

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/leading-a-young-team-to-success>

It's better for a CEO to describe success than to prescribe the exact methods employees must use to achieve it. This is done, says Chegg CEO Dan Rosensweig, by establishing a company vision and sharing it often with employees. He advises to not think in terms of business models, but rather to reframe the questions to ensure your company is thinking big enough. Then, hire people willing to be part of a team that will be integral to this vision.



Transcript

So, it sounds like Chegg is very mission-driven.. How do you build that culture in a company that's growing so quickly around that mission and get everybody signed up for it? Well, the first thing you do is you establish a vision for the company.. You establish a mission.. You write your company values.. Those things people take for granted.. You see, when I came to college, I needed a job.. My mom was getting divorced for the second time and we were going to have to sell the house.. And I was going to have to get a job like everybody else.. And I went into a company and what you think is, "Who had the job before me? What did they do? And how can I do the job 10% better?" And you move out here and the questions are very different.. The questions are, "What needs to be done and what's the smartest way to do it?" I mean, when you reframe the question you asked me, "What did you not know then that you know now?" To me, everything isn't so much the answer..

It's how you frame the question.. It's what problem are you solving for, how would you define success.. Is that success big enough to matter? What are the assets you have? What are the assets you don't have? And can you get them and if you can, what's the likelihood you're going to achieve that success? It's not a business model.. It's are you thinking big enough? And so, we've written our values where the first value is "Think big" because just the textbook market alone is a \$12-billion market.. So, I'm proud of where we've gotten to.. But we're a gnat out of the \$12 billion.. So, you get people understanding a common vision, the definition of success, what their roles are, what you're going to reward at the company.. And then, you hire people who buy into that and are willing to be part of a team instead of Randy Moss having to leave a team every three years or Terrell Owens having to leave a team every three years.. These are individual performers who are the hardest people to fire because they're great individual performers but lousy characters, right? You try to avoid as many of those as you can.. You don't get sucked into the drug of somebody who can get you a short-term decision..

And you build a team and then you reward it and you communicate and overcommunicate.. And these guys are all Cheggsters here.. And they'll tell you we meet as a team, as a company, once a month.. We go through the priorities.. We define whether or not we did them well.. We communicate them well.. We laminate them.. We put them on everybody's desk.. And our employees hold the management responsible rather than management holding the employees responsible because if we didn't focus the resources on what we said we were going to do, it's our fault, not their fault.. And you get people fired up about it..

And we have a company, if you walk in, the energy is extremely high.. We have people from all over the world.. We have tons of young people because we don't want people who have too much experience to think that there's one way to do anything.. And then, once you define success, people then know how to make a good or bad decision.. And you can give them the freedom to go make a decision.. And another thing that I learned, which I didn't learn when I was a younger executive and manager, is it's better for the CEO to describe success than to prescribe how to get that success because I can do things the way I do things.. We do things very different.. So, if I say to you, "Here's the mountain you need to climb and here's exactly the steps you need to take," but they're unnatural for you, you're not going to be successful.. And that's one of the hardest things as an executive to do, get really talented people in the company, work with them to define success and give them the freedom to do it their way.. They're best suited to do it..

And that's an invaluable lesson for me...