



GENERATE
WELL-
BEING

Shared Values and Pace of Work Foster Success and Well-being

CASE CONTEXT

An experienced and versatile professional knows herself well. She looks for assignments where she can use her skills to solve problem and help others succeed. If she is in role where she is needed and supported, she is able to thrive in fast-paced, high-pressure situations.



FEMALE

Level: FIRST-LEVEL
LEADER

Industry:
MANUFACTURING

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.



Nina loves high-pressure and a fast pace. She's held management position and project roles in her 25 years in

manufacturing, often changing jobs after 9 or 12 months. Currently, she is in a "firefighting role," working with global teams to resolve errors or slowdowns in the production process. Because she's worked across functions, locations and divisions, she knows the business as a whole and has a broad network. "I've worked in a lot of different parts of the organization. I find my path and connect people to get the job done."

"My current role is the most fun! I go from problem to problem and ask people questions to get at the root cause and fix things." The work is high pressure, with the stakes tied to safety, production schedules and cost, but Nina is thriving. The scope of the work is energizing and she has a direct line of sight to the impact of her work. Part of the fun for Nina is tied to finding and solving problems across teams and in situations where she had no prior involvement. "I didn't cause the problem, I don't know a lot, so I'm free to ask all the questions. I don't personalize the problems. I try to get to, *What are we going to do about it?* as quick as I can."

In other roles, the pressure and accountability—with no support or validation of her skills or approach—were not fun. Nina talks about gaining weight and not taking care of herself during one of those stretches. She also learned how she internalized stress, when muscle spasms wiped her out in the middle of a difficult time. She feels much healthier and effective in a role that is suited to her skills and her style—and where she is able to stay positive and focused on fixing and helping, rather than struggling with what should or could have been done. *"I could look at the job as negative. But, if I frame it that I am helping people every day or solving problems every day, then it is positive ... I have people tell me, Your job sucks. I wouldn't want it ... you're a dumping ground for people's problems. I think, That's really weird, because I love my job."*

Nina thinks she is wired to be positive and do what she can to fix things, but she says if any job gets too terrible, she can leave. She has moved around enough in the organization and has strong ties that would help her find something new. Plus, she says financial security helps, noting that she and her husband have done well enough that if she needed to quit they would be OK. "I'm going to be here until I don't like it any more ... I don't care what my level is. I want to be paid fairly, but I don't have a huge ego or goal to get a job title. The next steps always happen for me—the network plays a role in that—so, I don't stress about it a lot."

Nina's relationship with her current boss also keeps her going. A sense of purpose or impact is built in contexts where people feel trusted, respected and have latitude to shape their contribution—an environment that Nina says has been created by her boss. "I would work for him every day. He appreciates what I can do, and how it fits into the bigger picture of what we are trying to do ... There's something, too, about somebody telling you they know you can do it ... When I have no idea how to fix something, he says, *You'll figure it out*. I love that."

She tries to give that same support to others. She helps people understand different parts of the business, the politics involved and the useful resources. She likes to have one-to-one meetings, to mentor or talk about career steps. When she meets new teams, she tries to get to know people personally. "I'm kind of a talker, so I'll ask, *What's your background, what do you do, what are you about?* I try to find out something interesting about everyone ... Word of mouth is spreading positively that I'm not just going to talk to you about problems."

At the same time, Nina does find the best projects are those where the people involved share the same pace and process of work. "I have a lot of energy. I like to move fast. I like to move things off the list and see an accomplishment. I need work to match up with how I want to be ... Part of that is having the right people, too." Nina is clear that fast paced does not mean lack of attention or lack of depth. "You know when you work with people, you're in a meeting with someone, and you've got their full attention? It doesn't matter if their phone rings and email is going off; your time with them is important. I want to be that person. *I do ten things in a day, but for each of those ten things, when I am in it, I am focused. I like working with people who are all in and not distracted and think what we're doing is important.*"

When people don't care, or move too slowly or refuse to step out of their silos, Nina starts to lose that sense of purpose. When a situation is antagonistic, Nina is especially bothered. In negative situations, Nina's best strategy is to re-focus on what is important: other people. "I've kept going in a bad situation or pushed back on what's not right, because I don't want other people to have to face that alone ... There is something in me that is about wanting to help people."

Nina laughs about the idea of work/life balance, but she knows she keeps her pace mostly as a matter of choice. Outside of work, she helps her husband with his business and the two have always had side projects. "We both work all the time ... I will mentally turn off my day job, but I'm always working. My friends laugh because on a day off, I will have every hour scheduled—I even block time to goof off."

She notes that she does not have children or extended family nearby to automatically pull her into domains outside of her full-time job. That also leaves her with a different set of choices and activities. "I don't set rules that I won't work at certain times or I won't have my phone. But, I'll take a trip with my husband for time away. Recently, I've been trying to get healthier, so I protect time to work out. I'll check in with my sisters. We have a competition to see who can track more steps on our Fitbits! In the past, I would say, *I don't have time to work out*. Now, I want to find a way to beat them! ... When my brain is full, I'll send text or check in on Facebook to see who has the most steps. I think that's useful just to hit *pause* on work if I can a few times during the day."

Network Insights

- **Seek opportunities to increase your sense of purpose or impact.** Pay attention to when you have greater autonomy or are getting recognition and appreciation. Look to interact with people who care about the work in similar ways (what it is, how you do it and outcomes that matter).
- **Know your North Star.** When situations are negative, use that to pull you back to what you care about. For Nina, it is about doing work that lets her fix problems and help others. When you know your North Star, you can build the networks that help you travel in that direction.
- **Have relationships, interests and priorities outside of work.** This prevents you from being consumed by one thing.
- **Let yourself be pulled into brief interactions or distractions when you have long workdays or a relentless pace.** People cognitively work in rhythms with lulls about every 90 minutes, so a small point of connection with others (inside or outside of work) at these points may help boost a sense of thriving.

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.