizational performance and encourage innovation.

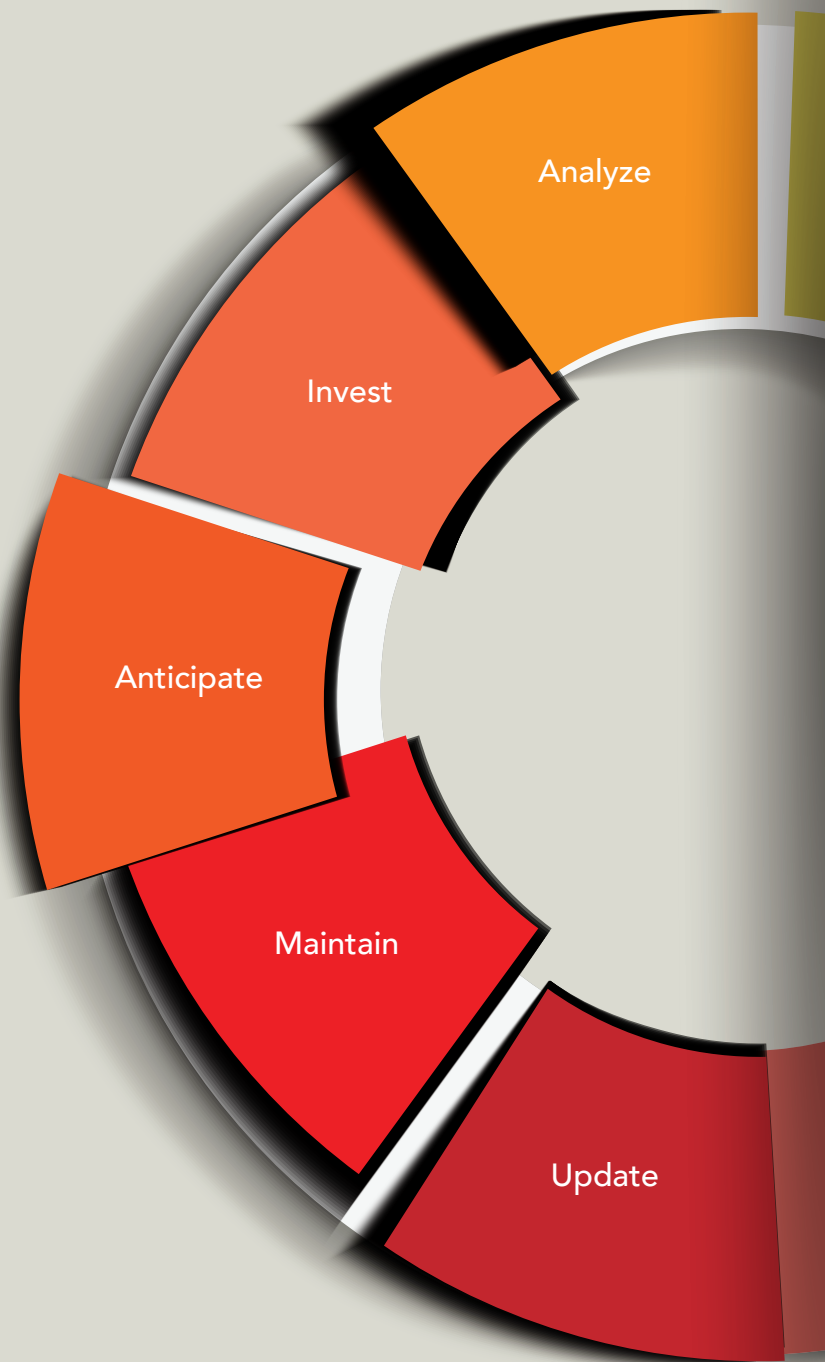
Unforeseen issues will come up, however, most employee relations problems emerge after a period of incubation, strongly suggesting that negative outcomes are avoidable. The longer issues exist before surfacing, the more vulnerable the organization is to widespread morale problems. Overall risk to the organization increases and may compromise the organization's ability to attract and retain the best talent.

A solid approach to future proofing engagement and satisfaction ensures talent assets are protected through positive employee relations practices.

*We are what we repeatedly do.  
Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit.*

*~ Aristotle.*

# Future Proofing Principles



Future proofing employee engagement and satisfaction involves taking steps to ensure all components of an employee relations strategy will continue to provide value and protect your talent investment.

Because many organizations face increasingly complex business demands, guarding against small problems that might escalate is necessary and achievable.

Future proofing minimizes risk and provides a strong foundation for a healthy organization.

Trust and transparency between management and employees reduces work-place stress and enhances everyone's ability to succeed.

Future proofing is all about taking *proactive* steps toward protecting your talent assets.



Zuppo Consulting

## The Cost of Being Unprepared

Unplanned employee relations issues can cause budgetary chaos, delays, inefficiencies, and frustration. The effectiveness of every management person in the organization as employee relations ambassadors has a direct influence on satisfaction, engagement and commitment.

In today's volatile employee relations landscape, it is crucial for organizations to make every effort to ensure transparency and solid communication.

