

A Contractor's Success or Failure Starts at the Top

Written by: Matt Verderamo, Consultant, Well Built Construction Consulting

There are many construction companies that win work, make lots of money, and have good reputations in the markets that they serve. And the leaders of those firms should be proud, because none of that is easy to achieve.

But there is another level of success that far fewer construction companies achieve. In our work with contractors around the country, it is rare for the external success mentioned above to align with an internal success of a happy culture and generally positive sentiments about the business.

Whether it's universal burnout, high employee turnover, or a culture dominated by gossip, internal strife plagues even the most outwardly successful firms.

There are many reasons why this is a problem, and the No. 1 is that internal problems often mean that external success is fleeting. It only lasts for as long as the superstars in the business are willing to deal with the depressing culture.

Typically, the same superstars that carried the external success eventually start to resent their bosses and give up – whether out loud or by slowly doing less and less for the business.

I feel bad when I get inside companies dealing with a lot of burnout, because what those people are going through is not easy. It's sad to see money being made but no one feeling happy.

However, increasingly, I am excited when I run into these cultures because I know that it is fixable.



LEARNING CURVE

The solution starts with building high-integrity leaders who demonstrate empathy. Many construction leaders have never received any kind of formal leadership training. So, although they may not be a great leader, it's often because they never learned how.

We start by helping them realize their impact on their people and the business. We encourage them to recognize how people do what their leaders do and the importance of leading by example. We push them to view themselves through the lens of others:

- » Would your people describe you as a great leader?
- » How would your people describe the morale in the business?

» If you were one of your people, would you want to stay here long-term?

These questions can cultivate a much deeper empathy for people at all levels of the organization. This cultivation of empathy and realization that they must lead by example are the two foundational pieces of building high-integrity leaders.

After four to six months of regular coaching and development, you can see the leadership team start to change its tune. Suddenly, there is less outward blame and more thoughtful discussion. Emotional intelligence skyrockets.

CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

As an employee, it can be hard to let your guard down when you've dealt with bad leaders who push you to the brink of burnout in order to achieve external results. If you have plenty of reasons not to trust those leaders, then you will do everything you can to avoid trusting them in the future. I don't blame a single person who feels this way.


So, if you are a leader trying to overcome this trust deficit, you must also recognize that you have given your people no reason to trust you. As hard as it may be, you must loudly admit your previous mistakes.

Tell them you want to get better and that you are working on cultivating empathy and demonstrating high integrity behaviors because you recognize all of it is needed to create an internally successful business.

As scary as it may be to admit your faults, it works really well for building trust with people who have no reason to trust you otherwise. Then, you must show up every day and act that way. Over time, people will start to recognize the alignment between your words and actions.

Once they do, trust can form. And when that happens, you will create a safe environment where people feel seen and heard and are willing to share ideas and contribute to a positive culture.

Success for construction companies starts at the top. Many companies have used external measurements of success to run their businesses, but more and more are recognizing the need for internal success to truly build a company that lasts.

Build a culture of empathy and high integrity, and external success will happen as a result. Then, enjoy having one of the best construction companies in the country. 



About the Author

Matt Verderamo is a consultant at [Well Built Construction Consulting](#), a Baltimore-based firm that delivers strategic consulting, facilitation services, and peer roundtables for construction executives.

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