

4 TIPS FOR LEADERS TO BUILD STRONG TEAMS DURING THE PANDEMIC

A lot of things happened in our organization in the last 10 months. COVID-19 forced most of us and our teams to work remotely and suddenly, our work, home, school, studies and all the relations had to exist in one space. Some people found it not so bad – not spending time in traffic gives them more time to spend with their family, read or exercise to support their health. Some found it extremely hard – not being able to be in the office, talk to people over a coffee, create value for the clients, using all the tools they knew and loved. Constantly thinking about health issues – worrying about ourselves, our families and friends does not help much to find a way through this hard time.

As people in leadership positions, we used to know how to handle different challenges, like recruitment, onboarding, motivation, conflict management etc. A lot of books, courses and studies supported us through the years and gave us lots of tools, tips or guides on how to be a good leader. The pandemic changed all that since this was a whole new situation: the term VUCA gained a whole new meaning.



How to be a leader who builds strong remote-working teams during this pandemic time? I have 4 tips, which arose from my work with the board, directors and managers from all levels in my company for the last couple of months.

1. **You don't have the time? You make the time.**

In my organization I discovered that during the pandemic we have more work than before. We had to transform our organization to become a remote workspace and adjust the processes to a completely different reality than before COVID-19. All this important work pulled most of our managers away from working with their team. They forgot that they are people managers – not only process managers, and their main task is to support teams, to work and talk with team members on a daily basis. Especially during this pandemic time when we are worried about other things more than in the past. I heard a lot of 'I-don't-have-enough-time' excuses when I was asking managers what did they do with their teams through last week, month or 3 months. They were really surprised when I told them that evidently a team is not their priority then. We all

have the same amount of time. But what is beautiful is that we can consciously decide which priority we focus on at each moment. Do you choose to make the time for your team?



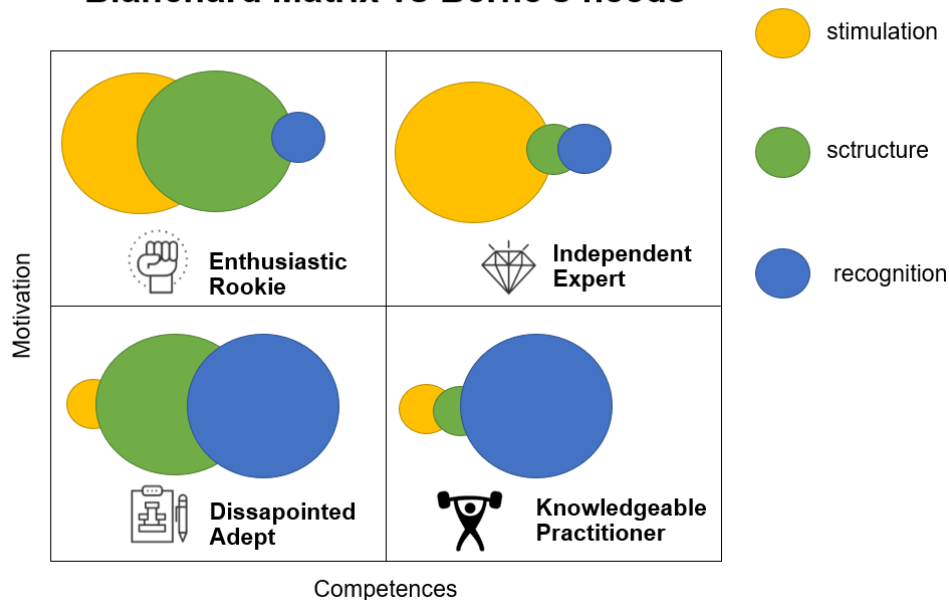
2. Talk with your people – not only about work.

When we are in the office, some team-building aspects happen automatically: we talk in the open space, during coffee time or lunch breaks, we share a lot of information connected to work but also about our personal life. Now, managers have to create the additional space – during work hours, between the tasks, to talk about those things - since the need didn't vanish. Plan one or two 15-minute meetings (we call it 'coffee time') when you don't talk about current tasks and projects, but about what you have been doing over the weekend, sharing some insights about your health or worries you are dealing with. It's a great time to better know each other; our first idea was to talk about our first job or memories from school. It is really surprising how easily people share and listen to those stories.

3. Ask about basic needs.

Eric Berne – father of transactional analysis, a concept connected to the organizational psychology – found out that people in general have three basic needs: recognition (satisfied with signs of recognition), stimulation (satisfied with physical or psychological elements of a workplace or life in general) and structure (satisfied with planning, organizing but also with structured communication or responsibilities). Transactional analysts who did a lot of research after Berne, linked the needs with the Blanchard Matrix and assumed that on each level of an employee's development in a certain company, the level of each of these needs is different. Do you know the situation for each member of your team? If so, did you check – 3 months ago, a month ago, a week ago, today – how these needs are covered for each member of your team?

Blanchard Matrix vs Berne's needs



4. Focus on one thing at the time.

Author Gary Keller in his book 'The One Thing. The Surprisingly Simple Truth Behind Extraordinary Results' underlines that to be really efficient and to achieve extraordinary things, you have to do one thing at a time. One goal, one task, one habit, one thing that you are focusing on at the moment. So when you talk with your team – don't do e-mails. When somebody is presenting something important that he or she has been working on for a few days – don't answer to your messages on the phone, don't scroll on social media. When you do the task – do the task. Switch your phone to airplane mode and cut off the distractions. You will be surprised how much time you actually save – or how much time you make, as I mentioned in the first tip. When you do this, you are more focused, attentive and you are listening better which makes you a better manager in the long run. How many things are focusing on right now?

Ask yourself the questions listed above, honestly. See what you can do to be a better manager who builds effective, strong teams. Be focused on your people, theirs and your needs to create a great space to work and grow, despite the circumstances that we all are in right now.

And to conclude I have one final, powerful question from Gary's book:

What's one thing I can do so that by doing it, everything else will become easier or unnecessary?

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