



YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

The Power Of Openness: How Transparency Drives Team Success

Shannon Waller: Are you an authentic leader? Do you find it easy or hard to be really transparent with your team? Stay tuned to learn more about how transparency builds trust and how to be a great entrepreneurial team leader.

Hi, Shannon Waller here, and welcome to Team Success. Today, I want to talk about the fact that transparency builds trust. And as an entrepreneurial leader, as a team leader, it is critical that we are always conscious of maintaining a type of relationship and communication with our teams that builds and engenders trust. And this is easier said than done. It is not always easy to balance between what you know, what you feel is appropriate to share. If you're a private person, this may not come naturally to you, but it is critical that people trust you. Even more than they like you. In fact, it's much more important that they trust you. That's where respect comes in.

So what does transparency actually mean? Well, what it means is to be open and honest and authentic. It also means not having a hidden agenda, not doing things just because it's easier to get through the moment, to say what you think someone else wants to hear, just to get through a sticky spot in a conversation. It does mean embracing the danger sometimes, but there are ways to do that that are successful and ways to do that that are not. So when we get to the strategy portion of this conversation, you'll know what I mean. And it is really easier said than done, as I said, for some people more than others. If you are naturally a fairly, you know, what you see is what you get type of person, if being transparent is important to you, you're more likely to be that anyway. Other people are much more private, as I said, much more to keep their thoughts in the background. So this may go against the grain a little bit.

However, I've seen this in our company, I've seen this in other companies, when people keep too much close to the chest and are not open and honest and transparent, it can actually cause harm. Because people lose trust, they suspect that there's a hidden agenda. And there may not be, maybe the person's just being quiet about something, but unless it's kind of above board and open and honest, people make stuff up, and they don't make it up in a positive way. They make it up negative. They assume the worst. And this is a very natural function of human beings' brains. We are wired for danger. We are wired to perceive threats. Apparently we have five times as many receptors in our bodies for threats than we do for safety. We're just tuned to that.

So as leaders, it's critical for us that we make sure that we do not set off that radar system, that sensor array. It's critical that we let people know what's what, even if we're delivering bad news, even if it's something we would rather not say. The advantages of being open and honest and above board to the degree that you feel like you can is critical, again, to build that trust. So why is trust so important? I've been doing a lot of thinking lately, and you'll hear more about this in future podcasts, but the difference between corporate leadership and entrepreneurial leadership. There's so many more uncertainties in an entrepreneurial company.



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We're making stuff up as we go along. There's really no such thing as perfectionism or being perfect because, as I said, we're making it up new. It hasn't been done before. Who knows if it's right or wrong until we test it. And to go along into that somewhat risk-filled journey, people have to trust their leaders. They have to have confidence that, you know, we'll figure it out as we go. Or if we don't succeed, it's okay that we fail. We'll learn from what worked and what didn't work, and then we'll try again.

But trust is so critical to that process. If people do not trust their leaders, they start to play defense. They no longer are playing offense. And people will settle back into what they know, what they can count on, what they think they're being paid for, but they won't step out. They won't try new things. They won't volunteer improvement ideas. And how is your company going to grow if your team does not perceive that you're open to new ideas? They'll just keep doing what they've always been doing. And you'll wonder why things get harder, why things slow down. Why you're feeling a sense of drag or resistance is because people are just, they're rowing their own little boat, you know, towards what they think is the goal, but they don't have that sense of experimentation because it doesn't feel like it's safe to take risks because they don't completely trust leadership. And the only way to think about this is for you personally. So they don't trust what can be happening.

So if you're like, oh, this is how I operate. This is my way of thinking. Great. But remember, you're also in a leadership position. So you may feel that you as an individual are very trustworthy. I know I certainly feel that way. But I also have to remember that I'm in a certain position. I'm in a leadership position in our organization, and because of that, I have power. There's something called position power. And just because of that, my word has weight, you know, it has meaning, and people listen. People are kind of cautious about that. So, I can be completely trustworthy as an individual, and people will trust that I, you know, mean what I say, but I'm still a leader. And am I going to get absolutely everything that that person's thinking? Probably not, as much as I wish that were the case. So it's important to take that into account as well. Like, know that you don't know everything. Do your best.

One of the ways to be trustworthy and to be transparent is to create an environment where people experience what's called psychological safety. You know, Google did this incredible study about which teams were most successful. And the one factor that was far more important than intelligence or team dynamics or anything else was the amount of psychological safety people felt on the team. In other words, how safe did they feel taking risks and, quote unquote, failing and stretching? If that psychological safety was there, these teams beat the other ones by a multiple. And if it wasn't there, no growth, no innovation, no winning, are much less winning. So as an individual, you want to be the person that creates psychological safety. Again, this is a learned skill. Some people it comes a little bit more naturally than others. Doesn't matter. This is our job as leaders is to create an environment where as you know, we



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talk about in our core values here at Strategic Coach where there's, you know, no defense budget. It's all on offense.

