Stanford eCorner

Ways of Working

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Sue Siegel, CEO of GE healthymagination, offers a thoughtful list of values for properly setting team expectations and interactions. While these ideas may seem obvious at first glance, says Siegel, a commitment to these values imbues teams with the cohesiveness and integrity needed to build a high-quality culture.

Transcript

This is something I call ways of working.. I've used it for years and this is something that as a manager or as a leader, as a team lead, as a project lead that I realize was pretty important.. Leaders, as you have learned in your classes, or as you have lived in life, have to be able to set vision and goals.. They have to be able to hire and fire and build teams, right? But in addition to that, you really do have to set the expectations particularly with regards to a culture.. So let me share something that when I start any job with any team that I work with, I essentially lay these out.. You might tweak them here and there, you might create your own, but just the fact that you lay them out, and that, in fact, they are something that you talk through creates a real culture.. So let me give you a sense.. For example, if you are part of a team and this is for Healthymagination team right now within GE, we are all ambassadors for the team.. That means that actually you need to support and represent the team wherever you are, and just understand that in fact that is that important.. People look at that and they go that sounds so obvious..

Well, but it's not, because if you go out there and say, you know, I don't agree with that, I don't believe that, you are going to get called on it, and I make that very clear to the folks that I work with.. When I think of the issues within the team need to be resolved within the team, again, it sounds obvious, but laying this out when you start working with the team is actually pretty important.. What does that mean? So you can go and say, you know what pretend to like it, go outside, talk about it, second guess the decisions, and I will tell you it will be one of the worst functioning teams that probably will exist, because you don't have the entity, you are not clear, and you are actually not coming together with regards to expectations.. Let me give you a sense of when you think about the decisions.. Now, everybody gets a chance to actually debate, to argue as much as you possibly want in the room, and the leader, the manager, the project team leader whoever it might be has to set that tone.. It's a notion of culture.. And by doing that, it really encourages very, very strong debate and allowing for everybody to be able to air their concerns and really add to the richness of the decision-making.. Once those decisions are made, however, in order for crisp execution to occur, in order for success of the team and individual success, you really need to make sure that in fact you have debated it internally and not second guessed it externally.. One of the things I tell the teams that I work with is, hey, it's not that you never get to bring the decision back, you just don't get the second guess it - behind the scenes, you have to come back in front of us, you have to ask us, look us in the eyes and say, we, in fact, are going to revisit this decision for the following reasons and don't come in without some solutions too.. Come in proactively..

Just by setting those expectations, I have to tell you it's made such a difference, and this is - you know that you saw that the - it was 1998 that I've used this and whatever you are in now, it's actually lived, and the reason why is they're so simple but the key to it is that in fact what's happened is that we have the ability to make it very, very clear and we get a sort of common contract together.. The other one I will tell you is this proactive product - project problem solving.. What do I mean by that? So one of the things that happens is that folks say, particularly in organizations, they talk about you know what? He didn't do this right, and they go and they tell somebody else and they go and tell their manager.. Where they can't resolve something and they go and tell somebody else without going first to the person that's actually caused the problem.. And you guys know how you feel when you haven't heard that there is a problem with you specifically, right, it's sort of human nature, in fact it just gets worse and escalates.. So this whole escalation procedure, I always say go to the source first, always talk about that, create that culture of accountability and create the culture of respect between one another, it's remarkable, it actually works, if you hold yourselves accountable and you get the team to get into this contract with one another.. The last one that I'll talk about is assume noble intend.. This one seems more simple than not, but it's absolutely - probably the one

that's the most elegant.. When people are approaching you when there is problems, what do you guys think, right? Depending on who the person is you have your preconceived notions, and you tend to think whatever you are thinking first, but the reality of it is, if in fact you can just assume noble intend, assume they're actually coming to you with a good purpose in mind, setting this kind of culture, I have to tell you guys it's worked over and over again, it's put really high performing teams in place, it creates a culture of accountability, it creates a culture of respect.. And as you start to move in to this corporate world or into the venture world or into a non-profit or wherever you go next, think about these hard and know what you've got to be able to represent...