

THE 3 CS APPROACH TO MAXIMIZING OUR TEAMS' SUCCESS

BY WES FRIESEN

What is the most important thing we can do in our leadership and management roles? Perhaps it's to create a culture where our team members can thrive and add maximum value to our key stakeholders. I recently read and was inspired by Susan Fowler's book, *Why Motivating People Doesn't Work... and What Does* (Second Edition, 2023). Fowler summarizes extensive research that shows that people have three innate, universal needs: Choice (aka Autonomy), Connection (aka Relatedness), and Competence. When these needs are met, people experience optimal motivation, positive energy, well-being, and vitality. Let's look at these three needs and discuss what we can do to help meet them.

The Need for Choice

Choice is our human need to perceive we have choices, feel we have options within boundaries, and have a sense of control that we are the source of our actions. People prefer to *want* to than to *have* to, and we value having a healthy degree of control and autonomy. In short, we all like to be treated like adults, not children. Mika Cross (a Director at the U.S. Department of Labor) writes, "Having a choice and a suite of flexible options that employers can offer their workforce is extremely important, especially when you are considering the generational differences of five different generations in the workplace." To meet this human need, we can consider what flexibility we can offer with work hours and schedules; vacations and other paid time off; work location; dress codes; and how some of the work is

done. When possible, offering hybrid work is popular and well-received — a study by Incisiv found that 81% of employees are expected to be working in hybrid models by 2024, compared to 42% in 2021 (and fully remote workplaces are expected to recede from 56% to just 19% that same time period). If feasible, what about going on a four-day workweek, expecting the same output with the same amount of pay? A recent British pilot with 61 companies tried that and found company revenue stayed roughly the same, and employee turnover and sick days plummeted by more than half.

As leaders, there is a place to give up our choices to benefit our team members. This fits into the Servant Leadership philosophy, which leads to optimal long-term success. Earlier this year, I heard an inspiring example from my friend Betsy Shortell, who is the Director of Mail & Distribution Services at Harvard University. During the pandemic period, Shortell could have done all her work remotely, which was what the other managers at Harvard and many other places typically chose to do. But Shortell chose to physically go into work every day! Why? Because her team members had to be physically present to do their work and she wanted to be there to show her care and support. What an example!

The Need for Connection

Connection is our need to feel a sense of belonging and genuine connection to others without concerns about ulterior motives, to align goals and actions to meaningful values and a sense of purpose, and to contribute to something greater than ourselves. Author Atul Gawande explains,

"Human beings are social creatures. We are social not just in the trivial sense that we like company, and not just in the obvious sense that we each depend on others. We are social in a more elemental way: simply to exist as a normal human being requires interaction with other people."

I appreciate this insight from the Dalai Lama: "We humans are social beings. We come into the world as the result of others' actions. We survive here in dependence on others. Whether we like it or not, there is hardly a moment in our lives when we do not benefit from others' activities. For this reason, it is hardly surprising that most of our happiness arises in the context of our relationships with others." Professor and author Brené Brown shared her perspective, "I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship."

The Surgeon General recently issued a detailed report entitled "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community." This report pulls in extensive recent research and is a sobering wake-up call to the dangers of the lack of social connection and community. The report iterates the leading causes of illness and premature death among American adults, including the usual suspects of physical inactivity, obesity, and excessive alcohol consumption. Surprisingly, the number one health risk today is the lack of social connection and community. The lack of connection is a higher risk of premature death than smoking 15 cigarettes per day!

Inadequate social connection results in a 29% higher risk of heart disease; 32% higher risk of stroke; higher anxiety, depression, and dementia; worse performance at work; and costs businesses an estimated \$154 billion per year due to stress-related absences and health costs. The problem of inadequate social connection and community is rampant. One large survey found that only 39% of people feel very connected to others; another survey found that 58% feel lonely on a regular basis. Following are the report's recommendations of what we can do in workplaces to help encourage and facilitate social connection:

- ▶ Make social connection a strategic priority in the workplace at all levels (administration, management, and employees).

- ▶ Train and empower leaders and managers to promote connections in the workplace and implement programs that foster connection.
- ▶ Leverage existing leadership and employee training, orientation, and wellness resources to educate the workforce about the importance of social connection for workforce well-being, health, productivity, performance, retention, and other markers of success.
- ▶ Create practices and a workplace culture that allow people to connect to one another as whole people, not just as skill sets, and in a way that fosters inclusion and belonging.
- ▶ Put in place policies that protect workers' ability to nurture their relationships outside work including respecting boundaries between work and non-work time, supporting caregiving responsibilities, and creating a culture of norms and practices that support these policies.
- ▶ Consider the opportunities and challenges posed by flexible work hours and arrangements (including remote, hybrid, and in-person work), which may impact workers' abilities to

connect with others both within and outside of work. Evaluate how these policies can be applied equitably across the workforce.

Here are a few practical ideas that I, along with other leaders, have implemented to help build connection and community: have common break rooms; implement workout areas; offer common break times to take walks or play games; celebrate birthdays, marriages, births, and other special events in people's lives; have regular team building times (e.g., events like miniature golf, attending a movie or sporting event; fun competitions, etc.).

The Need for Competence

Competence is our need to feel effective at meeting everyday situations, demonstrate skills over time, and feel a sense of growth and flourishing. Author Mary Jo Putney speaks to a benefit of competence when she says, "Competence is a great creator of confidence." People are created for mastery; we want to develop our skills and learn to manage everyday situations more effectively. As leaders, we should help close gaps between what we ask people

to do and the skills required to accomplish these tasks by providing ongoing training and development. There are many opportunities to help train and develop our team members. Of course, on-the-job training is essential. As a long-time university professor, I suggest encouraging and supporting people that want to finish undergraduate or graduate degrees — or support those that want to take selected classes. Many companies offer training, and there are numerous webinars, seminars, and conferences available. We can encourage involvement with professional organizations, support relevant certification programs, and share relevant books and great trade journals like this one. ■

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