



GENERATE
WELL-
BEING

A Global Manager Creates a Context for Thriving for Himself & His Team

CASE CONTEXT

An experienced leader invests in his team in ways that promote a sense of purpose for them and for him. He focuses on co-creation of work, learning and building trust—and sees their success as his own.



MALE

Level: FIRST-LEVEL
LEADER

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.



As head of legal for the Latin American division of a global healthcare products company, Gabe addresses the full

scope of needs ranging from labor and employment, to patents, to litigation. He's held various roles within legal for over a decade. Based in the U.S., Gabe is the legal interface between corporate headquarters and the businesses in each country. "My job is to collaborate closely with headquarters attorneys and business leaders. We always look to find a good balance of making sure we address specific local issues and sensitivities and doing it with the consciousness that our actions may have a global impact."

Often, his role can be a negative one, with people seeing legal as a roadblock to their interests. He has learned to make collaborations constructive and built valuable relationships, so he is able to address business concerns, protect the organization—and feel like he is thriving personally and professionally. "I always make sure that I know in a lot of detail the space of my cross-functional colleagues. If we are going to provide legal advice for someone, we cannot do it in framework of the legal constructs without understanding their business concerns ... If we understand their business and their concerns, we can give better advice and be a better collaborator ... It has reaped good results."

Gabe's interactions within his team are also points of satisfaction and success. He works on different levels to create a context of trust and engagement. "First, I try to grow people within what they do really well already—I give them more of that. Then, I partner them up with their peers." The partnership—for example, a person in Colombia may work with a person in Mexico—establishes collaboration between them, sets up a development opportunity and prepares them to lead projects across the region. "I instill in my team a collaborative perspective. It is a way to break through the usual, *We know each other but we never worked together...* I found that very effective and it is one thing they like." In this process, people learn about the expertise of others and build trust by working on things together. Using the natural unit of work to promote collaboration builds a more effective team that then leverages each other—rather than always coming to the leader and overwhelming them.

Gabe also fosters trust and collaboration by way of team meetings every other week and one-on-ones in the off weeks. This helps him spread a shared sense of purpose, avoiding the isolation direct reports can feel as a dispersed team working as advisors to very different business units.

“In the one-on-ones, I ask them to highlight three things they are working on or that are important for me to know. Then, we ask questions.” Team meetings are structured around sharing information and giving recognition and encouragement. “When you are hours away in another country, you feel a bit isolated. It is important to build teamwork and transparency, to help them feel relevant in this humongous matrix.” Gabe values these meetings, knowing they pay off over time in terms of his ability to trust in the work and engagement of his team. “These meetings take a lot of my time, but it’s important. It is critical for me to have these meetings.”

The time commitment Gabe gives to his team meetings also helps him manage collaborative overload. By creating two hours of “open space” for the team to consult with him and, more important, with each other, he has removed himself from the center of all collaboration. “We’re not having meetings just to have meetings ... There may be one or two agenda items, but it’s an open space to say, *Hey, I’ve got this issue. Have you seen this before? What do you think? What do you recommend?* Then there is easier follow-up or connections among them.” If they don’t need the full two hours, they’ll be flexible and cut it short, “but the time is standing.”

Gabe also manages collaborative demands “in the spirit of, *you should be where you need to be as long as you need to be, but not more than that.*” He advises his team to go to more meetings early on, build relationships and knowledge, but “then feel empowered.” This means attending meetings strategically—“Be involved for half an hour of a two-hour meeting”—and strategic calendaring—“Block 3 or 4 hours a week to think and focus.” It also means setting email rules: Gabe responds quickly to his boss or his business vice presidents; other emails he’ll address as he has gaps in the day between meetings. People who adapt a small set of behaviors like this often claw back 10% - 20% of their collaborative time to invest in other relationships and activities—something Gabe has found invaluable.

Gabe recognizes the kinds of interactions and key relationships that build a sense of purpose and satisfaction for him. “My role as a leader is to not just say I am open to collaboration and ideas, but to live that. I go in with an open mind and listen.”

“When we have lots of different teams or agendas, everyone has to foster an environment to listen and express viewpoints. It’s OK to disagree, but it is important that our sessions don’t become one-person monologues—they lose that big potential they otherwise could have ... Wherever you work, you have smart people around you. If you harness that ability and foster that environment collaboration and other positive things go up exponentially.”

Gabe is currently thriving, due largely to the relationships and interactions with others at work. But he also is invested in other people and activities outside of work—important for creating perspective and personal well-being. If he needs work time on the weekends, he’ll block out a couple hours early morning or Sunday night. But mostly, he spends time with family and the activities that involve his children, including a standing time to go swimming with them. “Blocking the time is important. You need to have set activities that take you away from work and make you well rounded.”

Network Insights

- **Engage external stakeholders in co-creation to increase the degree you and your team are doing work that engages you.** When you simply take what comes through the network or from your boss, you may end up doing things of less value or without a sense of purpose or meaning. Give time for conversations, meetings and relationships that allow you to shape and define work.
- **Create a constructive context of learning, trust and engagement in the team.** Get people into work they already do well and find meaningful. Then, pair people up to peer-coach and support each other to develop new skills. This builds a more effective, collaborative team that then leverages each other rather than always coming to you (which can lead to overload and burnout).
- **Employ team practices to drive purpose.** On alternate weeks, hold a team meeting and 1:1s. This gives built-in touch points on the work and how the group can support or advise each other. Use team time to give recognition, encouragement and context to help people feel relevant—and connect to your own purpose as a leader.

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.