

The 2026 State of Team Building

Companies are forcing their people physically back together at the exact moment they've never felt further apart. This is the data on the gap between proximity and connection — and what actually closes it.

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THE HEADLINE

Proximity went up.
Connection went down.

20%

of employees worldwide are engaged at work — the lowest since 2020.

Gallup, 2026

\$10T

annual cost of disengagement to the global economy — about 9% of GDP.

Gallup, 2026

54%

of the Fortune 100 now mandate five days in-office; about one-third of all U.S. firms require full-time on-site.

JLL via Fortune; Flex Index, 2025–26

1 in 5

workers feel lonely — rising to 1 in 4 among remote employees.

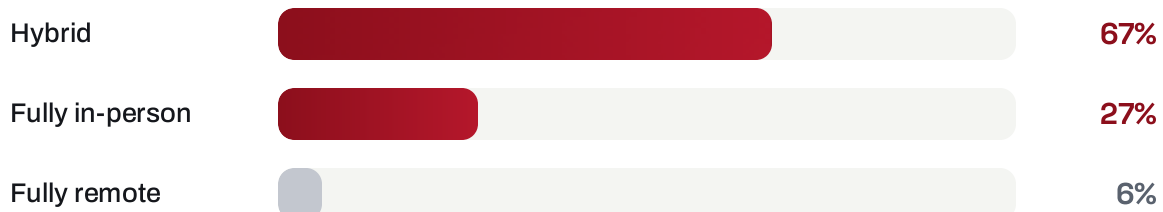
Gallup, 2025

Everyone's back in the building

After five years of negotiation, 2026 is the year the office won — at least on paper. The return-to-office wave that began with Amazon's 350,000-employee mandate has become the default posture of corporate America.

How America works in 2026

Share of companies by work model, end of 2025.



About one-third of U.S. firms (34%) now require workers fully on-site, and among the Fortune 100, five-day mandates have climbed from just 5% two years earlier to 54% — with the average in-office requirement rising to 3.8 days a week.³⁴ Three days a week is the most common hybrid requirement, and enforcement is hardening: 69% of employers now track attendance, up from 45% a year earlier.¹

Leaders frame the return around collaboration, culture and mentorship. But the evidence that mandates deliver those things is thin — while the cost is not. Eight in ten enterprises say they've lost talent to strict RTO policies, and companies with rigid mandates report turnover roughly 13% higher than flexible peers. The people most likely to walk are the ones you least want to lose: research finds skilled employees are 77% more likely to leave after a mandate, and senior employees 36% more likely.²⁴

54%

of **Fortune 100** companies now require five days a week in the office — up from just **5% two years earlier**. Proximity is being mandated. Connection cannot be.³

02 • THE CONNECTION GAP

Together in the room, alone at the desk

Here is the paradox that defines 2026: the same companies filling their offices are presiding over the lowest employee engagement in years. Putting people in a building did not put them on a team.

Gallup's 2026 State of the Global Workplace pegs global engagement at just 20% — down from a peak of 23% in 2022, and the first time Gallup has ever recorded two straight years of decline. Each percentage point represents roughly 21 million workers, so that slide is tens of millions of people who have quietly checked out.⁵⁶

The human signal underneath the engagement number is loneliness. About 1 in 5 employees say they felt lonely much of the previous day — and that climbs to 1 in 4 among fully remote workers. Forty percent report significant daily stress.⁷ Co-location alone does nothing to fix this; a room full of people who don't trust each other is just a more expensive form of disconnection.

20%

engaged at work globally —
lowest since 2020

40%

of employees feel significant
stress every day

22%

feel lonely a lot of the day —
25% of remote workers

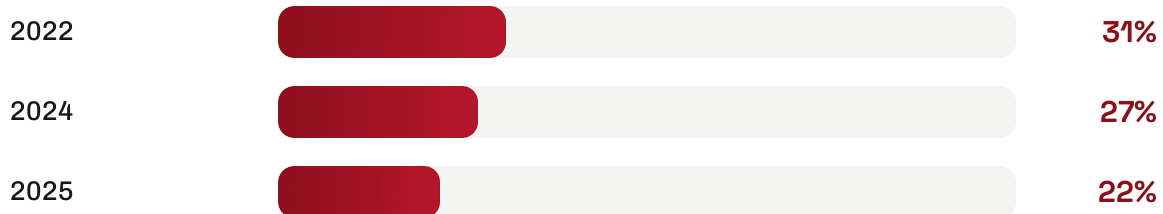
The cost is not abstract. Gallup estimates low engagement drains about \$10 trillion from the global economy each year — roughly 9% of GDP. Closing the gap to best-practice levels of engagement would add an estimated \$9.6 trillion in productivity.⁵ The opportunity is as large as the problem.

The people holding teams together are coming apart

If there is one through-line in this year's data, it is that the manager crisis has become the workforce crisis. Managers drive an estimated 70% of the variance in team engagement — and they are burning out fastest.

Manager engagement is falling off a cliff

Share of managers engaged at work, globally.



