

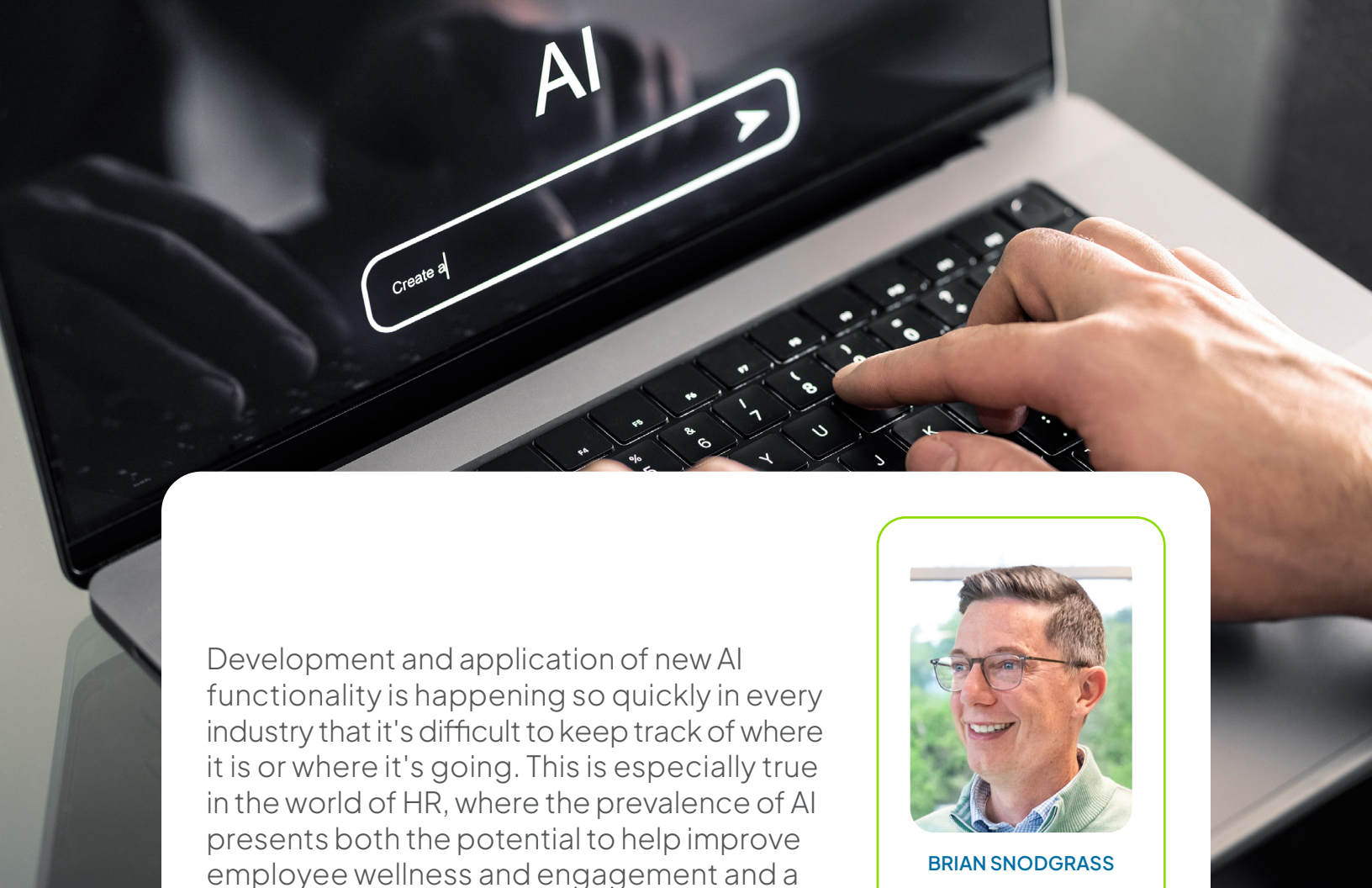
PART 1

AI & the Future of Employee Engagement

A Conversation With Terryberry's Leaders on Evolving
Technology in Employee Recognition & Engagement

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Development and application of new AI functionality is happening so quickly in every industry that it's difficult to keep track of where it is or where it's going. This is especially true in the world of HR, where the prevalence of AI presents both the potential to help improve employee wellness and engagement and a significant source of concern among many employees. In this first part of a two-part series, Terryberry's President Brian Snodgrass and Vice President of Product Travis Poppleton discuss how they see AI impacting the world of employee interactions in the near future as the technology and industry rapidly evolve.



