

Unifying Your Team At A Distance

Insights from Tom Hershberger, CEO, Cross Financial, 2020

Culture eats strategy for breakfast. - Peter Drucker

It's true. Your bank's culture can be a powerful catalyst and driver of success. Mismanaged it will crush great plans and intentions. So, let's get our cultures right.

Create Focal Points

Dividing a workgroup isn't the optimum way to unify the team. Physical disconnects make it harder to embrace challenges and opportunities and bond the team. Separation places a premium on focus and effective communication. Where do we start? How do we create focal points that will unify onsite, as well as, remote workers?

Begin by developing empathy for the circumstances. We will be trying to unify employees that previously gathered daily, in the same location, to complete their tasks. We will be trying to unify a group of employees from different departments, in different locations, to trust each other as they serve customers. These conditions require effective communications and message delivery methods.

We can achieve success. In fact, the answers might be easier than we expect. Giving employees purpose can raise engagement. Challenging them with valuable responsibilities can enhance their skill set and knowledgebase. Improved skills and engagement are excellent outcomes for teams. The underlying principle is probably just to remember; leaders need to care about their employees, professionally and personally.

Creating an environment that encourages employees to contribute, to share, to participate, to succeed, and celebrate is a necessity. Too often managers and employees 'get the work done'

and simply move on to the next task or project. Managers might assume everything is fine simply because complaints or concerns are less frequent. That is not a proper gauge of culture. Getting the work done on time is not a proper gauge of culture. Managers need to get involved and stay involved to make this work.

At the organization level, a good gauge of culture connects to employee engagement, the quality of customer experiences, and the ultimate achievements of the organization. At a team level, a good gauge of culture is the openness when your team shares values, insights, goals, and expectations. If those things aren't happening or can't happen, the team culture must be improved.

So, how do we leverage team culture? Begin by creating expectations for what is possible and optimize your implementation with effective communications. In short, set goals and then leverage communication to ensure those goals become focal points.

Be Courageous - Set Goals

Setting a goal gives employees a reason for the pursuit we ask them to undertake. Be courageous and set goals that are concise, visible, and can be measured. Teams with winning records want to stay that way. Teams with losing records will hopefully want to improve. Ultimately, the goal is what provides the catalyst for everyone's contributions; a clear goal based on what we know has happened and what we believe could happen.

Major company performance goals are fun for organizations because they typically represent a significant milestone in the life of the company. That focus is too big for workgroups. Use smaller goals with shorter timelines and easy measurements. Encourage your teams to process their goals and contribute to how they can be achieved. Share a personal invitation with each employee encouraging them to

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direct their talents to achieving the team's goals. Invite their feedback. Encourage their feedback. Request their feedback. Acknowledge their feedback.

Instead of setting a big goal to complete a three-month project, break things down into goals that the team can see themselves completing in days or weeks. Some employees may feel threatened by goals, so work to engage them and keep the goals visible so they can remain focused on their role in achieving the desired results. Who better to set goals than the team members responsible for achieving them?

Once goals are set, accountability can be introduced. While accountability may not be comfortable for some employees, your team won't understand their roles and progress unless they know what needs to be completed, by when, and at what level. Dedicated and engaged employees will not shy away from accountability. They will embrace it. They will also love seeing how their contributions have a positive impact on team achievements.

Focus Communications On Dialogues

The second essential element to unify your team is communication. This cannot be accomplished with one-way emails, dictates, or one-sided Zoom calls. Your team needs to be part of an interactive discussion, a dialogue. Sharing thoughts and opinions is important. Team members should be challenged to take an active role in every workgroup endeavor; goal setting, execution and final performance. They have the best view in every situation, so leverage it. Use their insights to draw the team together. Use their experience to set appropriate goals and solve problems as a team. Encourage input, feedback and involvement.

Team members can support one another more effectively when they have close working rela-

tionships. This doesn't have to be a close physical connection. It needs to be a relationship of understanding, trust, and expectation. Dialogues will help your team hold each other accountable for team efforts. No negatives. No criticisms. Just honest feedback focused on the achievement of a common goal. A goal set and understood by the team.

Move The Needle

Unifying a team can begin immediately. There is no need to wait for new team members to join the workgroup or for a new organization chart to change reporting relationships. Jump in today. If you are a manager, get organized, enhance your communications, and ask your team to help set goals everyone can support. If you are a team member, examine your contributions and decide what else you can do to contribute favorably to the team. Don't judge other team members' contributions, judge your contribution. Each team member is responsible for their performance. Focus on doing your best and the team results will improve.

Go ahead and set some goals and actively discuss your progress. Even if your team members aren't together physically, they can still remain unified when they examine contributions to desired outcomes and share the moment their team reaches an established goal.

Start today by writing down simple goals you could suggest to your workgroup or team. Identify things that would feel great to accomplish. Then, offer them to your team for discussion. The first step to reaching any goal is to set it.

We'd like to hear from you. Send your feedback and thoughts to tom@crossfinancial.com.

