

Communication Culture

BY SARAH LINNEY

WITH MANY SENIOR EXECUTIVES AND CEOS CONSIDERED BY THEIR EMPLOYEES TO BE MYSTERIOUS FIGUREHEADS, EXPERTS ARE URGING LEADERS TO DEVELOP STRONG WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS.

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The productivity and cohesiveness of a team and workplace stem from strong, collaborative relationships between the team, management staff, and the company. When these relationships are inefficient or mistrustful, the team and company suffer.

Theresa Moltoni is the founder and Managing Director of IRIQ, a leading team of industrial relations consultants. Theresa's career spans over 25 years in the human resources and industrial relations arena. She believes it is essential to develop trust with the people you work with. "It is important that you find a way to prove you are on the same page, and that you place a high value on the goals of the business rather than the personal agendas of individuals," she says.

"You must show an interest in the lives of your co-workers and employees. Get to know their family members and regularly ask about their welfare. Set reminders in your calendar for important events such as birthdays and anniversaries within the company. Get to know the important things that are happening in their lives, and show that you genuinely care about them.

"As a CEO or senior executive, it's important that you regularly communicate the direction of your business and how you are tracking as an organisation. This should include important initiatives, decisions, and the reasons for them. The larger the organisation, the greater the perception that the CEO or senior executive team are icons somewhat removed from where the real work is done."

Theresa advises leaders to take a holistic approach when attempting to develop efficient workplace relationships. "I think this is deceptively simple," she says. "If you are serious about developing strong, productive workplace relationships, you need to create an environment where staff feel you are approachable and are comfortable telling you what they need to be effective in their roles, as well as what might not be going as well as it should and how that might be solved.

"How you respond to this is then going to determine your success. If you listen to and act on this information, you will demonstrate you actually are approachable. That doesn't mean you personally need to fix everything or that all issues need to be raised with you. Your action may be to understand why they didn't feel able to raise this issue with their direct manager, and to make sure that is no longer the case.

"The final step is to ensure you explain what action you have taken and why. The manner in which you handle every single interaction with your team will be amplified and spoken about among staff, so don't try to take shortcuts. Deal with every situation as you would have your staff deal with them: professionally, respectfully, and with good judgement."

CEO of Fast Track Australia and 1999 Telstra Business Woman of the Year Sheryle Moon specialises in transforming organisations and their employees. She believes that time and effort are the key elements in developing strong, productive workplace relationships.

"I think many leaders and managers look for a silver bullet, a one-size-fits-all approach to relate to employees and colleagues in a workplace. It really comes down to having an understanding of the individual needs of people and their motivations in order to get the best out of them."

To develop cohesive workplace relationships, Theresa suggests executives get to know their employees on both a professional and a personal level. "When first appointed to an executive role, it is helpful to let your employees know a little about you. It's important to build credibility, so inform them of your career to date, including previous achievements. People relate to you better if you also let them know a little about your personal interests and family.

"Next, I find it beneficial to take the time to get to know key people. Make an effort to understand them by learning about their history, what challenges they have faced in

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the past, how they handled those, where they are heading, what their goals are, what is important to them, how they plan to get there, and how you might be able to help them.

"Cohesive relationships will develop when you both inherently know that you have each other's best interests at heart. This means you have taken the time to understand each other and that you are committed to working together to support the achievement of mutual goals."

After the initial establishment of key workplace relationships, Theresa says, executives can nurture and strengthen these relationships through trust, effort, and consistency.

"Trust means consistently making sure you put shared interests above personal agendas—in other words, looking for goals that will be of mutual benefit. If circumstances arise where taking a path will mean personal gain at the expense of the other person, then judge the worth of that choice carefully. If it is still something you think you need to do, then approach the other person and openly discuss the situation, the issues on your mind, and seek their agreement to that decision before you make it.

"Put the effort in and make sure that you regularly follow up. Relationships take effort →



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and time to nurture over regular and ongoing periods. Whether it is a regular phone call, a coffee catch-up, or lunch, it is critical in nurturing your relationship, understanding each other, and demonstrating an ongoing commitment to achieving mutual goals in the long term.

“Of course, the final element is being consistent. You can’t build a strong, trusting workplace relationship without a demonstration that you will consistently behave in a mutually beneficial and caring way. Proving over time that you are reliable, and that you will listen, understand, and act when appropriate, and consistently do what you have said you will do is essential.”

According to Sheryle, executives often make mistakes when attempting to develop workplace relationships. “They think that people relationships can be process driven

and mass executed,” she says. “In our busy lives, with all the demands on managers and leaders, it is easy to de-commit on the time and effort required to nurture individual relationships and opt for a one-size-fits-all approach.

“It is important to balance the need to achieve a common task, the need to be held together as a working team, and the needs that each individual has. If you diminish one of these three, the other two areas will suffer to the detriment of achieving organisational objectives. Many managers err on the side of the task and the processes associated with it.”

By developing these relationships based on trust, communication, and collaboration, executives will see a significant improvement in the cohesiveness and productivity of their team and workplace. •