Ep 130: How to Effectively Lead in a Hybrid Work Environment

Change is necessary to get the best from your team

- Set clear expectations on process, deliverables and consequences and then let go.
    - This is a key part of what we call Vigilant Leadership.
    - Set clear expectations on process, deliverables and consequences. This includes having to get over your control-freak mentalities which focus too much on the doing and not enough on the deliverable.
        - Set clear deadlines and be clear on the implications, ramifications and consequences for missing these. Sometimes deadlines can feel arbitrary, but when people know how their work impacts others and/or the company's reputation and/or bottom-line, it does drive motivation. Nobody wants to be THAT person who lets everyone down.
        - Be less concerned about how people get their work done. If someone wants to work odd hours, be less concerned with that and more concerned that they deliver quality work on time. The great thing about WFH is we can manage life and work with more fluidity. We can also manage our energy levels and not feel as constrained in working 9-5 or resentful if we choose to work more.
        - Be clear on channels of communication and when to communicate. Do you expect everyone to be on IM and responsive if you ping them? Do yu want regular status updates (don't overdo this to the control-freak point) via email weekly? Do you want to know when there is a problem when it happens? None of these are different than when everyone was in the office, but they become more important in clarifying because when people aren't together, cause and effect, or knowing what is going on just through proximity is diminished.
    - There is a level of granularity that is needed to get this right. Yes, a proper level of control. But this is a place where people aren't clear on expectations and that is where different interpretations come in. Whatever rules you are setting, they need to be as black and white as possible when when if comes to expectations.
    - There may be some roles that need to be in person more than others and you have to be ready for that.
- Hold key team communications and meetings for days everyone is in the office.
    - Company news, announcements, strategy sessions, reviews are all better when everyone is present in-person so everyone can participate without tech barriers and so you can monitor body language, reactions, dynamics. All those important non-verbal engagements that help you access culture. It also helps your people better read you and each other to understand the non-verbal cues (appearance part of Personal Brand) that goes with what people are saying.
    - This is especially true if you are delivering heavy news or recognition. It is important to be able to gauge reactions which is hard to do over zoom. And it is more impactful to get all the congrats in person and do a bit of a celebration.
    - The only caveat is in making sure the team isn't the last to know. So, you may have to flex in some circumstances.
    - Team needs face-time with each other and you. It helps to remind everyone that we are human. It rekindles spirit and builds comradery. Don't underestimate the power of this. Make sure you infuse some fun with the business. But don't make htem excessively long to "make up for lost facetime".
    - You should also arrange times when the team can just get together and have some fun. Team outings, lunches, etc.
    - There is a LOT of angst around this for people. Even the ones that typically are super outgoing and get their energy from being in person. You have to find ways to make the office not the "big bad wolf". Start small with a 2-hour meeting. Let them get used to it. Have intentionality around WHY you are going to be in person. Speak transparently to WHY it is so very important. It cannot feel like punishment. It has to be something people want and see the value of. And then also still be flexible on the other side.
- Maintain consistent behavior whether in the office or at home.
    - It has been difficult to overcome our control-freak ways when people started working from home. When they don't respond immediately to our IM, we immediately think they are messing around. The biggest way to release this fear is to set clear expectations on process, deliverables and consequences and then let go. This has worked for many in releasing the paranoia.
    - Now that people are splitting their time, we suggest bringing this approach into the work place too so as not to inadvertently fall back into our micro-management ways. When people are more accessible, we tend to take advantage of that. Some areas we have seen inconsistencies that are driving your people crazy.
        - Drive-bys: One big reason why people like WFH is because there are less distractions. They feel more productive and can get more done. So, if at home you ping to see if they are available, follow this practice in the office too versus stopping by and interrupting their flow.
        - Making it hard for people to participate if they aren't in the room. When it was just phone conferences, we didn't worry as much about making sure those on the phone were included in the convo. it is a very different thing when people are on zoom. The expectation is that they are as a part of the meeting as the people in the room. You need to manage meeting protocol to ensure your in-room convo doesn't take over and leverage tools that everyone can access.
        - Making assumptions. You aren't going to know everything and you can't control their behavior. Which is why setting clear expectations for deliverables and consequences is pivotal.
    - You have to find objective measures for evaluation, including whether people are in the office or at home. The most important thing is whether the work is getting done on time and is of high quality and are the team members respecting and upholding the guiderails and hard rules that have been implemented. There is no "one size fits all" anymore, so you have to think through this with considerations and lack of personal feelings.
- Make sure people don't get too lax in their working from home environment.
    - Maintaining a professional appearance with senior leaders, clients, customers, partners is important in maintaining the reputation and credibility of the team no matter if they are in the office or home. It is important to consider this and not get too lax thinking it doesn't matter because you are WFH and on zoom.
    - We always say you should dress one up from who you are engaging with in formal engagements. It shows respect for the other people. When you come to a meeting looking disheveled, you send the impression that the meeting wasn't important enough to even brush your hair.
    - Be mindful of the environment you are in. Many are using the virtual backgrounds which is a good way to ensure there isn't anything distracting in your background. Provide them a few company/team based ones that have your branding.
    - Be mindful of the level of each interaction as well. You have to identify who is "in the room" and be mnindful of how you are showing up.

ForthRight PEOPLE

www.forthright-people.com

april@forthright-people.com
anne@forthright-people.com