For growing startups, looking back on the history of Labour Day is a chance to learn some valuable lessons from the not-so-distant past.

Less than 150 years ago, companies saw their employees as expendable. With the rapid rise of industrialization, many workers were suddenly faced with intense pressure to produce quickly and without complaint. With no end in sight to the suffering (*state-sanctioned and entirely lawful* suffering!), hazardous working conditions and grueling hours became the norm.

Today in 2016, when we think of Labour Day most of us imagine backyard barbecues, fireworks and family picnics, or that last chance to escape to the summer cottage. While we've come a long way from the terrible labour practices that led to the strikes and [Trade Union Act of 1872](), it's still worth remembering that our breezy long weekend holiday originated as a serious struggle for fair and equitable treatment in the workplace.

## HERE'S BLANKSLATE'S COUNTDOWN OF THE TOP 3 LESSONS STARTUPS CAN LEARN FROM THE HISTORY OF LABOUR DAY

Source: Stocksnap

# 3. Give Everyone A Voice

Back in the day before trade unions, workers who spoke up could quickly find themselves without a job. Nowadays we have labour laws in place to prevent companies from firing workers without just cause.

## *SO WHY DO SO MANY BRIGHT PEOPLE STAY QUIET AND KEEP THEIR HEADS DOWN, INSTEAD OF SPEAKING UP AND SHARING THEIR IDEAS?*

Put simply, it's hard to break a hundred year old habit. Until very recently, people often

worked for the same company for decades on end. In a time of rampant job security, it simply made sense to put in the years, nod yes repeatedly, and wait for your inevitable promotion. Because here's the thing:

## *PEOPLE WON'T SPEAK OUT IF THEY DON'T FEEL SAFE.*

Unlike the slow-moving corporate giants of yesteryear, today's growing startups feed on ideas and innovation—neither of which can happen without a strong foundation of trust.

Make it a priority to help people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts. Take the time to create an open, supportive environment, and watch as the ideas (and dollar bills) roll in.

The more touch points you create to communicate with your team, the faster you'll be able to find alignment. Regular [one-on-one meetings](#) are an easy way to build and sustain trust. For more information on strategies unique to you and your industry, feel free to [contact us](#)—we'd love to help!
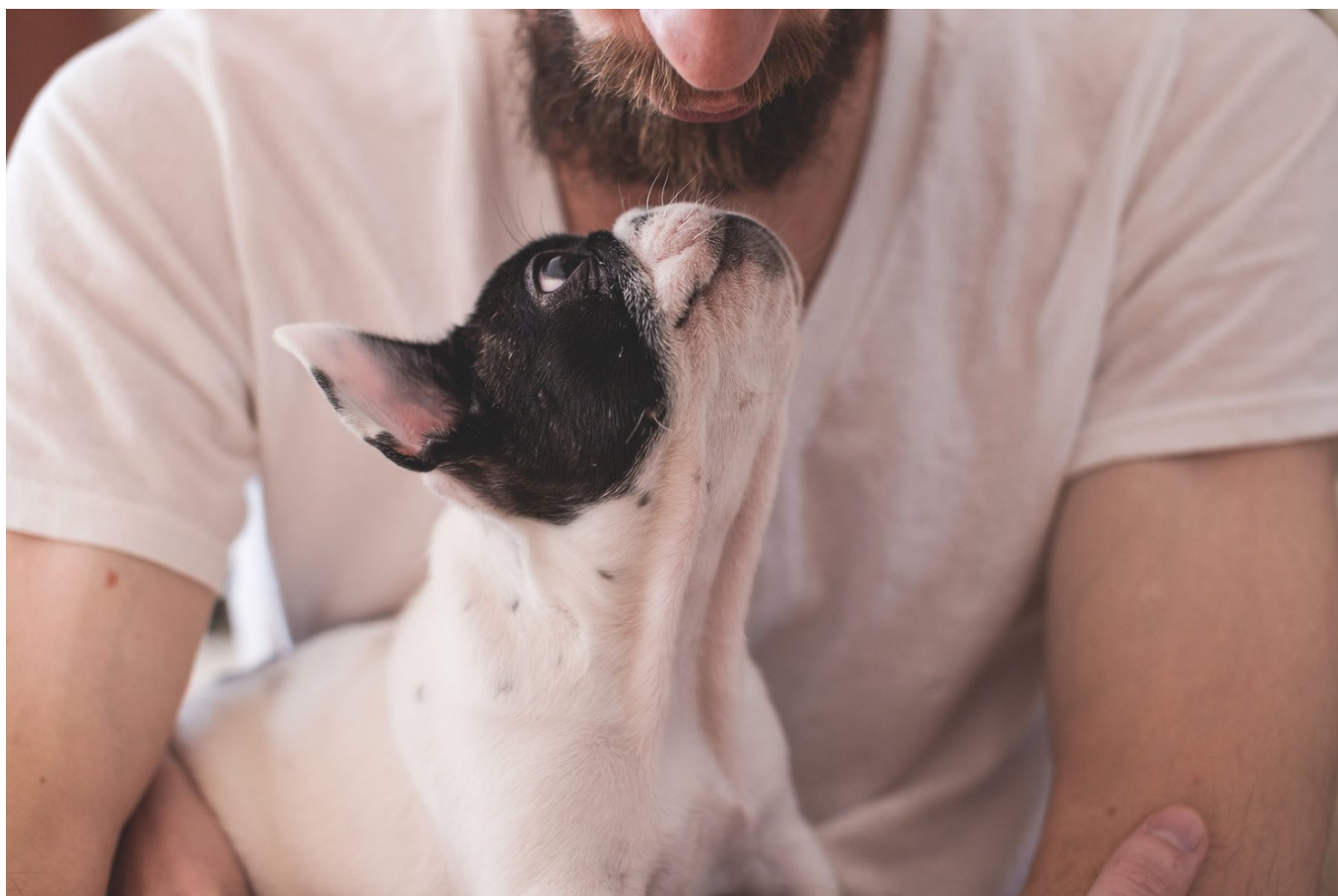
Credit: Stocksnap.io

