



Leadership for the Long Run

Engendering Community in the Workplace

An executive decides to fly in team members from all over the globe for four days of face-to-face conversation. Given the financial commitment this entails, I ask how he can justify the expense. He responds, “It’s not enough for the team to *know* they all work for the same organization, they have to *feel* it.”

If the word “feel” strikes you as misplaced or annoying, please keep reading: This article is for you.

Effective leaders know that a high-functioning team is essential to execution. What if it was the leader’s job to go beyond basic team building and create community? We often associate community with our religious affiliations, children’s schools or neighborhoods. But community should play a role in your business, too. Here’s why.

Create Community, Boost Performance

The idea of community generates positive associations with belonging, meaningful contribution and real connection. Where there is community, you will find engagement, feedback and accountability. You’ll find enhanced creativity and laughter. You’ll ignite your team with the energy that comes from a sense of collective purpose.

Your business could benefit from all these factors because they directly improve job performance and results.

Your Unique Role as Leader

As a leader, you are positioned to influence not only the content discussed at a meeting, but how you gather as a team, how you interact and how responsive you are to one another. Here are some ways you can create community.

- **When reorganizations occur, give the new team a chance to “gel.”** In the midst of reorganizations, there are still deadlines to meet and pressure to move forward quickly. But a new group needs a chance to get to know each other’s strengths, personalities and priorities. Time spent in the short term defining expectations and cultural norms will save time—and money—in the long run.

- **Make the small group the unit of transformation.** In his book *Community*, Peter Block says, “Small groups create connection and move the action forward.” Encourage your sub-groups and teams to mingle and watch the results.
- **Notice the conversations that dominate your meetings.** How much time are you spending talking about people who are not in the room? These conversations do not produce energy; they consume it.
- **Create advice-free zones.** Set aside a forum where people simply state their requests and share what they are willing to offer.
- **Recognize that questions create community, while answers do not.** Set aside a forum where questions are discussed with an attitude of curiosity and a goal of deep listening. Ask participants to paraphrase what they’ve heard before making their own point.

Community Buy-In

When you see every business meeting as an opportunity to create community, you offer a chance for your team members to become “owners” of a project, a goal or the business itself. That community buy-in can, over time, help streamline operations and create a welcome boost for your bottom line.

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