So, no defense budget is key that people don't feel like they have to protect themselves. And when there's a lack of trust, walls go up and you no longer get full access to that human. And if you're someone who values people's heads, hearts, and will, you know, three parts of the mind, then you're missing out. And that, to my way of thinking, means that we then curtail the opportunity that we have to grow and to develop and to experiment and to test and to expand our impact as an organization. So there's a really big cost to not being transparent. So yeah, and losing that trust, if that's how you think about it.

So what can you do about this? This is interesting because you have to think about, okay, where do I feel, you know, in my own environment where I feel like I can be transparent? So this is very much a self-reflection, as well as how do you show up to your direct reports and to your team? So I have a list of things that I think really help build transparencies. Number one is in a leadership meeting. So Strategic Coach runs on EOS, and we have something called L10 meetings, as does everyone who's in the Entrepreneurial Operating System. And L10 meetings decide what you are going to share. And it's got to be something, preferably from every single meeting. And so what are you going to share? And what are you going to, what's called cascade down? right? Because everyone needs to get the same message. If you just go into a locked room or a private Zoom room and you're behind closed doors and there's hushed tones and then everyone knows that you had a meeting but they don't know what happened, well, most people assume you're hashing out hard things. True story. You're probably talking about them. Maybe, maybe not. Who knows? Or that something bad could be happening. Again, probably not, but there you go.

It is, in fact, the leadership team's job to what's called IDS in EOS terms, which stands for Identify, Discuss, and Solve. Issues, ideas, all the things. So that is leadership's job, but it also needs to be one where ideas can freely escalate up to the leadership team. It means that people have confidence that things are being discussed, that they are bringing forward. You cannot keep a lid on this, especially in an entrepreneurial company. Otherwise, you're seen really to be about power and control versus openness and honesty and transparency. So people need to be able to trust. And if the process is cloudy, if it is mysterious, then that's where trust goes downhill. So the more transparent you are, this is what we're thinking about, this is what we're talking about, here's some decisions that we're making, you know, it kind of pays for that. Now, does it mean it's sometimes messy and complicated? Yep, sure does. However, when people are included in that conversation, they can be part of the solution as well. And they're much, much, much more likely to buy in to the final answer, even if it's not the one that they wanted, because they know that it was a transparent process. So super, super critical.



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So bottom line, make sure that you share after your leadership meetings, whatever you call them, what it is, and that there's a consistent message that every team leader is communicating. So that's number one. Where possible, err on the side of more information, not less. Again, people will make stuff up with a lack of information. So you want to make sure that you say, here are some of the pros and cons we're looking at. Even if you don't have an answer yet, that can be super helpful. Say that you're planning on moving your building. What you can do is let people know, here's what we're thinking about. Here's some of our success criteria. Impact Filters are great for this, if you're in Coach. And if not, you can find us a download from our website. So here's what success looks like. Here's what not success looks like. Here's our worst result. Here are our success criteria. And then people really feel like they know what's going on. It's not mysterious. They may not like the end decision, but they will know why you made that decision.

So sharing the thinking, sharing the intention, which is what an Impact Filter does, is a great way to communicate and get people on the same page. It's huge. Then the other thing, and this lesson's becoming clearer to me every day, is take into account not just the final actions and the decision, but the why, as I talked about, and then also how people are going to feel about it. If you know that people will be happy, great. Some of you have been asking for this. You'll be thrilled that finally we're able to do blah, blah, blah. Or you're like, I know this is going to be a tough one for a lot of people to swallow. We looked at it. It was a really tough decision. We weighed the pros and cons. Ultimately, for the success of the team and the business and whatever, we've had to make this particular decision and we are going to move ahead. We took into account what everyone was saying and how they were feeling. Describe how you did that because you actually do need to ask people. and then let people know the final decision. But that means they feel like they're accounted for, how they felt about things. Feelings are a thing. And you want people to feel really, really good about your company and about how you make decisions. So the more that you can be explicit about that, again, even if it's not a result that you know everyone's gonna be thrilled with, it just goes a long way, again, because you're being transparent about it.

