**Leadership – Communication and inspiration**

#### What to Know:

When people feel a sense of purpose, belonging, and part of something greater than themselves, they derive a sense of meaning from work. Meaningfulness is related to a host of positive outcomes, like motivation, commitment, helping behaviors on the job, lower turnover intentions, and personal well-being. Having an inspiring vision helps people create meaningfulness in their work.

#### Mythbusters:

Having a vision or mission statement isn’t enough. To be inspired, people need to know what the vision is and hear about it on a regular basis. Beyond knowing the vision, people at all levels need opportunities to live values in their daily work. They also need to see managers and senior leaders acting in ways that uphold and embody the values. Inconsistent policies, systems, and actions deteriorate commitment to the organization’s purpose. Communicating an inspiring vision is through not only words but more importantly, through action.

**Questions to Ask:**

* What makes you feel confident about where we are headed as an organization? Where are your concerns?
* Do you understand the organization’s vision and strategic goals? If no, what is unclear?
* How could Senior Leaders communicate a vision and strategy for the future better? What communication methods work well? What would you like to know more about?
* Think of a time when Senior Leaders did a good job communicating. What made that experience positive? How could we do more of that?
* What gets in our way of communicating consistently? How could we improve?
* If you were to rate this question a “5” what would be different?

**Best Practices:**

* **Review communication practices.** Are they consistent and transparent? Does information cascade to all levels of the organization? Use a variety of communication channels and repeat, repeat, repeat. Keep others informed about big picture goals and the plan for success.
* **Show concern for others.** Rather than working to accomplish your agenda, start by asking employees what they are focused on. Demonstrating that leaders understand the work and challenges of employees builds confidence that decisions will be made with this in mind.
* **Be transparent.** Employees can handle bad news, but struggle with no news. In the absence of information, we fill in the gaps with assumptions and stories. Proactive communication keeps the rumor mill at bay.
* **Take the long way in and out of the office.** Casual conversations that demonstrate a genuine interest in people and allow people to get to know senior leaders strengthens relationships.
* **100 calls, 100 days.** The executives of one of our clients pledged to each call 100 employees in 100 days. Five-minute casual conversations to check in and see how things were going contributed to the employee feeling valued and leaders learned a tremendous amount about the organization.
* **Be intentional about connecting.** Create a schedule that involves each member of the leadership team going on a “listening tour” to connect with employees, build relationships and hear about employees’ ideas and challenges. Leaders can spend 5 minutes sharing and the rest of the time asking questions to build a connection to that part of the organization.
* **Give others the credit.** Good leaders take responsibility for failures, and give others credit for success.
* **Demonstrate trust in others.** Trust in leadership can suffer when employees don’t feel trusted by leaders. Micromanaging and controlling all decisions can lead to feelings of lack of control of autonomy and control – two important factors that drive employee engagement. Leaders should challenge themselves to empower someone to do something they normally do, or allow decisions to happen as close as possible to where the work is taking place.
* **Review organizational policies.** Organizational policies around social media, travel, working from home during a blizzard, vacation, etc. set the tone for a two-way trusting relationship. Treat employees like adults and expect them to use good judgment and that’s what you will get in return.

**What Managers Can Do:**

Get intimately familiar with the County’s True North and values and use the language consistent with your team. During team meetings, in email communications, during planning and strategy sessions, and when goal-setting with individual team members, connect ideas and priorities back to the company mission and values.

Ensure you have a solid understanding of where the company is headed and how your team contributes to that vision so that you can effectively create meaning and purpose for your employees.

When communicating the True North, help employees understand “what’s in it for them” so they can find personal meaning in working hard to achieve strategic goals.

Check-in with your team on a regular basis to communicate the vision for the future of the organization and how your team plays a role in this vision. Invite your team to ask questions, brainstorm how each team member directly or indirectly supports the overall mission, and identify ways to correct any misalignment with the mission.

#### What Employees Can Do:

Ask yourself, do you know the organization’s vision? Do you understand the vision and values, and why they are important? Do you understand how the work you do connects to that vision?

When developing your goals, tie them specifically to the vision and/or values. Identify how your personal priorities also help move the organization closer to accomplishing its mission.

#### What Leadership Can Do:

Check that leaders are on the same page about the vision and values. Do leaders across groups/departments share consistent messages? Invite leaders to share examples of how and when the vision has motivated their groups.

Bring leaders together to explore each group’s role in accomplishing the vision. Discuss how are groups working together to achieve the vision. Brainstorm examples of when collaboration was critical for accomplishing the vision and ask leaders to share out with their teams.

Exhaust all possibility to weave the vision and values into regular communication channels. Look for opportunities to share stories of the values in action.

**Watch:**

* [Why good leaders make you feel safe | Simon Sinek](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmyZMtPVodo)

**Read:**

* [*Eight Ways to Communicate Your Strategy More Effectively*](https://hbr.org/2011/08/eight-ways-to-energize-your-te)
* *Circle of the 9 Muses: A Storytelling Field Guide for Innovators and Meaning Makers by David Hutchens*
* *Built to Last by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras*