



This is one of 140 case studies created based on Rob Cross' leadership study.

# A 15-Year Career is Fueled by a Sense of Purpose & Collaborations that Matter

## CO-CREATE SOLUTIONS

When you involve others in framing work and developing solutions, you help them see how their work matters and has impact. This case includes details that reflect *co-creating solutions*, along with additional network insights.



FEMALE

Level: MANAGER OF MANAGERS

Industry: HEALTHCARE

Some people are very successful in creating high-quality connections in networks and a context for others to thrive. They do this in 3 ways.

### Build Trust

Inspiring trust in your abilities and intentions forms a foundation for people to experience Purpose and Energy in their interactions with you.

### Cultivate Purpose

Building purpose by sculpting meaningful work and high-quality collaborations promotes creativity and greater effort.

### Generate Energy

Energizing people around work fuels performance and engagement.

Allysia is the general manager of a regional business unit for a global pharmaceutical company. She rotated through sales, marketing and operations roles in Europe, Asia and the U.S. Today, she has a clear North Star: to be a customer-centric company by breaking down silos and collaborating effectively. “This starts with exceptional leadership to engage our people and then understanding and delivering on customers’ needs ... If we do that, we will hit our sales plans and earn the profits the company expects.” A larger sense of purpose—positive impact on people’s health—is a deeply held cultural value. Allysia strives to create structures and practices that reinforce and build on this shared purpose.

A couple years ago, Allysia began to shift the organizational culture away from hierarchy and silos—not a natural inclination for many employees whose culture or experience was based on formal structures. Seeking the benefits of greater collaboration, shared decision-making and empowerment of teams, she focused on a cultural aspiration: “Everyone is working on equal footing with everyone. Everyone should share their perspective and shape the goals and activities that affect their work.” With a new sense of autonomy and ability to contribute and have impact, teams and employees are showing more collaboration, new energy and purpose in their work. “Managers have taken to this idea and are sharing ownership, not micromanaging. Teams members are more open, contributing ... You see a lot of co-creation and collaboration with our customers, too.” This shift has generated enthusiasm, especially among the growing group of millennials in the company. “We have several self-organizing teams working on projects on top of their normal work. That is where their passion and energy is ... They are getting so much energy out of it; by doing this, they feel it is easier to do the rest of their work ... New collaborations are developing and it creates new ties and exchange of ideas that benefit other aspects of the business.”

Allysia also introduced other ways to build purpose through the workforce. She made culture and purpose an explicit element of the annual conference of the top 150 leaders. She set up a culture council made up of a cross-section of employees to help steer changes. Companywide lunches are held every six weeks where Allysia and other leaders host sessions on leadership and culture. One-third of employees participate in interest groups, which add to employees’ sense that they are shaping their work in ways that are meaningful. The results of a recent engagement survey showed improvements tied to creativity, customer service and self-management. “Of course, it is not all rosy and we hope to keep improving.”



Even as Allisia is pushing for greater collaboration, she is aware of the difficulty of operating in a global, matrixed organization. Our research shows the collaborative intensity of work exploding in the past decade, with people spending as much as 85-90 percent of their work time on phone calls, in meetings and responding to email and texts. “It’s easy to get burned out, overwhelmed. People need to be at ease with ambiguity, with decision making being on many different shoulders, with the time you need to invest to talk to global and local colleagues to move something forward. You need to be somehow comfortable with that.” Those who are new or struggling are coached and supported to be more effective and less overwhelmed. They are taught about being focused, having clear priorities, clarifying accountabilities as much as possible, and, importantly, having a North Star to guide the work. “The key communication is, *What are we doing?* You have to get the context right. You have to get everybody aligned behind the objective ... Being brilliant at the basics is important.”

Allisia is also disciplined about her calendar, protecting time to reflect, absorb and think things through. “I could go from 8 to 8 in meetings, one after the other. But, I am also paid to think strategically and step back to reflect: Is this the right thing? What are we shooting for? I need that reflection time in my calendar to make this happen.” That time to reflect and share is also created with her top team through off-site meetings twice a year. “It is time for learning and broadening our thinking ... Also to share personal experiences and not talk about business ... We are all so busy, it’s counterintuitive, but if you allow time to free up your mind on something completely different, you go back to your current business with a different filter and different energy which helps you make sense of all the complex challenges.” Allisia’s approach also is a chance for the leadership team to connect off task—essential for building trust and shared purpose.

Allisia also thrives because she is driven by the patients her company serves and the employees around her. Hearing stories of patients and how the efforts of her colleagues have change their lives keeps the complex work and constant demands of her job in perspective. “When patients have years of a journey behind them, a debilitating disease, their

whole life is impacted ... When they are treated with your product and doing well, those stories get me emotional and are where I get my energy.” Over the years, she has also learned, “I love developing people. If I have talent who has a great opportunity or does things really well, I am extremely proud.”

Clarity about her personal commitments and well-being also helps Allisia thrive. She insists on evenings and weekends with her young child, blocking time for what matters. She volunteers in a program for people with disabilities, but does so as part of her job—leaving any spare time for family. She views these commitments as priorities, but they also contribute to her effectiveness as a leader. “You need to take time away to recharge your batteries ... In the end, you define your priorities. You define what you want to make happen and then find time for it ... Reflective time allows me to be clear and get back to what I really think is important.”

## Network Insights

- **Express a clear North Star.** Let people know what matters; they can orient themselves to it in a ways that give a sense of purpose and thriving in their work.
- **Allow people to choose how they contribute.** When people have a sense of autonomy, opportunities to co-create and the ability to invest in things they think are important, they bring that energy and effort into their role more broadly.
- **Coach others to manage collaborative contexts.** Don’t just assume people work well in matrixed or highly collaborative contexts. Give them guidance and tools, then allow them to figure out their personal approach to avoid overload.
- **Protect time to reflect.** Block time on your calendar to process information and think strategically. Set aside times for your team to step away from the business, connect off-task and gain perspective. This builds trusting relationships and allows you to be more focused and effective.
- **Connect with your own sense of purpose.** Don’t let interactions that matter to you—developing other people, co-creating, positive impact on people—fall by the wayside.
- **Build in time for people and activities outside of work.** Set rules for turning off work (i.e., dinner time with children, no Saturday email) and engage in activities that expose you to life outside of the business bubble.

## 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, Edward A. Madden Professor of Global Leadership, Babson College. 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 [rcrossjr@gmail.com](mailto:rcrossjr@gmail.com).