3 Tips to Leading a Fast-Growing, Remote Team

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We are a young company that has grown from four people to 30 in less than two years. Before becoming an entrepreneur, I was a veterinarian but had to stop practicing because of severe burnout. Having recovered, I became passionate about solving problems that used to make me feel miserable in the practice — inefficient workflows, toxic work culture, lack of sense of belonging and purpose. These are common problems that permeate most veterinary practices, making veterinarians one of the most burned-out professions. I believed I could use technology to help alleviate the issues.

With this mission in mind, I launched VIS. The company quickly grew, but one day I realized that I was the only one actively pursuing the core mission. I had a great team, but they didn't have a clear understanding of our bigger purpose. Why? Because I had never shared it with them. Disengaged teams lack loyalty and motivation, which causes employees to burn out or jump ship the minute a better opportunity comes. I didn't want that.

Additionally, our team is remote, with new people frequently joining as we grow, so keeping everyone engaged and aligned became more and more challenging.

Here are my three tips that helped me become a better leader for a fast-growing remote team.

1. Define your purpose

First, I clearly defined our purpose, mission, vision and core values, and posted them on our website and internal knowledge base. Employees can revisit them as needed, and new candidates can review them to help decide if we resonate with their values.

Defining our purpose crystallized our product vision and allowed us to better communicate it to clients and partners. Simon Sinek said, “People don’t buy what you do; they buy why you do it. If you talk about what you believe, you will attract those who believe what you believe.” We started receiving job applications from people who said they wanted to work at VIS because our mission to combat burnout was close to their hearts.

Last year, during one of our “town hall” meetings, I shared my personal journey, including:

- How I burned out as a veterinarian and almost lost my career and my life
- How veterinarians are four times more likely to die by suicide than the general population
- How I got professional help and overcame depression
- How that led me to launch VIS and why what we do is so important

I opened up, which really resonated with my team. The video is now part of the onboarding process for new employees.

Shortly after, our head of support operations, Kate, was showcasing a new help desk project that optimizes the client hiring process. This feature not only saves hundreds of work hours for our client but, more importantly, greatly improves the experience of new employees coming on board. At the end of the presentation, Kate made me realize I had successfully translated my purpose. She said, “We don’t manage tickets, we

help the people behind the tickets."

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2. Trust your team

For my MBA dissertation, I studied how the application of lean thinking principles can improve the veterinary team experience during an acquisition. Originally developed for human healthcare by John Toussaint of the Catalysis institute, these principles can benefit any corporate culture.

- **An attitude of continuous improvement** – Let people create their own solutions to the problems in the processes they're accountable for and trust them to follow through. Our best client success stories emerged because our employees have the freedom to be creative. Don't micromanage, but ensure employees understand they have your support.
- **Respect for front-line employees** – Lean leadership empowers every team member to make their own decisions, which puts employees in control when dealing with difficult problems. This helps eliminate several classic burnout triggers, including lack of appreciation and recognition, and the feeling of not being in control.

Related: How to Make Veterinarian Team Members Feel Valued

3. Use cascading goals for collaboration and transparency

Every person should have a job function they own, policies that direct them, and a system that automates this process. I ensured all our key company processes and policies are visual and explicit. Employees can always refer to our internal knowledge base, which is critical for new employee success. If

something goes wrong, first look back at the processes, policies and training. Burnout is a result of poor leadership, not weak employees.

A culture of transparency makes scaling up, onboarding and sharing knowledge easier.

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We also use agile project management to maintain flexibility. Each department plans its initiatives for the quarter, and we have an online, company-wide meeting to present these initiatives, identify dependencies with other departments and collaborate. All initiatives and their timelines are visualized on a board in Miro. This approach allows us to:

- Align people around a common set of goals
- Engage people, because they understand how their work and the company goals relate
- Focus people, letting them determine a handful of measurable ways they can contribute
- Make everyone’s goals visible to everyone else, which increases teamwork and accountability

Each week, we have an all-hands meeting where departments showcase the initiatives they kicked off or completed, and their contributions to the overarching company mission. That way, every team member is up-to-date on what’s happening in the company.

These methods have allowed me to successfully lead a fast-growing team that shares my purpose and genuinely enjoys their work.

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