BRIAN SNODGRASS



TRAVIS POPPLETON

How do you see AI influencing the employee engagement industry over the next five years?

TRAVIS

AI is bringing about a substantial change, whether we like it or not. It's so dynamic that it's difficult to say where it's headed.

For example, it was predicted that radiologists would become extinct in five years because AI would do all the work. That prediction was made ten years ago, and since then radiology employment has increased 6%. The reason that changed is the human element. AI does a fantastic job of reading X-rays and finding out what's wrong, but when sitting in a lab or waiting for test results, there is comfort in knowing the person in that room with you also knows what it's like to be a human.

It's interesting that ten years ago, we thought these were the jobs that would go away while coders and engineers were in a protected space. **Now, my advice for anyone starting a career would be to lean in on being human.**

But at the same time, I think there's a way that AI will actually help us, especially in the employee engagement space, become more effective at communicating as humans.

For example, I saw a study recently about a mid-tier company where they implemented super-short pulse surveys, just tiny little surveys they sent out across the organization, and having AI analyze that data to discover and identify sentiment trends.

That kind of micro-listening is leading the way to where soon (if we're not already there) we'll be able to predict the best time to engage with employees based on large data sets that have, until now, been too difficult to keep track of as individual managers and leadership.

How do you see AI influencing the employee engagement industry over the next five years?

BRIAN

I think there are three key areas where AI will impact employee engagement in this early phase: recognition, coaching, and linking to business outcomes.

There's a lot of potential for AI to dramatically improve the recognition side of things, in terms of making it more continuous. If we have the ability to measure so many more things as they're happening, we can pull in and identify more recognition moments that would otherwise go unnoticed.

If you've got AI that is looking at all these different feeds that include project plans, delivery mechanisms, and operational dashboards, there are more things that can prompt frontline managers for recognition moments. **We need to be cautious that we don't automate things and lose the human aspect of recognition, but we can start to bring out more and more insight into where it's happening and where it should be happening.**

I think we're going to be able to do some exciting things with rewards and recognition to go from static catalogs to curated catalogs based on interest. If we can start to bring things forward from a reward perspective that people are really interested in they maybe hadn't thought about—I think that'd be powerful.

I think you're going to see a lot more AI coaching. Comments like, "Here are things you should be talking about in your one-on-ones based on what's happened." All of that starts to drive employee engagement. You'll also be able to see where their engagement has dwindled or has increased to determine what's going on and build a profile on employees and where behaviors are changing.

I think we're also going to have the opportunity with the data we collect to leverage AI to link to business outcomes. To put together sentiment, engagement, productivity, and recognition to see how they correlate and influence each other.

What is the biggest challenge in implementing AI in employee engagement right now?

TRAVIS

HR is tricky right now because they play the role of employee advocate, and what employees are most worried about right now is change. They're worried about their jobs and how evolving technology will impact that. So, it's easy for HR to resist that and say, "Nothing's going to change here," or "We're not going to embrace that new technology." But I think that position is risky for a company that wants to remain competitive. So, I believe **HR is finding themselves in this place where they'd like to foster an environment of safety while not dangerously ignoring a significant step in technology's evolution.**

One thing we can start to do is encourage employees and HR to leverage these things Brian is talking about, like micro listening. Monitoring health is often dependent on that smaller-scale listening, so we could be better, more adaptive, and see so much more if we start to use AI to leverage sentiment in those smaller timeframes.

That transition from being resistant to being more open and letting AI build tools to create safer cultures is going to be the biggest challenge in the next few years.

How do you address issues around trust as technology moves forward?

TRAVIS

Well, it's a challenge because AI is creating a degree of uncertainty, instability, and lack of trust, but it's also the best tool we have to address it. That's going to be uncomfortable, to embrace the thing that at the same time is raising our suspicions. But AI really is a powerful tool that is helping us break down and automate the way we understand data.