Manager engagement fell from 27% to 22% in a single year — a nine-point slide since 2022 and the steepest drop in the dataset. The “engagement premium” managers once held over their teams has essentially vanished; they are now only about as engaged as the people they lead.⁵⁶ Younger and female managers report the sharpest declines in both engagement and wellbeing.

That matters because the manager is the single biggest lever on team performance — and most have never been equipped to pull it. Fewer than 44% of managers worldwide have received any formal training.⁷ The gap between what we ask of managers and what we’ve given them has never been wider.

Connection is trainable. So is the recovery.

The hopeful half of the data: the same research that maps the crisis also points to the way out. Disengagement is not destiny — it responds, measurably, to deliberate investment in people.

Gallup finds that giving managers role-specific training cuts active disengagement roughly in half, and that managers trained in coaching practices deliver 20–28% improvements in performance with up to 18% higher engagement on their teams.⁷⁸ Training alone lifts manager thriving from 28% to 34%; pair it with ongoing development and that figure jumps to 50%.⁸

The lesson for team building is direct. What moves these numbers isn't a pizza party or a trust fall — it's structured, repeated, emotionally real experiences that build trust and give people a reason to care, reinforced over time. One-off events create a spark; deliberate practice turns it into a habit. The companies that treat connection as a discipline, not a perk, are the ones that close the gap.

2×

training roughly halves
active disengagement
among managers

20–28%

performance gain from
coaching-trained managers

50%

of managers thrive with
training plus ongoing
development

What we see across 2,000+ events

We've spent 20+ years building teams the only way that lasts — by connecting heart and mind to a real business outcome, then measuring whether it stuck. Our own data lines up with the research: when an experience is emotional *and* measured, it changes behavior.

BUILDING TEAMS · PROPRIETARY DATA

By the numbers: 20+ years of the give-back model

According to Building Teams' own program data, across two decades the pattern holds: make the lesson emotional, tie it to a business outcome, and follow the behavior for 30 days. The result is connection that lasts — at any scale.

4.76/5

average
participant rating
across 2,000+
events

500k+

participants
since 2003

1,500+

companies
served, incl. 80%
of the Fortune
500

50,000+

bikes built and given
to children

4.88/5

"good use of my
time" — DaVita
national meeting

**30
days**

of behavioral
follow-up after
every
engagement

**5–
5,000**

people per event
— everyone
participating at
once

1

Guinness World
Record — the largest
bike build ever
(DaVita)

The mechanism is simple and backed by the science above: an emotionally charged, give-back experience creates connection that proximity alone never will — and a 30-day measurement loop turns that moment into durable behavior change tied to outcomes like service, quality, trust and leadership. In a year when companies are spending enormously to put people back in the same room, the question isn't whether they're together. It's whether they're a team.



The 2026 takeaway: **proximity is being mandated; connection has to be built.** The organizations that treat team building as a measurable discipline — not a perk — are the ones that will close the gap.

METHODOLOGY & SOURCES

How we built this report

The 2026 State of Team Building synthesizes the most recent publicly available research on employee engagement, wellbeing and return-to-office policy (2025–2026) alongside Building Teams’ proprietary data from 20+ years and 2,000+ corporate and executive events. Third-party figures are cited below; proprietary figures reflect aggregated participant evaluations and program data. This is an annual report — the 2027 edition will track how the connection gap moves. To cite this report: “The 2026 State of Team Building, Building Teams (Be Legendary), June 2026.”

1. CBRE / Flex Index, workplace attendance & enforcement data, 2026. Compiled in Hybrid Hero, “Return to Office (RTO) statistics and tracker 2026.” [hybridhero.com](https://www.hybridhero.com)
2. ResumeBuilder & ZipRecruiter surveys; M. Ma (University of Pittsburgh) on skilled-employee attrition — reported by CNBC, February 2026. [cnbc.com](https://www.cnbc.com)
3. JLL, Fortune 100 office-policy data, reported by *Fortune*, July 2025 (54% fully in-office vs. 5% two years earlier; 3.8 avg days). [fortune.com](https://www.fortune.com)
4. The Flex Index (Scoop), company-by-company U.S. office-requirement data (~one-third of firms fully in-office). flex.scoopforwork.com
5. Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace: 2026 Report* (engagement 20%; ~\$10T / 9% of GDP; manager engagement). [gallup.com](https://www.gallup.com)
6. Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace: 2026 Report* (two consecutive years of decline; engagement from 23% in 2022). [gallup.com](https://www.gallup.com)
7. Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace* (wellbeing, daily stress & loneliness; <44% of managers trained). [gallup.com](https://www.gallup.com)
8. Gallup manager-coaching & thriving findings (20–28% performance gains; thriving 28%→50%), as summarized by Haiilo. haiilo.com

QUESTIONS, ANSWERED

State of team building FAQs

What is the state of employee engagement in 2026?

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Gallup's 2026 report found global employee engagement fell to 20% in 2025 — its lowest since 2020 and down from 23% in 2022. Gallup estimates low engagement costs the global economy about \$10 trillion a year, roughly 9% of GDP.

How many companies have returned to the office in 2026?

+

Does team building actually improve business results?

+

Why does team connection matter more in 2026?

+



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