



## GENERATE WELL- BEING

### CASE CONTEXT

A global product director takes a proactive and positive approach to her demanding job. She engages with people on a personal level, helps them see the *why* of the work and sets a tone of openness and learning.



FEMALE

Level: FIRST-LEVEL  
MANAGER

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.



# Creating a Collaborative Context to Thrive in a Demanding, Global Job

With degrees in math and statistics, Sonia was hired as a clinical statistician for a pharmaceutical firm before moving into market research and analysis. Involved in marketing ever since, Sonia is currently the global director of a new product. She leads a team to ensure “launch readiness, working with different functions to be sure we are on time and on task,” which includes being the bridge between the global and local marketing functions. Her team also is also responsible for strategic planning and forecasting and is the liaison between marketing and medical affairs. Sonia thrives by shaping her role and creating a collaborative context for her team and partners.

*Sonia thoughtfully initiates and develops relationships with new team members or stakeholders with the belief that understanding the whole person helps her work best with people.* “No matter who you are, no matter your role in the organization, no matter how big or small your title, we are all people ... The idea that I can come to work and separate what happens outside work, that is a myth. We bring ourselves to our work ... The first thing I do is try to get to know the people as people: Who are they? What do they enjoy? What do they like? Who are their friends or family? What are their experiences?” And she shares the same with them. “I let them get to know me, my motivations, what I like and what I don’t like, what I consider fun.” Establishing a personal relationship helps her feel connected, but also teaches her about the work styles and preferences of others. It helps her understand how to work with them. In this way, she begins to build trust and create interactions that are meaningful to her.

*Additional aspects of interactions that promote a sense of purpose and thriving at work are co-creating and keeping the “why” of the work at the forefront.* Sonia focuses on how a given task is part of the big picture and a chance to create together. “It is not you or me. It is the team. We are part of something bigger than us. If we do this thing right, if we blow this thing out of the water, it’s going to be so cool!” *She connects the daily work to the higher purpose and with a sense of gratitude.* “We are lucky. The fact that we are working on this medication at a global level, that we can make people’s lives better ... What a great opportunity! This really is a chance to do something bigger than ourselves and leave our mark on the world! When I get excited I can convey that excitement to the team!” People like Sonia who think about the positives and create a context of gratitude are far more likely to thrive at work than those who magnify the negative.

With her direct team, Sonia also builds purpose, engagement and thriving through her leadership practices. With newcomers on the team, or when she starts a new role, she directly and clearly tells people the kind of leader she wants to be and to hold her accountable. Then she takes authority out of the equation by scheduling times for the team to meet without her and rate her. “I say, *You all get together and talk about me. Decide what is working well, and what I should change.*” Afterwards, one person is elected to meet one-on-one with Sonia to share what the team has talked about. “They always provide me with very good insights that hold me accountable and help me continue to grow as a leader.” The process also gives people a good opportunity to practice giving feedback and builds a sense of openness and ownership within the team.

A willingness to be vulnerable and open to feedback has also given Sonia a network that has helped her career and kept her engaged. She readily seeks out people for guidance in areas that are weaknesses for her. For example, several years ago, she realized a more senior person on a project team would help communicate her abstract thinking by restating her comments in a more linear way. “I saw him doing that and realized, *This is what I need to do so others can follow my thinking. This is great!* I asked him to be my mentor ... I said, *I like how you help me think about things differently ...* Only once in ten years has somebody said no to helping me in this way.”

Sonia routinely injects levity into her interactions as well. She’ll toss out movie or pop culture references or use humor to ease tensions. “One thing I have always done is use the fact that English is not my native language for humor. I love American slang. But I butcher it! Half the time I mispronounce it or use it wrong! It cracks people up and they relax.” This use of *self-deprecating humor takes status out of interactions, helps people connect on a human level and is one of the most consistent predictors of people who are seen as energizers.*

As the collaborative demands of work (email, phone calls, meetings, etc.) have increased dramatically in recent years, Sonia reminds herself to engage more intentionally, which includes being clear where she can add the most value. “The thing I have done that is most effective is looking at the day and asking for each meeting, *Do I really, really need to be here?*”

“Did I say yes only because I am curious or because I was asked? Or, will the business be hurt or will I delay something if I am not there?” This thinking has extended to Sonia’s larger team, as they have acknowledged that with long days and overload, health suffers and family time suffers. “We are all thinking about our unique contribution ... We are all more mindful of what we are doing and what we are asking of each other.” Sonia has found that with team-level commitment, it is easier for people set priorities and control their calendars. While individually, people have more power to structure their days than they realize, a culture and shared value around it gives validation and promotes the team being more effective as a whole.

While Sonia is energized and all-in while at work, she blocks her evenings as family time. She may check in on email or catch up on work after the kids are in bed. Last year, she took a three-week vacation, seeking a substantial mental shift and extended family time. “My boss almost had a heart attack! But I was not worried. The plan was to have a plan, and I was able to show her nothing bad happened. The team kept going ... It worked so well, she decided to take off two weeks in a row this year.”

## Network Insights

- **Get to know team members and external stakeholders as people.** This insight helps you know how to work with them, builds trust and creates meaningful interactions.
- **Use co-creation and a focus on the “why” of the work to stay energized.** Think about the positives—a context of gratitude helps people thrive.
- **Seek feedback—and act on it—so you can be better.** Model a mindset of growth and learning and create a developmental context in the team.
- **Promote fun in interactions.** Don’t take yourself too seriously. Self-deprecating humor is a trait of energizers.
- **Address issues of overload—individually and as a team.** Set agreements about meetings, availability and the need to step back from work. The ability to shape work prevents it from defining you and creates a context 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](http://www.connectedcommons.com) or email Rob at [rlcrossjr@gmail.com](mailto:rlcrossjr@gmail.com).