Happy Valentine's Day! I've always wondered why we need a designated day to show our love and devotion to those who are most important in our lives. Shouldn't we just be showing our love - however we do that - all the time? Especially when everyone is so far apart!

I hope you take time this month to show the people in your life just how much you care. (Now I sound like a Hallmark greeting!)

Kristin

IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE

HOW TO LEAD A VIRTUAL TEAM

- by Joseph Sherren

When working with clients to develop a team-based culture, the concern that always comes up is – My team is scattered and many work virtually, so how do I build a team under those circumstances?

First understand that unless you have the skills to lead a team face-to face, you will not be able to lead them virtually. On-site, pragmatic training is required either way. Remember, a virtual team is just a group that works collaboratively, but separated by geography, brought together by technology.

Nevertheless, there are unique challenges when working with a team virtually:

1. You are unable to read non-verbal cues
2. There is less opportunity to build relationships
3. It is more difficult to establish rapport and trust
4. People may work in different time zones
5. Ensuring that everyone gets to express their opinion
6. Overcoming technology challenges

These are not insurmountable. Smart leaders recognize these challenges and devise deliberate strategies such as the following to maintain team cohesiveness and productivity:

- **Start with a Face-to-face Meeting.** That way everyone will initially get to know each other at a deeper level. Repeat this once a year if possible.
- **Meet Regularly.** It is not just about getting the work done, but also about developing relationships so the work can be done collaboratively. I recommend once per month, even if they are short. This way people become familiar with the process and each other.
- **Establish a Regular Day and Time** for each meeting. By doing this people will be able to schedule well in advance and minimize any missed meetings.
- **Set Expectations**. Create a team charter so everyone knows what is most important. Identify key tasks, critical milestones, roles, and responsibilities. Agree on a common project management system such as Basecamp to track individual contributions to the team's work.
- **Use Technology** that allows people to see each other. Possible ones are: Skype, Zoom, GoToWebinar or Google Hangout.
- **Have Everyone Contribute.** Create a segment where each person shares a good news story or something they are grateful for.
- **Rotate the Role of Facilitator.** This gets everyone engaged knowing they will need to lead a discussion at one of the meetings.
- **Encourage Interaction.** Virtual meetings are awkward and often the leader does most of the talking. It does not have to be that way. Set ground rules such as:
- Set and distribute agendas before the meeting.
- Everyone participates; no one dominates.
- Say your name first when you are about to speak.
- Be concise and speak slowly.
- Do not interrupt others.
- Speak as though your team members are in the room.
- Do not multitask during meetings.
- **Confirm Action Items.** At the end of each meeting, ensure understanding of the action items and agree on next steps, due date, and accountability.
- **Manage the Metrics.** Metrics matter. Ensure everyone understands how the team defines success. Document it in a visual dashboard that everyone can see.
- **Create Informal Gatherings.** It is important to generate opportunities to gather around the virtual water cooler. Create fun competitions as well as opportunities for professional development.
- **Integrate New Members.** Whenever you bring on a new team member, invest the time to virtually introduce each team member and to review ground rules and team memory.
- **Celebrate Often**. Find reasons to celebrate successes, including achieving a key milestone. Observe birthdays and other special occasions. Arrange to have pizzas delivered to your various sites at the same time.

Many of these strategies are important in an intact team environment as well. But, they are even more critical in a virtual one. It takes dedication to stay connected, and most successful virtual team leaders create rituals or patterns that support the team's work.

4 CRITERIA FOR A STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

I was facilitating a mastermind of manufacturing executives when we started chatting about strategic plans – and more specifically, about what makes a strategic objective "good?" So I offered up my four criteria for a worthwhile strategic objective, and

since they scribbled this down in their notes, I thought it might be something worth sharing with you!

For a strategic objective to be meaningful and worthwhile, it should be:

1. Cross Functional. It should cut across functional boundaries. Ideally, it should involve the entire organization. If it belongs to just one function, then just let that functional head take care of it. It's not "strategic."
2. Long Term. It should take more than one year to complete. If it takes less than one year, it's operational and belongs in your business plan, not your strategic plan.
3. Directly Connected to the Strategy. This kinda sounds obvious, but you would be surprised at how many objectives have a rather loose connection to the mission, vision, values and/or strategic statement. Make sure the team can clearly articulate how this specific strategic objective will help the business.
4. Inspire Passion. So you have this strategic objective that everyone know we should do, but if you don't have a passionate, committed team willing to do what it takes to make it a reality, then it simply won't get done. There will always be something more important that will get in the way. Make sure your team is passionate and committed to the objective.

When finalizing your strategic objectives, make sure they meet ALL four criteria – You'll be well on your way to success!

PANELIST MODERATORS: OPEN YOUR PANEL DISCUSSION WITH THESE FIVE ELEMENTS

Don't you just hate it when the panel moderator takes forever to launch the panel discussion? Drones on and on, talks about him or herself? Me too! Listen, we know you are smart. You don't have to prove it to us. Take just a couple of minutes to tee up the discussion and then let's get to business!

Your opening remarks can include these five different elements:

1. Start Smartly. Share an attention-grabbing statement, fact, statistic, quotation, anecdote, or poll.
2. Set the Table. Quickly give an overview of why the topic is timely and important to the audience as well as what you hope to accomplish in our time together.
3. Share the Process. Provide a high-level overview of the process as well as any ground rules.
4. Clarify Your Role. You are NOT a panelist! You are there to be the champion of the audience and stimulate a lively conversation.
5. Panelist Introductions. You introduce the panelists OR the panelists introduce themselves. You decide.

You should be able to do this in just a few minutes…and then let the games begin!

And if you want to blather on and on about the topic or how important each panelist is to you, then you are just showing us all how truly "not smart" you are!

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: THE 5 LOVE LANGUAGES: THE SECRET TO LOVE THAT LASTS

- Gary Chapman

I wish I knew about the book, The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts by Gary Chapman about 20 years ago. But I do now. Chapman theorizes that everyone speaks a different primary and secondary "love language," - the way they show someone they love them. There are five different languages: Words of Affirmation, Acts of Service,

Receiving Gifts, Quality Time, and Physical Touch. Just as you might have some troubles if you talk to someone in Polish if they only speak Portuguese, the same holds true if you offer your love with an act of service and it isn't appreciated because your loved one values physical touch more!

Getting on the same page of music is a great idea, and reading this book is a fabulous start!

P.S. Since I speak on leading teams, it's not surprising that I can see a parallel between the 5 Love Languages and the 5 Ways a Leader Can Show They Care. Think about it. The theory still holds up!