



Episode 56 Show Notes: Build a Culture of Trust to Support High Performing Teams

Darrin Murriner is the co-founder of Cloverleaf Me and author of *Corporate Bravery*. In this episode, he highlights the factors that cause a lack of trust and fear to thrive in organizations, how these impact corporate culture and what one organization is doing to address it. Darrin explains how teams are typically assembled and what research tells us about the importance of diverse cognitive styles and other characteristics of successful high-performing teams.

Darrin has over a decade of experience working at some of America's largest corporations. He has managed large, complex teams at companies like Arthur Andersen, Fifth Third Bank, and Munich Re. He has been both an employee and an outside consultant in the areas of Operations, Finance and Risk Management. In 2015, Darrin cofounded Cloverleaf Me, a firm that uses a technology platform to build high performing teams. His book, *Corporate Bravery*, explores how to eliminate fear-based decision-making and transform corporate cultures into brave places for people to do their best work. It also addresses how to foster a culture that supports engaged employees, provides opportunities for measured risk-taking and innovation, and rewards the brave leadership that drives business success.

Key Learnings From This Episode

- **The background to *Corporate Bravery*.** Darrin wrote *Corporate Bravery* based on his experiences working in and/or for a variety of organizations. He has always been fascinated with people and culture and what creates culture. One of his corporate clients was experiencing a lot of organizational fear for many reasons, largely driven by regulatory factors. This caused Darrin to think about what creates a fear-based culture and what drives fear-based decision-making.
- **Characteristics of fear-based cultures.** Control is tightly linked to fear. Command and control environments create more fear. Organizations with many levels of hierarchy or highly regulated industries where there is ambiguity or uncertainty – all contribute to fear-based decision-making.



Management practices contribute to a culture of fear. How does an organization promote and support individuality and give people the opportunity to bring their ‘whole self’ to work? Do people feel like they have to hide who they are (e.g. freelancing to stay engaged) for fear they will be perceived as uncommitted? Maybe they are not given the opportunity to ‘flex those muscles’ within their role and, therefore, look elsewhere for those opportunities.

- **The employee-centric experience.** A best practice example is Airbnb who recently recast its HR organization, applying the customer experience concept of being relentless in delivering the best customer experience possible. The same concept is being applied to the employee experience, shifting HR from an organizational to a more employee-centric focus. This is increasingly important in an era of low unemployment and talent retention challenges.

- **The distinction between fear and lack of trust.** It is two sides of the same coin. Mistrust comes from a handful of key factors. One is knowledge or making assumptions about why someone is doing something, an underlying motivation. A big part of trust comes from how we communicate. Organizations should think about moving from a culture of ownership to a culture of stewardship. A lot of people feel they need to control what is theirs: ‘this is my team’, ‘this is my organization’. We need to move away from this ownership mindset to a stewardship model. Ownership implies that you want to maintain control. Mistrust is caused by misinterpreting motivations or a lack of knowledge. Where mistrust exists, fear can creep in.



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WE HAVE TO BUILD AND ESTABLISH TEAM TRUST AND CREATE A STRONG ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE.

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- **How can fear harm an organization’s culture?** Organizations fear a more agile competitor, focusing on the competitor instead of focusing on their own competitive edge in the market. Having a clear understanding of who your organization is, what your strengths are, and how can you leverage them will allow the team to avoid falling into the trap of letting some of those



environmental fear factors drive behaviors and decisions.

- **Benefits of the Cloverleaf platform.** The platform allows individuals to understand themselves, their roles, how they work and communicate, their peers and understanding where they can best be leveraged in the context of team objectives. It eliminates opportunities for fear to creep in. Having a strong sense of self and what your role is within the team can go a long way to creating a fertile ground for trust. One of the benefits of the platform is its use of assessment tools (E.g. MBTI). Two other key factors are:
 1. **Visualizations** that provide insights for managers so that they have a clear understanding of who their team is and where their strengths lie. This provides a very clear way of setting goals and objectives for the team by looking at what skills and competencies are needed to be successful as a team, including the relational dynamics.
 2. **Embedded integrations with communication tools** (email, Slack and calendar apps) that are designed to improve the way a manager is communicating with a team so he/she can be more effective. It drives more positive behavior change over time. The more you can increase the effectiveness of communication, awareness, and understanding within the team, the more opportunity there is to establish trust and create a strong organizational culture.
- **How Cloverleaf's platform supports team and leader effectiveness.** The platform builds managers' effectiveness. It captures styles, skills, and talents and allows the team leader to distribute work and engage with others accordingly. Machine learning is also being incorporated to identify power structures and dynamics within the team to help serve up tips that drive communication effectiveness. The platform can be especially helpful for new and short-term project work. People who work very differently come together quickly which can lead to conflict and misunderstanding. The faster you can move from 'storming' to 'performing', the more effective the 90-day or 120-day team will operate.
- **Hallmarks of successful high-performing teams.** Teams are historically built using surface level factors such as skill set and availability. This means that cognitive diversity is not being factored in. High-performing teams focus on the diversity of cognition – the way we think, the way we process information. That's where the power is. It takes a different approach to how we think about diversity and allows teams to be assembled with diverse cognitive styles to achieve higher performance.



Dedicated team membership (sharing individuals across multiple projects or a full-time job in addition to a project) and team size (anything above 7-10 individuals causes things to break down) and are also hallmarks of successful high-performing teams.

- **When creating teams, be sure to look beneath the surface.** It is not just about skill and past experience or if someone has previously been in that role. It is also about how the dynamic changes for the existing team. Usually high-performing stars had a supportive manager and a supportive work environment that contributed to their success. Is the context you are bringing that person into going to be the right context? Will it align with their career objectives? Is it the type of work that is going to excite them?

Recommended Reading and References From this Episode

- [Cloverleaf Me Website](#). Includes “The Impact Teams Have On Culture & Productivity” whitepaper
- [Corporate Bravery: Eliminate Fear-based Decision Making](#) by Darrin Murriner
- [Harvard Business Review - The New Science of Team Chemistry - March-April 2017 Issue](#)

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