Future proofing employee engagement and satisfaction is the best strategy to keep talent happy and boost productivity. Once an employee relations crisis emerges, it might be too late.

**The Fix:** Adopt a systematic approach to making sure your employee relations strategies remain effective, so your talent remains motivated and happy in their work.

## STEP 1 Assess Organizational Culture

Believing any organization is without some degree of employee relations vulnerability contributes to being woefully unprepared to deal with potential legal and labor problems. No organization has a 100% perfect employee relations picture, but the best make sure they do certain things right.

Keeping a running, categorized list of employee comments or concerns provides a clear picture of how important an issue may be to your employee population. Without being able to quantify the shifts in what your employees want and need, you could end up with bigger problems than anticipated.

Providing for a brutally honest picture of your culture is best accomplished by someone from the outside as symptoms can be difficult for insiders to see. Objectively identifying opportunities and issues removes the chance that subjectivity might obscure the view.

Consult an outside professional to conduct an HR audit for an unbiased assessment. That way, you can spend your time enhancing your contribution to overall success of the organization.

**Bonus:** Consult a trusted professional to assist with an HR audit and culture inventory.

## STEP 2 Ensure Training is a Top Priority

**Bonus:** Monitor management's engagement and satisfaction for a strong organizational foundation.

Organizations cannot afford even one bad manager as it is estimated that 70% of the variance of engagement is related to poor management. Frustration comes with a high cost. Resist thinking that employee relations problems are limited to the complainers and malcontents.

Realize that your best employees will try to do the right thing by working with management to resolve problems because they'd rather not have the distraction or added stress. However, make no mistake, your best performers have lots of career options and rather than try to fight a battle they can't win, they'll go elsewhere.

Protect engagement and satisfaction by training your management people before they manage and refresh often. Remove anyone who demonstrates resistance to positive employee relations practices but be sure to monitor management's engagement and satisfaction as well.

**Bonus:** Be open to seeing or hearing things that are less than positive as it's better to know. That way, small problems can be resolved before they become overwhelming.

## STEP 3 Minimize Surprises

Use the information from Step 1 (Assess Org Culture) to plan for the future. Develop strategies and supporting tactics well in advance and solicit feedback at every phase. Be sure to take into account any internal and external factors that contribute to shifts in attitudes, opinions, and commitment. Avoid relying on outdated survey data and regularly take the pulse of both management and employees.

Establishing a regular schedule for training (Step 2) minimizes the risk of unpleasant surprises and maximizes chances for shared success. Keep in mind that relying only upon reactive employee relations strategies can be costly and painful.



Zuppo Consulting

## STEP 4 Proactive Maintenance

Regularly work with an outside employee relations professional to be sure your organization experiences as little variation in engagement and satisfaction as possible. Soliciting a fresh perspective increases the odds that only small changes (vs. massive upheavals) will be necessary.

Establishing consistency and predictability provides a vehicle for transparency and fairness. That way, when people are faced with change, they will be more likely to supportive because changes represent the removal of obstacles to being productive.

## STEP 5 Create Quantifiable Peace of Mind

To keep your organization healthy, take steps to free your people up to do what they do best. Take full advantage of the fact that employee relations professionals are **partners** who work side by side with you, offering support and advice. Additionally, these partners can work with all members of your management and employee population to establish and maintain a positive organizational culture with high engagement and satisfaction.

Create quantifiable peace of mind by turning to an industry expert to provide support and manage complexity. Establish a managed service contract with a knowledgeable, trustworthy employee relations expert to accomplish Steps 1-4.

Types of services can range from basic assessments to more extensive engagements such as assisting in strategic planning or management of a critical situation.

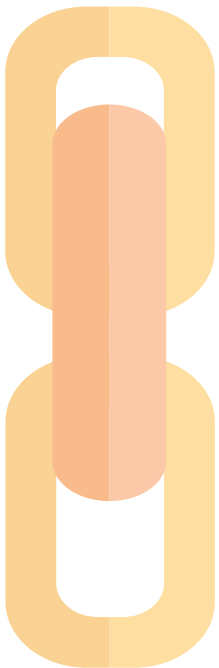
Working with an employee relations professional facilitates more control over how engagement and satisfaction are managed. By design, communication is enhanced between employees and management and precious assets (talent) are protected.

**Bonus:** Ensure consistency and fairness in all matters of management and remove barriers to getting the job done.

**Bonus:** Establish a partnership with an employee relations industry professional to provide regular support and help manage complexity.



Zuppo Consulting



## Future Proof to Protect Your Bottom Line:

The fact is that lack of preventative maintenance of employee relations strategies can have serious consequences for an organization. Unionization efforts are on the rise and employers who are not prepared stand to lose a great deal, especially if their employee population is frustrated, disengaged, or dissatisfied.

While it is never easy to hear negative things about one's organization, if culture and climate are plagued with a lack of trust, communication problems, and poor management, it's likely that a union has already found contacts within your organization and are preparing their strategy now. Employers who are not prepared will have little time and almost no chance of winning back employee hearts and minds that have checked out due to lack of proper care and feeding (i.e., a strong foundation built on positive employee relations strategies).