## 2. Trust Your Team

In the late 19th century, factory workers were often fined for minor (and ridiculous!) infractions like *idle chatter*. It was these kind of oppressive rules that bred suspicion between employer and employees. Today's labour laws prevent the most extreme cases, but smart leaders stay on the lookout for the mistrust and unease that can easily snake its way into our working relationships. People will bring an innate enthusiasm to their work, but unreasonable rules disrupt that natural drive. Excessive micromanagement kills innovation. So what's the

solution?

*Should I just hire great people and get out of their way?*

**AUTONOMY IS CERTAINLY VITAL TO BUILDING A STRONG TEAM, BUT EVEN THE MOST SELF-DIRECTED INDIVIDUALS BENEFIT FROM A STRONG FOUNDATION OF TRUST. WITH A CLEAR VOTE OF CONFIDENCE FROM LEADERS, PEOPLE FEEL MUCH MORE VALUED, AND THEREBY ABLE TO PRODUCE HIGHER QUALITY WORK.**

*Even smart, creative people need regular feedback—though we prefer the term* feedfoward

Think about each of your communication channels. At BSP we love using [Slack](#) for instant communication: it gives us a nice breather from email. How do you connect with the people you depend on most? Incorporating multiple avenues for communication and team building, as well as feedback/feedforward is essential. If done well, performance reviews are a basic way to start, but it's really all about the daily check-ins. Leaving a conversation for six months or a year isn't going to help anyone. With the right conversational loops, your people are better connected to their team, more receptive to coaching, and they understand how to put constructive criticism—as well as praise—to good use.

There are some great tools out there to help you manage performance conversations. One we recommend highly to our clients is [7Geese](#). But conversation, and creating a safe environment for you and your team to work together, are the best places to start.

Source: Pexels

# 1. Appoint Ambassadors

In the dark days before Occupational Health & Safety regulations, foremen and managers used brute force to keep their workers in line. This excerpt taken from an [interview](interview) for the 1889 Royal Commission with a cigar maker, Stanislas Goyette, shows how vulnerable workers were to rampant abuse from their superiors.

Q. Were you ever beaten during your apprenticeship?

A. *Yes, sir.*

Q. Who beat you?

A. *The foreman.*

Q. *Why did he beat you?*

A. *For all sorts of reasons.*

Q. *You do not remember why?*

A. *...it was oftenest because I would not work after regular hours.*

Q. *Did he strike you with his hand, his fist or some tool?*

A. *With whatever he had in his hand. He balked at nothing.*
Thankfully we've come a long way since then. Physical assault in the office is a rare occurrence, and we have solid laws in place to ensure the safety of everyone. So what can we learn from this example? Well, it's probably safe to say that this foreman's actions tarnished the entire company for the worker. When your mainlines are toxic, the whole organization becomes polluted.

Managers and the company's leadership represent you and your startup. It's helpful to think of your leaders as your cultural and organizational ambassadors—they're your immediate link to your team, so how they lead and interact with people is a direct reflection on your culture and values. Clear, open communication is a must. If people feel their managers and leaders are acting for their own interests, and not for those of the team, communication between the team and higher-ups will dry up fast.

The simplest way to help your management team lead is to provide them with the best

possible [training tools](). A straight-forward, [strategic plan]() can transform your managers into powerful leaders and culture ambassadors.



Credit: Stocksnap.io

## A Final Labour Day Takeaway

Startups face different challenges than 19th century factories, but there is one constant that remains across the centuries: *people*. Your small yet dedicated team goes above and beyond every day—so take a moment to check in, not just during those especially hectic times, but

every day. Labour Day is a good prompt, but remember: **saying "thanks" is an easy win for everyone.**