



## What NFL Teams, Street Gangs and Your Workforce Have in Common

A sense of belonging is important for successful teamwork, retention and job performance.



A sense of belonging. It applies to family, the military, clubs, online groups and the list goes on and on. People want to belong to something bigger than themselves. Have you experienced that sinking feeling when you were left out of something? If you have, then you understand the need for belonging. Your business is a team and may even have teams within those teams. A sense of belonging is a strong production and retention tool for your workforce.

### Belonging is Good Business

A sense of belonging is a basic, human need that marketers, businesses and Sam Malone have been exploiting for decades. Look around an NFL stadium and see how many fans are wearing team apparel or team colors. The people watching at home are probably wearing the team apparel as well.

The sense of belonging is so strong, fans say “we won” or “we lost” as if they were on the field. So why does a national team encourage this behavior? To create a strong bond that can endure even when times are hard, a team is losing or the world shuts down because of a virus.

Translate that sense of belonging to your business. Do your employees feel like part of the team? Feel like they belong? *Harvard Business Review* reported on a BetterUp study which showed that high belonging resulted with a “56% increase in job performance, a 50% drop in turnover risk, and a 75% reduction in sick days.” **PMPA-PM0422**. Think about how those results can affect your business.

### How to Create a Sense of Belonging

There are many ways to create a sense of belonging and you can probably think of a few instances where you felt it. Use those instances as inspiration. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- I’ve handed a business card to an employee with their name on it and witnessed the employee’s pride. The sense of belonging is instant. Almost magical. Even

if an employee doesn’t need a business card, I’ll bet they went home and showed it off to their family. Business cards are an inexpensive way to show employees they are important and belong.

- Mimic the NFL and give your employees company shirts or t-shirts — they could even be designed by an employee. Ask everyone to wear it on the same day. Or wear company colors on the same day. Maybe the t-shirt has special meaning that the employees understand and would have to explain to an “outsider.”
- Keep them in the loop. It can be a short meeting, email or message on a board. Being “in the know” can go a long way toward making an employee feel like they belong.
- Ask their opinion. They have a unique perspective so ask their opinion on something. Even if it is the color of the new garbage cans you are buying. Give them a vote or a voice. It can be as simple as giving them a sticker to put on the image of the one they like. In the big picture, the color of the garbage cans doesn’t matter. What matters is that you bothered to ask them their opinion and they feel included.
- Celebrate birthdays. Everyone has one. It doesn’t need to be an elaborate party, but acknowledgement that you know their birthday and want to share it with others provides a sense of belonging.

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As noted in the BetterUp study, taking the time to make your employees feel like part of the team can boost performance, retention and production. ⊕

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