Managing and promoting positive change in the HR/ER space has become increasingly complex as new challenges are constantly emerging. Finding ways to improve performance while maintaining a high level of productivity necessitates future proofing employee engagement and satisfaction at all levels.

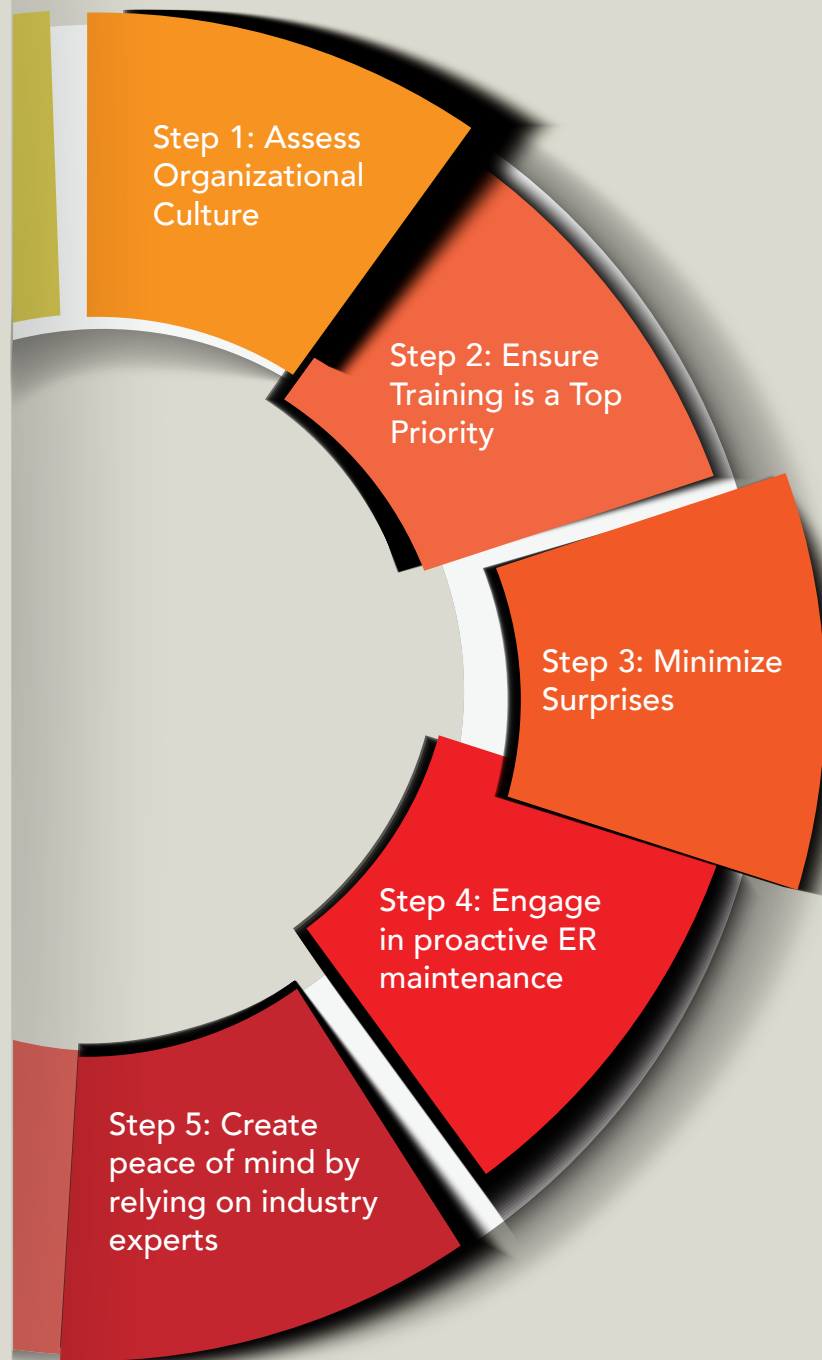
Working with an employee relations expert offers quantifiable peace of mind by closing the future proof loop.

That way, you can focus on what you do best: building an optimal future for your employees and your organization.



# Future Proofing Process

A systematic approach to future proofing takes the guesswork out of employee relations practices and protects investment in talent.



Zuppo Consulting



## About the Author



**Cori Zuppo, SHRM-SCP, SPHR, GPHR**, is the Principal of Zuppo Consulting. Cori earned her Ph.D. in Technology Management from Indiana State University with a specialization in Human Resource Development and Industrial Training. Cori's dissertation research was entitled "Organizations as consumers of human capital via technology: A policy study of information and communication technologies." Cori also holds an M.A.Ed. from The George Washington University and a B.S. in Conflict Resolution from Ohio University. Cori received advanced mediation training at Capital Law School and has completed the CUE Employee and Labor Relations Certification Program.

Cori's industry experience in HRM, labor relations and corporate legal has been in both union and non-union environments. Cori has diverse experience in corporate and academic environments. Areas of consulting expertise include HRM, employee & labor relations, HRD, organization development, organizational strategy, communication, technology management, leadership, and management development.

Contact Cori to explore how she can help assess and strengthen your employee relations strategy.



Zuppo Consulting