

Pearls of Leadership Wisdom: The Power of Belonging

Welcome to my backyard again and Pearls of Leadership Wisdom. Today my focus is on Belonging. Now over the years I have had the opportunity to work with leaders on engagement and certainly engagement surveys are the norm—and certainly the go-to metric for organizations to understand what is happening inside their cultures. But with all the focus recently on systemic racism, on action steps we need to take, and education, communication, and ideas. I believe that we as leaders need to zero in more closely on the topic of belonging.

Now a few years ago there were a lot of opinion pieces about how loyalty in organizations is dead—you can probably recall some of those as well—we have all read them. Yet I believe that notion of thinking that loyalty is dead has obscured us from actually seeing that there is a basic human need that individuals—all of us have. And that is a need to belong, to feel valued, to feel welcomed, to feel important; to feel a part of something that is bigger than you. As leaders we need to do more to understand and foster a sense of belonging among those with whom we work.

Now, I happen to have read an article recently—it was on CNN Business—about a research report that focused on belonging across organizations. And they divided belonging, interestingly enough, into four components. I want to use those four components for us right now. The four components were: a feeling of being seen, feeling connected, feeling supported, and feeling proud. Those four elements were central to individuals having a sense of belonging in their work. I am going to take each of those four elements right now and brainstorm some ideas for action steps that you as a leader can take with each one of those four components of belonging. And challenge you to come up with some of your own ideas around these four because I think it makes a difference.

So as leaders we actually don't need to wait for the engagement surveys or for more data to tell us what to do in these four areas. Here are some action steps you might consider.

Action steps around helping people feel seen:

- Try a quick round robin at the start of every meeting and have individuals just do a check in.
- Invite individuals to meetings who might have been excluded.
- Put a broader list of individuals on to a meeting simply to give them an opportunity to be seen and to be part of something.

Action steps for helping people feel connected:

- This one is easier, but reach out, make a phone call, participate in a small group.
- Do something that lets people know you are connected with them.
- Ask them for their opinions; show curiosity about their point of view or their experience.
- Give them a chance to tell them about some of the barriers they are experiencing so you can do something about them.

Actions for helping people feel supported:



- Provide feedback.
- Give someone a chance at a project that they might like to tackle even though they don't have the skills.
- Give someone the opportunity to talk about their careers and where they see themselves going.
- Do whatever you can to help them know there is someone behind them who has their back.

And finally, helping people feel proud:

- Give them feedback when something has gone especially well.
- Help them know how their work connects with the bigger picture or the strategy.
- Help them know what meaning their efforts have to you personally.

As leaders we can do a lot to connect the dots for people in that way.

Remember always in these four areas that leaders are a key link between individuals having a sense of belonging and having a sense of meaning in their work.

Leaders help connect the dots for people for belonging and for meaning. I hope that you find ways and that you challenge yourself to find action steps for these four areas of belonging: being seen, being connected, being supported, and being proud.

My best to you in your work.