Now, the other thing is, what if there's something not just company-wide, but a particular situation where you're in the power seat, you're the one who gets to make the decision, and you're struggling with something. You're struggling with how someone is connecting with you, or they have a completely different take on the situation. It is completely appropriate in that moment to use I statements. I'm struggling with this. This feels really hard for me. It clearly feels hard for you. But I statements are so much better than you. You never want to say to anyone implicitly or explicitly, you're an idiot. It can be tempting, don't get me wrong, especially when someone completely disagrees with you, or you say, I'm really having trouble aligning with that. So you taking ownership for how you feel about it, you could even say, I'm having trouble keeping my cool about this. You owning how you're feeling and not putting it on the other person. I'll be doing a future podcast on how to manage strong emotions, yours and



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other people's, and this is one of them, saying I and you say not putting it on the other person but just owning how you're feeling in that particular moment again builds trust. They can see it in your face, they can hear it in your tone of voice, they can again see it in your body language. So you stating it is kind of, again, being transparent. It means you're not trying to operate over top of something.

It was really fun. I had a great conversation with a couple of entrepreneurs just a few days ago, and both of them said how they have zero patience, tolerance, anything for drama. They just don't. Like, take action, deal with it, move on. They hate politics with every fiber of their being. The three of us agreed on this in this conversation. So don't be someone who creates politics. Just be straightforward about this. Don't be all weird. Don't be manipulative. Don't try and, like, stack it in your favor. That's a very, very, very short-term strategy that more often will have you shoot yourself in the foot for that one. So you can say, I'm having a hard time with this one. And then bring someone else in. If you can't work it out with that person, good, bring in a third party, bring in someone, get some outside influences and information, because maybe it's such that the two of you just can't figure that out. But again, you saying how you're feeling is another way to be transparent about it. Again, some of you will love it, some of you will not, but I know that that works.

The other thing is know yourself, and this goes back to the I statements. If you know that you're like, you know what, I'm an expert in numbers, or I'm an expert in strategy, I'm not so strong on the people side. I feel like I'm really missing something that you're saying. Can you help me get this in a better way? I want to, and you have to have a sincere desire to want to, but you're like, this isn't the strength for me, and I'm struggling. Could you help me, please? Oh my gosh, most of your team will jump in quite willingly to be able to support you with that. If you are genuine, do not be faking this. That will be a disaster. So again, ask for help when you need it. Be truthful. Again, that sort of seems kind of obvious. For example, if you don't know something, even if you think you should know it, just go, I don't know. That's a really good question. I feel like I should know the answer, but I need to go and find out. Way better than trying to fake it. Maybe I should call this podcast Don't Fake It. I guess that's kind of the point here. So just be straightforward. People will trust it. Again, they may not love your answer, but they're going to trust it. And they'll respect you for saying, I don't know. Especially in a leadership position, sometimes we feel as though we should have all the answers. Says who? We're making this up as we go along. So no, you don't have to have all the answers. You might need to be the one to help go figure it out and then come back.

Actually, here's another one. Close the loop. A lot of times, a lot of ideas get put out, and sometimes they're great, rich conversations. There's identify, discussing, and solving happening. But what doesn't happen is closing the loop, as I like to say in the Team Programs, close the open file for people. Let them know, hey, here's why we made this decision. We weighed the pros and cons. Here's this, here's that. I described a situation where we made a



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decision. Someone had a suggestion for one of our offerings. Why isn't it this way? How come it's this way? And I could have heard that as a criticism, but I didn't. I'm like, oh, we brought this up and here was our discussion about it. Were you in that conversation? Oh, no, you weren't. Let me fill you in. Here's how it plays out. Here's, you know, what we took into account. Here's how it actually works. And then we came up with the decision in this case, it was to keep something the way that it was instead of changing it. And she was like, oh, I didn't know any of that. So what looked like a really obvious change to her, we kind of went through some of the nitty gritty of it. And she was like, oh, that's really interesting. Now, am I willing to revisit the issue? Yep, sure am. We can try again. You're a year and a half after we made the first decision. But she just didn't know the background. And I was more than happy to share the background. And I didn't take offense at being asked.

I think this is another thing. If you've made a decision and you just want to move on, you don't want someone to bug you with it, you kind of need to be willing to give people the whys and wherefores of why you made that decision. And remember, you know, one of the great things about the team with whom I work is they remember why we made certain decisions. I don't. I just remember the final answer. Someone's like, oh, well, it was this, this, and this. I'm like, yes, exactly. Now, with this particular topic, I did remember the why, so it was fine. But I like relying on my fellow team leaders to help share why we made that decision and be really clear about it. But again, closing that loop is so, so, so critical. If you don't do it, things go into the abyss, and then people don't trust that they're even being talked about. So we have to, have to, have to make a habit, and sometimes this is work, I know, of closing the open files for our teams, because trust me, they are open and talking to your team if you haven't done that.

