



GENERATE WELL-BEING

A Manager with a Record of Success & Promotion Engages His Team to Set Purpose, Have Fun & Get Results

CASE CONTEXT

A mid-level manager structures his role in ways that keep him aligned with his personal leadership principles. He puts his team engagement front-and-center, building relationships through authenticity, interest and connecting off-task.

Des has packed a lot in his ten years with a global pharmaceutical firm. He built a reputation as a skilled

marketer and manager, being rapidly promoted from individual contributor, to first-level leader, to alliance leader, to functional manager. He's worked across divisions and locations, on established products and new product launches. Currently, Des leads global forecasting and strategy for a core business. His team includes 20 people on site and another 15 globally who engage directly with the research side of the business. "It's a humbling experience to walk into so many meetings knowing you probably know less than 90% of the people in the room ... But, it's been great."

"I have a real passion for this work. I love the scientific rigor. I love developing high performing teams." Much of Des' enthusiasm comes from the relationships, and he takes his role as leader seriously. "If people aren't happy and having fun and being themselves at work, what are we doing this for?" One way he starts to build that sense of thriving is to talk openly about purpose and identity. "A couple months into a new role, I pull in a tool called Dimensions of Difference ... It walks through the things you are born into, and family life, relationships, education and work style ... *It gets you to what are the three things that define you as a human being. If we have that open, raw dialogue, people can really be themselves moving forward ...* People can get to know where I come from; I get to know where they come from." This personal insight gets Des and his team through some outwardly difficult or professionally challenging moments.

"People don't know what I'm thinking or feeling; they only see my actions ... If I can give them a lens to what's underneath, they can infer that my intent is pure, and we build trust ... Without trust, you hear the inflection in someone's voice—something they don't even know they are doing—and you over-react ... We have to feel safe to talk. By talking about who we are, what we are really about, we end up with more satisfaction at work. When we get into debates, we don't think about those little things."

Des also drives purpose by placing the patient—the ultimate customer—in the center of team conversations. "I elevate the patient we serve, especially when we go through hectic periods ... There are patients counting on us." He'll bring in YouTube clips or a story from a patient or family to meetings—putting names and faces to their purpose. He's matter-of-fact about the business and financial demands, "But, that's not very inspirational ... Real inspiration has my team thinking about their business in the shower or driving home; they want to make a difference for a patient. That's the North Star, not some business target."



MALE

Level: MANAGER OF MANAGERS

Industry: HEALTHCARE

HIGH-PERFORMING LEADERS LEVERAGE NETWORKS TO DO 5 THINGS

Based on 20 years of research in more than 300 organizations, we know that the quality of your professional relationship play a significant role in your success. We have extended this research to describe the way high-performing leaders leverage their networks to: Innovate, Execute, Scale, Thrive and Adapt.



Acknowledging accomplishment and giving recognition also helps people feel part of a team and generates purpose and energy. “Whether it’s acknowledgement of someone’s work anniversary or recognition of a project going well, it gives a nice buoyancy to the person being called out and it makes people want to be part of that kind of culture.” Fun, too, is part of the mix. “FUN is one of my leadership principles—the only one I put in capitals.” He opens each meeting with a “wow” moment, with team members rotating who brings in something interesting and inspiring to the team. For example, an ad or video from a completely unrelated industry or from pop culture will bring humor to the beginning of a meeting. “It’s a moment to say, *let’s not take ourselves too seriously ... We laugh together before we get down to work.*” Feeling part of the team also builds accountability and commitment. Honest and open start/stop/continue meetings help people focus on improvement and highlight when there is a need to do extra or do better to get results.

Des also tries to see the positive, which fuels both energy and innovation. *Seeing possibilities and not critically analyzing every idea is important to help people feeling engaged in their work.* “I think it is human nature to say no, to point out why something is not going to work. We’re wired to overstate risk. As a caveman, you stayed in the cave. The one who said, I’ll go look outside and see what’s going on out there, who took the risk, his genes didn’t usually pass on!” Des tries to support taking risks, driving change—not just giving lip service to *fail fast* or *innovate*. “I want my team to feel comfortable to communicate an idea or jump on an educated risk, because they feel supported. People are not scared to take a risk—they are scared to be blamed.”

All the effort Des places on supporting his team pays off for him personally. He finds great satisfaction in being a leader. “Really, nothing gets me more excited than my team being engaged—when they are doing good work and happy doing that work. That’s fantastic! And when people are developing, getting better and enjoying the process of getting better—that gets me charged up! ... And, I get a sense of purpose as a team when I see us running at problems, owning it, solving it, to help improve an outcome or drive a result.” Des is happy not being in

the spotlight as a star player, but as the coach or part of a team. “I played a lot of sports growing up. That feeling of winning as a team is different than winning on your own ... I always liked the team aspect ... There are things you do, you have individual responsibility for, to enjoy the benefits team success ... If my team does well, I do well.”

Des’ family provides a valuable counterweight to the time and intensity of work. He dedicates much of his time to his three children, his wife and a nonprofit they run together. These commitments are tied to deeply held values, and he notices the difference between when he is going through the motions and when he is fully focused and present. “I try to dedicate sufficient time to everything, but I realized that all the things I expect of my team and myself at work, I wasn’t doing at home ... I was there but I wasn’t fully present.” Having the experience of dealing with cancer in his family put things in perspective. “You get reminded that your life can get turned upside down in a quick minute. You know you can’t get your time back, so don’t screw it up.”

Network Insights

- **Demonstrate authentic interest and concern for others—people don’t care how smart you are until they know you care about them.** Be genuine in your interactions. Hold regular 1:1s that are protected time where you are fully present as a leader. Follow through by removing barriers for your people.
- **Use a framework to understand team members at the level of identity and purpose.** A tool like Dimensions of Difference is a jumping-off point to share who you are and get others talking about what matters to them. These conversations build trust, lead to more satisfaction in work and allow a safe environment to take risks.
- **Be clear (for yourself) and transparent (for others) on your leadership principles.** Informally pulse check with open-ended questions like, *Tell me how things are going*, to gauge how those principles are playing out. As needed, you can re-direct attention and priorities, as well as celebrate when people are getting it right.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH & ROB CROSS

Building on 20 years of research with more than 300 organizations, the Network Leader Research Project seeks to understand the approach and strategies that enable certain leaders to consistently achieve peak performance. The research includes 160 in-depth interviews conducted by Rob Cross, a Professor of Management at University of Virginia’s McIntire School of Commerce. The Connected Commons is currently focusing its research on leadership effectiveness, talent optimization and organizational alignment and change—three areas where network insights can clearly drive performance. For more information visit www.connectedcommons.com or email Rob at rlcrossjr@gmail.com.