We work with an advisory board of PhD researchers who are really interested in the findings around this. In addition, they're curious about the effect AI has on the way we communicate. So, as we're discussing trust, they're wondering, as we allow AI to answer emails and recognize our peers in the workplace, if that content is weakening the relationships we have with our professional peers. And, I say this to point out it's going to be very difficult to address how we trust a technology we haven't had enough time to understand. And, as uncomfortable as it is, **the fastest way to understand what we're dealing with, is to leverage the same tool we're analyzing.**

What's the First Problem AI Should be Solving for HR Professionals?

BRIAN

I think part of it is sentiment analysis of combined data sources. If you've got a large organization—thousands of people completing a survey with open-ended questions—you need to be able combine that with other sources like demographic data, which we're developing and improving right now.

Those other data sources will help us track sentiment and impact across topics and groups. Things like employee communication, productivity, wellness, and efficiency are data points you can lay on top of one another to see how different elements interact. As a result, you get insights into what's driving employee engagement, satisfaction, wellness, and productivity.

Going back to what I mentioned earlier—the **idea of being able to give frontline managers nudges and a better understanding of what's going on with their employees**—I think that's going to be a way HR can empower their leaders for the quality, depth, and focus of interactions they're having with their reports. And in addition, it will help managers with things they should be recognizing people for given the goals and current state of the company or their team, which is what companies need to truly drive high-quality employee engagement forward.

What's the Biggest Misconception About AI In this Industry Right Now?

BRIAN

That we truly understand how to use AI yet. That you can just plug it into something and it's going to work the way to expect.

TRAVIS

That AI is going to replace everyone's job. There's a pretty common expression we're hearing in this space, which states, "AI is not going to take your job; people who know how to use AI will." Change is coming, but there are ways to be an active part of that.



Brian is President of Terryberry, where he is redefining employee engagement as a program-driven business discipline—not a collection of tools. He believes the industry has created a sea of sameness, with companies offering platforms or rewards marketplaces that fail to drive real change. Terryberry takes a different approach—designing and delivering comprehensive engagement programs that combine technology, symbolic recognition, rewards, and employee sentiment to produce measurable outcomes. Under his leadership, organizations partner with Terryberry to intentionally build culture and turn employee experience into a competitive advantage. Brian brings over 20 years of experience in technology and product leadership and holds an MBA from the University of Notre Dame’s Mendoza College of Business.



Travis Poppleton brings over 20 years of experience in HR tech leadership to his role as Vice President of Product at Terryberry. A seasoned innovator, Travis has driven product strategy for industry giants such as Great Place to Work, Ultimate Software, and UKG, where he played a pivotal role in shaping solutions designed to elevate the entire employee lifecycle. At Terryberry, he is at the forefront of workplace technology, overseeing the cutting-edge AI integration of employee engagement data with a specialized focus on sentiment recognition and analysis. A graduate of Brigham Young University and Harvard University, Travis combines his rigorous academic foundation with decades of hands-on expertise to build technology that helps organizations deeply understand and connect with their people.

Contact us today to talk about how Terryberry's evolving employee engagement solutions can help you better see the people and trends in your company.

PART 2

AI & the Future of Employee Engagement

A Conversation With Terryberry's Leaders on the
Application of New Technology for the Company

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Terryberry has over 100 years of experience in recognition and engagement and the company has seen huge technological shifts going all the way back to the advent of the rotary phone. Now, the rapid acceleration and application of AI in the modern workplace presents a new challenge Terryberry is rising to meet for its customers. In the previous part of this two-part series, Terryberry President Brian Snodgrass and Vice President of Product Travis Poppleton talked about the opportunities and challenges presented by the rapid expansion and application of AI. Here, they talk about the unique role Terryberry looks to take in the industry at such a dynamic time.



BRIAN SNODGRASS



TRAVIS POPPLETON

How would you describe the role Terryberry aspires to play in the implementation of AI within employee engagement?

TRAVIS

The jobs will change. The direction will change. Terryberry wants to partner with our customers as those changes occur.

We aspire to be, in my opinion, a company that will always enable humans to see and celebrate other humans. We're always going to be building products that help our customers navigate the changing landscapes of company culture.