The last thing I want to say, I'm sure there's lots more. You probably have your own strategies for being transparent. The other thing to pay attention to is, and I want to say go deeper. Again, this is something that I'm in the midst of learning. If you sense that someone is upset, and I'm very capable of just working on things on the intellectual level, here's why we made the decision, blah, blah, blah. But I have to pay attention to how people are feeling about it. And I have to be willing to say, hey, how are you feeling about this, without an agenda about what they say. And I have to be someone who doesn't get all reactive or triggered. You know, this is why know thyself is so important. When you know yourself, obviously I love to use profiles, Kolbe, Print, CliftonStrengths, Working Genius, all the things, because it helps me know myself better and I'll know what triggers me and what doesn't. Saying I'm triggered, really powerful. It doesn't put it on the other person, it puts it on me.

So I have to be willing when I'm talking to someone else, go, hey, how is this impacting you? How are you feeling about this? And if you're genuine in that question, it's kind of amazing what people will share with you. They'll be like, oh, I'm feeling really crappy about it. This does not feel good to me at all. And I'm like, oh, okay, tell me more. You know, or they'll be like, at first I really hated it for this, this, and this, and this reason. Now I've kind of come around



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because I see the other side. Someone else may go, I'm completely fine. I know there's a lot of talk over here, but me personally, I'm fine with this decision. And they felt heard. Does it mean you're going to change something? Maybe, maybe not. But it means that they have felt heard from not just an intellectual perspective, but from how they feel about it.

And this ties back to why entrepreneurial leadership is kind of special because we are counting on people striving. We want people to strive. We want people to be courageous in the face of what they don't know. And that courage doesn't come from your head. It comes from your heart. And so it is critical that we take that into account when we are working with our teams. It is not just about how they think about things. Obviously, we're hiring awesome, intelligent, smart, creative people, but that only gets engaged if they care. So, you know, there's a great expression, people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. So asking, how are you feeling about this, is such a powerful question. You know, don't preface it with telling them how they feel, just genuinely ask them and be willing to ask open-ended questions you don't know the answer to. Don't seed it. Don't plant seeds in terms of what you want to hear. Actually, just ask open-ended questions you don't know the answer to and be willing to hear anything.

It's interesting, this is where, for me, coaching comes in so handy. There's a term we use about not being trickable, which means not getting hooked by your emotions, not getting triggered. Because a coach who's triggered at the front of the room, not a lot of fun to be in that room. They're just emotional. They need to be really emotionally stable to be a great coach. And one of the things that's true when I'm coaching is it is really, really, really hard, hasn't happened in recent memory, for someone to trigger me. I can not like something that someone says, but I don't take it personally. And that's, I think, again, the bottom line. I don't take it personally. I have all the room in the world for anything that my clients are thinking, feeling, or experiencing. And I think we need to be like that with our teams, too. We can have our opinions, don't get me wrong, but we need to have a lot of space for people. Then they'll have more space for us, is the corollary to that. So it just means when you see yourself in the coaching role rather than as a status thing, as someone who could be challenged, you know, even if someone says, you're wrong, you're kind of like, oh, that's interesting. Tell me more about that. Why do you think I'm wrong? Or how does that make you feel can be a little bit of a manipulative question, so you have to be careful. But how are you feeling about that, if you mean it, is awesome. So when you can be untrickable, when you can not take anything personally, and you see yourself as a true leader, not a boss, not even a manager, but as a true leader, I think you open up the opportunity to create real teamwork with your team. This is not about, you. Frankly, it's just not about you. I'll just leave it at that.



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So the more you can connect with people, the more you can be transparent, the higher level of trust that you build, and then therefore, the more of your people that you get. They get to bring their heads and their hearts and their will to work. Because, again, none of it works, though. But none of this really works. You don't get the full engagement from people until you connect with who they are and how they feel about things. That's what decides how much of their head and how much of their will they bring to work. So transparency builds trust, and that's really on you to be as clear and as open and as honest as you possibly can. I hope this inspires your thinking. I actually hope it makes you think, you know, where have you felt like it was appropriate to be open and honest? Where do you feel held back? Where do you take things personally? I mean, I hope you're asking yourself these questions. I think it's a great conversation to have as a leadership group, because people have very different opinions, I can tell you right now. But to my mind, transparency, especially in this day and age, especially with new people coming into the workforce, this is absolutely vital. We don't get to stand on positions. We don't get to stand on ceremony. People are not giving us that respect. We have to earn it. So transparency builds trust. Go for it. Thank you so much for listening. Again, I hope this has inspired your thinking. If you have any questions or comments, please let me know at questions@strategicoach.com. And as always, here's to your team's success.