



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

## Is It Always Bad When A Senior Team Leader Leaves?

**Shannon Waller:** What happens when senior people leave? Is it a good thing or a bad thing? Stay tuned to find out.

**Shannon Waller:** Hi, Shannon Waller here and welcome to Team Success. One of the advantages of having written *Multiplication By Subtraction: How To Gracefully Let Go Of Wrong-Fit Team Members* is that people come up and tell me their stories. And I find this very enjoyable. One of my favorite clients came up to me, he said, "Shannon, is it bad that two of my six senior team leaders have left that are gone now?" And he looked pretty stressed about it. So I was like, "Oh no, what happened?" And so as he was telling me, and I asked him a key question, I said, "Well, were they really working out? Were they aligned with your company's core values?" And he goes, "No, they were not a good cultural fit." And I said, "In that case, it's not just a good thing, it's a great thing."

And I kind of really want to assure people that it absolutely is harder when senior people leave. They're responsible for activities, they're responsible for work getting done. You're often afraid that it will come back to you and you're like, "No, I don't want to take over that level of accountability again, I tried to pass it off," so we often procrastinate about exiting team leaders because they do create value often from a results standpoint. However, if they're a wrong cultural fit, which usually comes back to their behavior, not aligning with core values, not taking care of your team, not growing people underneath them, then I have to say it is extra important that you pay attention that this isn't working.

And just as a reminder, we are often the last to know that there's an issue. People don't like going over their boss's head. They don't like saying bad things. They don't want to be the person being a tattletale. And so we are often the very, very, very last people to know. So if you are hearing whispers, there are bellows down below, just have to tell you. You really do have to respect that kind of feedback, even if it's a little whisper here and there, little bit of like, "Hey, were you aware?" Pay attention to those things. Don't blow them off. I know it's a pain to have senior people leave or to let them go. But again, if they are not reinforcing what you're up to, if they're not growing people, if they're not aligned with your core values, they are doing far more harm than good.

First of all, it means that your core values don't have integrity because the leadership isn't representing them. Not having integrity means that people will disengage and disconnect from your organization. Now, when I'm talking about this is a time where it's really important to keep good people. There's a scarcity of people after lockdowns in the pandemic, especially a scarcity of good people, so you can't afford to lose people. One of the ways that you can do that is by, again, paying attention to this feedback and not stressing when you do lose senior people.



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Again, they're sending the wrong message. And this is really costly to you. We cannot afford to have people who don't support, again, your bigger goals, what you're up to, who are not exhibiting your core values. As far as I'm concerned, team leadership needs to be the epitome of core values. They need to be stellar examples of what you're up to and why you're doing what you're doing. And if they're not doing that, why are they there?

One of the situations that inspired me to write *Multiplication By Subtraction*, and this actually happened three times, was that I met with business owner, client of Strategic Coach, met with the senior team leader, and I could tell the senior team leader was not bought in at all, was paying strictly lip service to what we were talking about, was not aligned in terms of the goals of what we were setting up to accomplish, which was to grow the business, and just nodded and said all the right things, but had absolutely no intention of following through.

And so I communicated this to the owner and I was like, "Hmm, this person's not on board. They're more interested in their own game than yours. I got red flags all over the place." And like, "No, no, no, it's fine. They're actually going to be taking over and all the things." I'm like, "Hm, just remember this." And then two years later I got a phone call saying, "Shannon, you know that conversation we had about (fill in the name)?" He said, "You were right." I was like, "Ooh. I know." Unfortunately, two years went by. Now, everyone has to learn in their own time, so that is ultimately okay. And I could just see it. I could see the lack of alignment with core values. They were not aligned with what my dear friend and client was up to. It wasn't obvious to my friend, and I hate that.

And so that lack of alignment with core values, which means they're not a culture fit, is so, so critical. And culture is what has people stay. It's what has people be engaged. It's what has people grow and feel really connected, not just intellectually but also with their hearts and their will, their striving. So this is a big deal. If your leadership is not the epitome of your core values and your culture, that's a problem. And so if they're gone, again, I think that that's a great thing. So if you want to take action on this, if you want to delve further, I want to turn you onto a book that is completely exciting for me. It's called *Radical Candor* by Kim Scott. And I think it is one of the very, very, very best leadership and management books I have ever read. And I've read a few.

I'm just so excited by it. I'm like taking notes, I'm highlighting it, I'm listening to it at the same time, it's solidifying a lot of what I know. It's also expanding my thinking. It's given me new tools and language, which I'm finding really powerful. And I think it's something that can really help grow your leadership in a way that does, in fact, reinforce your core values. I'm having a lot of fun with that and I want to share that with you.



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And then the other thing I want to say is, please, please, please give regular feedback. And we have a podcast on that too. Give regular feedback to your leadership. Pay attention. Pay extra close attention to your leadership to make sure they're representative of you to the people below them, because you're not talking to those other people. They have to be you embodied. What you're up to, why you created the company, what is so important to you has to come through cleanly through your team leadership. And if they're not able to do that, if they distort the message, if they minimize things, if they, again, just pay lip service, they are costing you far more than they are contributing.

And personally, it bugs me. I want people to be more focused on contribution than status. I think that's critical. But you really do have to make sure that they're getting regular feedback. So let them know. Have the question. Ask open-ended questions you don't know the answer to. Figure out what their core values are, where did they come from, where are they going, is where they're going in alignment with where your company's going, what's their mission? Because everyone has one, whether they know it or not, and whether you know it or not. Really making sure that you have those deep conversations.

One of the things that she talks about in *Radical Candor* is to care personally and challenge directly. These types of conversations are about you caring personally, really getting to know people. It isn't until you do that, they can really see what's underneath someone's behavior. Because here's the other thing about really successful team leaders, sometimes who end up leaving or being exited, is that they put out a really good show and they're smart, they're savvy, they can have you believe what they want you to, but you really have to check with their underlying motivations. Why are they here? What are they up to? What are their goals? If you could help get those aligned with what you're up to, phenomenal. That's incredible.

And if you can't, you have to be willing to have the courage to your culture, the courage to build the kind of company you want, to be true to yourself and to your goals, to actually call it. Have regular feedback. Let them know what's working, let them know what's not. You have to give them standards to live up to and if they don't, you can't compromise those. This is letting it slip. You have standards. You don't let anyone be a client. You don't let anyone just work for you. They have to exhibit certain characteristics. And again, your team leaders, I think need to be at the highest level of that.

So if you do have some senior leadership that is not a right culture fit and they're gone, what next? Look for the people who are a phenomenal culture fit, who are very successful in their roles, and who really are phenomenal representatives and can be that leader for other people. Those are the people that you want to elevate. Those are the people that you want to support. Those are the people that you want to grow. And when you do, it's phenomenal because they're you in a different form. They're your value system in a different form. They're



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complimentary to you. But you can be rest assured that your company is growing along the principles that you find so key and so important.

So pay attention, don't stress. Multiplication by subtraction is okay. It doesn't have to be as stressful as you think. And make sure that your senior team leaders are people that not only do a phenomenal job, but also are fully aligned with you and what you're up to. Thanks so much for listening. If you have any questions or comments, please let me know at [questions@strategiccoach.com](mailto:questions@strategiccoach.com). And as always, here's to your team success.