

Member Communication Experience

Building Together: Shifting from Leader-Centric to Team-Focused Cultures in Construction

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In the construction industry, leadership has traditionally been viewed through the lens of hierarchy - project managers, superintendents, and foremen steering the ship. While strong leadership remains essential, an overemphasis on the folks with “titles” can inadvertently sideline the collective strength of the team. As projects grow in complexity and scale, fostering a team-focused culture becomes not just beneficial, but imperative.

The Hidden Costs of Leader-Led Models

A leadership-first approach can lead to several challenges:

- » **Siloed Communication:** When decisions funnel through a single leader, it can create bottlenecks, delaying responses and hindering collaboration between everyone who is responsible for part of the outcome.
- » **Overlooked Talent:** Focusing solely on your leaders means you aren’t taking advantage of experiences, insights, and innovations offered by team members at all levels.
- » **Reduced Morale:** When recognition is directed at project managers or other leaders who “brought the project in on time” team members can feel that their contributions aren’t valued. When this occurs, they can be less interested in doing their job to the best of their ability or they may decide to find a new organization that will value their contributions.



Embracing a Team-Focused Culture

Transitioning to more of a team focus isn’t hard, but it does demand intentionality. In the past, perhaps you’ve provided a bonus to the project manager who completed a project on time, now instead, you’ll give a \$50 or \$100 gift certificate to everyone on the team or perhaps give everyone the opportunity to take a Friday off with pay this summer (not all at the same time, of course).

Recognition can be demonstrated in other ways too.

Ask for people’s perspective regarding their work. For example, during the preconstruction phase of a project you may hold a group meeting with all trades to ask them if they see

bottlenecks or missed efficiency opportunities. (It doesn't matter if they actually come up with answers, it matters that you asked.)

Intentional mentoring and/or cross-training helps to share knowledge while building respect among members of the team.


Make it easy for crews to raise concerns, make suggestions, or reflect on how the job is going – then show that feedback is valued and used. If you get especially useful feedback, be sure to recognize it in front of the whole team.

And of course, team culture isn't just about work – a little intentional social time can go a long way. One client held an “international food fair” on a project. The client provided tables and utensils, etc. and each person was asked to bring a hand-held food item to share, that was a favorite in their culture. Another team had breakfast together every Tuesday before the shift started. Each week a different person was responsible for providing all the food. The crew took their responsibility very seriously and would spend their weekends shopping and preparing for their fellow team members (this was an activity that the team created on their own, it was not a mandated activity by the company).

Bottom Line: It's Good Business

Companies that have a team-focused approach report:

- » **Improved Safety Records:** Collaborative environments tend to be more watchful, with team members looking out for one another.
- » **Enhanced Problem-Solving:** Diverse perspectives contribute to more, and often better, solutions when challenges arise.
- » **Higher Retention Rates:** Employees who feel valued and part of a team aren't motivated to look for another employer.

When you move from a leader-led approach to a team-focused approach, you unlock the full potential of your workforce. Morale improves, communication sharpens, safety becomes second nature, and you develop a reputation as a great place to work. And that's the culture that will carry your company into the future. 



About the Author

Dr. Nanette Miner is an expert in building ready and capable leadership teams for succession and exit.

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