

How do you keep your team focused?

Take a few minutes every day to help them see the big picture.

By Verne Harnish

FORTUNE -- The No. 1 challenge in any relationship, whether it's with your mate or your 1,000 employees, is communication. Company owners can be crystal clear on the key priorities, issues, and metrics for their business, but this stuff can become one big blur for the team if leaders are not communicating it the right way.

Every business needs to create regular rhythms for communication -- by the day, week, month, quarter, and year -- to keep employees aligned. Most companies already do a pretty good job of gathering their management team for strategy meetings every month, quarter, and year, and even pulling together their team weekly. But they skip the most critical meeting of all: the daily huddle. They think they don't have time, because they already spend so much time in other meetings. Trust me: A daily huddle will save you time -- as long as you keep the session very brief and laser-focused. Schedule a 5- to 15-minute in-person meeting or conference call at the same time every day with your leadership team. Talk about what's coming up in the next 24 hours, set priorities, and discuss any roadblocks that are getting people stuck, so you can clear them. Doing this will easily save everyone on your team an hour-and-a-half of cc'd emails to each other every day.

Also have your team give you a quick update on the key performance measurements that matter to your business. Depending on your industry, that might be sales booked, invoices collected, packages delivered, or something else.

What you're trying to do is avoid minor slip-ups. A daily huddle will alert you to issues you need to tackle within 24 hours, so they don't get bigger. Poor communication is a culprit in nearly 56% of projects that fail, according to 2013 findings by the Project Management Institute.

A daily huddle will also let you take advantage of unforeseen opportunities that help you move forward on key projects. Maybe one employee will mention he's having lunch with a client, and another one will say, "While you're with them, can you ask them X?"

By serving as a placeholder in everyone's day, the daily huddle can also save people time on emailing back and forth to set up other meetings. They'll know they can catch each other on their way back to their desks or jump on a call right after the main one.

Be disciplined about how you run the meetings, so they don't drag on. Start on time and consider holding the meeting standing up to keep everyone focused. Don't let the meetings turn into a rehash of what happened three weeks ago. Ask employees to take problem-solving sessions for individual projects offline.

Employees might resist the idea of another meeting when you announce this, but don't give up. Once they see that this is keeping your weekly meetings from sprawling to two or three hours -- and getting them home earlier -- they're going to show up on time.

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