How to Let Your Employees Know They're Your Heroes

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When people talk about leaders, they commonly bring up the idea of the leader as someone you look up to. But if *you're* the leader, do you see your employees as your heroes? It makes sense to do so because, without them, none of what you envision could come to life. As people come back to the office and face all kinds of change, uncertainty and anxiety, it's the perfect time to make your perspective clear.

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Connection and training

We integrate technology a lot at Vagaro, so our team is relatively small with about 300 employees. We know that every single one of those employees is really necessary. But we don't assume that they automatically know that, or internalize how they matter and where they fit. So, we make a deliberate effort to help people feel like they belong in the group.

This effort to build a sense of nurturing and community starts with the way we train. Right out of the gate, we train all new hires collectively, in a small group, which lets them break the ice and get their bearings. We familiarize them with all of our core processes, tools and values. From there, we send people into their respective departments. There's a lot of organization to ensure that everybody gets to know everybody and can see across silos. Names matter.

We don’t leave executives out of this approach. Too often in business, those at the top are buttoned up, tight-tied folks who work in corner castles – or at least, that’s how they come across because the employees can never reach them to talk. Along with other leaders in the company, I purposely get out on the floor and make myself visible every day. I ask people how they’re doing and ask how their day is going. Doing this may seem like a simple gesture, but it’s truly the small things that matter when getting to know your employees.

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Recognition and appreciation

Another way we show our workers that they’re our heroes is by tapping into the community we’ve built and making sure that people have platforms to interact and communicate what’s on their minds. We intentionally create environments that foster communication about contributions and influences.

When we first started to bring people back to the office during Covid-19, we knew that it had been a long time since people had been able to have fun together. We leaned on our vaccinations and hygiene precautions to safely throw our company holiday party. The event allowed the team to give some shout-outs and point out all the hard work they’d seen happening through one of the most difficult times the business world, and the world in general, has ever experienced.

We also have a more formal, annual employee appreciation day. Here, the team can participate in fun games, raffles, enjoy catered lunches and generally have a good time while getting to know one another outside of the four walls of the office. It’s a great way to build connections with your team while showing them they truly are valued and their work appreciated.

Additionally, during our annual All-Hands meetings, we give

awards to stellar employees and recognize workers who have been with us for a long time or reached certain milestones. More frequent events can work, too, depending on your setup, but purposefully getting all hands on deck for a little praise goes a long way toward helping everybody improve their big-picture understanding of what everyone does and how everyone intersects.

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Modeling

Leaders often have to bring their people through tough circumstances. But if you want people to feel like they're heroes to you, you can't be a hypocrite. You have to be shoulder-to-shoulder with them in whatever it is you ask them to do. Otherwise, you create a perception of "us versus them" where people think two different standards operate.

When we first considered bringing people back to the office during Covid-19, we knew it was the right choice for us because we'd seen stress levels climb and productivity decline as people continued to work from home and lacked that human connection. We didn't want to send the message that our leadership saw anyone as more expendable or deserving of more risk exposure than anybody else. So when our support team came back, so did our executives. We walked the walk to make sure nobody felt exploited.

Protection and wellness

My company has always made an effort to take care of the team mentally and physically, but the pandemic threw that into high gear. We encourage and even require people to stay home if they feel sick, rather than implying or explicitly telling them they should power through.

Our care, health, and safety requirements helped people to relax so they could work at their best, too. While you might not always have a pandemic to fight, finding small ways to invest in employee wellbeing, such as telling an employee who has worked extra hours to head home early if they're stressed, sends the same powerful message.

By flipping the usual model upside down, you'll stand stronger than ever

Every leader wants others to view them as a hero. The best leaders, however, know they have to reverse this view. They place enormous value on the people they lead and understand that success comes from a strong foundation of team players who know they're valued. Research shows this approach pays off, with recognition and appreciation improving morale, reducing turnover and improving productivity.

If you really want to make your mark and grow your business, don't take your team for granted, especially now, when the pandemic has workers thinking seriously about what they're worth. Show how thankful you are at every opportunity and open doors because the appreciation and respect will come back to you tenfold.

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