We want to enable leaders to see their employees and help them feel safe enough to take risks. We want to encourage creativity, out-of-the-box thinking, and a daily sense of purpose.

That comes back to employee engagement, no matter what the landscape looks like. We want to be part of that conversation, and we have the data that drives change.

What we're going to continue to build will leverage AI in a way that helps us understand a dynamic employee landscape. We want to partner with our clients to recognize employees at the right time and in the most meaningful ways.

How would you describe the role Terryberry aspires to play in the implementation of AI within employee engagement?

BRIAN

I think the point about the human element is key. I think companies are at risk if they think that automated recognition is where you want to go. It's dangerous because it will remove the human element.

But **empowering human interaction is where AI is going to become extremely powerful**, and I think it's going to really help understand what's going on with employee engagement. How you can start pulling information and giving insight through AI is huge.

I see a lot of potential in predictive engagement analytics. If you do an engagement survey once, maybe twice a year, that's your snapshot in time. Engagement analytics can tell you how you're trending around, say, belonging or feeling connected, and can predict your future trajectory, but you still need to understand the human element of why movement in sentiment is happening.

I see an environment where, instead of manually reacting to events you know about, like a product launch, a change at the company, or maybe scuttlebutt going around, AI would analyze trends in engagement in that micro-listening I was talking about to determine specific areas that need follow-up. Ideally it could be attached to other metrics within the company, like productivity. AI will be giving you more reasons to be asking questions to get the data around why things are trending one way or another. But I don't think it's going to replace humans in understanding and addressing the connection between the metrics and what's driving them yet.

I think it will be interesting because once you start to get more data, the system will be able to find some of those "whys," so people can spend more time working on improving them. I also think it's going to be important to be able to drill down into specific demographic categories to find smaller-scale trends.

Eventually, **it's going to be a system that helps people see other people when and where they need to be seen, and help everyone be healthier, happier, engaged, and productive.**

What is Terryberry's guiding strategy for technology development and integration?

TRAVIS

We want to avoid implementing AI just for the sake of implementing AI. We are actively having conversations with our customers, with academics, and key stakeholders to understand where AI can act as an organic extension of how our users leverage our software in the first place.

Terryberry has deep expertise in engagement data. As we expand our use of AI to deepen the degree to which we can connect our expertise to our clients' needs, we are also working to apply our knowledge and understanding to ensure our tools are providing trustworthy results while protecting data privacy. **We care deeply about using rigor in our AI to ensure customers are basing important culture decisions on sound reasoning we can stand behind.**


Fundamentally we're making sure we remain credible, clear, and compassionate.

BRIAN

For me, the biggest thing is making sure we're leveraging AI to empower personal connections, and we are using it to truly help people be more engaged—more tied to the mission, vision, and values of their organization. **We want to help organizations build strong, authentic connections with their team members using technology, not have technology replace the connection.**

What HR leaders and managers are doing is helping every person be able to create a stronger relationship. To understand where each employee fits within the overall success of the organization and how their contributions matter. If we can use AI to do that, that becomes powerful. That allows us to go back and drive to what everyone's trying to do: keep employees and drive more productivity. And while those things seem very business-focused, they're still truly human-centered, because everyone wants that. Why are people afraid of AI? Because they're afraid their worth and their contributions are going to be minimized.

We, as Terryberry, are saying, **"We aren't trying to have AI replace employees. We aren't having AI replace the idea of employers engaging with employees. We are providing tools to build strong relationships between people on a human level."** That is where we can make it very powerful.



What is going to set
Terryberry apart?

BRIAN

I know that others have tried to purely automate and think that reward, recognition, and employee engagement is a technology problem. We've never believed that. **We believe technology is a framework for helping** in that area, but it's not the entire solution. And that's how we're thinking about AI and everything else.

I am concerned that others will use it more for automation. I can see how easy it is to think, "I'm a manager. I don't have to do anything! This tool will give out the recognition for me." You can't have that. It needs to help you give out great recognition.

I don't know that we'll be the only ones to do it what I'd call "the right way," but I'm confident we will—and that will be a huge advantage for us and our clients.



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