

Why YOU Should Be Addicted To Alignment

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Many leaders want alignment in their businesses. Why? They desperately want what alignment will do for them. However, alignment is elusive. It is challenging to create and even harder to maintain, it is difficult to describe, which makes it perplexing to model when others seem to have it. We want it nonetheless.

Alignment in a team dampens egos and strengthens the team orientation. Alignment in a division awakens the ability to collaborate and quickens decision making. Alignment in an organization is an amazing thing to behold, although rare. Why so rare? Alignment takes courage, skill, vision, patience, and compassion. Not all leaders have this combination and not all leaders seek to develop themselves in these areas.

A colleague recently shared this about alignment: *Even when running my own company, one of my major "pain-points" was that we just assumed everyone that worked for us was in alignment with my business partners and my goals. What had all the makings of being a very successful PR firm, ended up being a complete mess because none of our employees saw what was in it for them.*

Alignment is not possible in an organization if the leaders:

- Don't share the organization's or team's vision often and clearly
- Don't focus on developing their people
- Focus too much on themselves (ego)
- Don't have the courage to have difficult conversations

I was talking with a business leader recently about vision. He shared his boss's vision with me. The boss said to him, "We are going to be a billion-dollar organization." The leader then said to me, *that isn't inspiring. It is a vision which describes transactions. Shouldn't the vision be about what difference we are making? Shouldn't it be about how we change lives with our work?* Vision, when it focuses on the result we want to create in the world, inspires those who align with that vision. We can actually attract people who share our values, making alignment much easier.

There are two main areas to focus on when creating alignment:

1. The vision - a set of clearly defined goals that unify the organization at least on an annual basis. 3-5 years out is even better. The vision should be about what we will see in the world in the future that inspires people to want to join us.
2. The core values – a set of clearly defined values that describe our culture. They must be observable and they must be observed. If they are not, then they are just words on a poster hanging on a wall in the break room.

Alignment makes working together appear seamless. It calls out the irrelevant or less important work. It challenges individuals to stay focused on what matters most. It encourages us to have the potentially confrontational conversations that bring awareness to an individual or group. Alignment asks managers to know their people which enables them to share feedback that lands. It asks leaders to get out of the weeds, trust their people, and keep the future in mind.

How will you know when you have it? Alignment is not only about knowing where we are going, the vision and goals, it is also about where we are coming from. Observing how we have a conversation, how we deliver a message, how we serve a client, and how we provide feedback gives us insight to the lack of alignment or the degree to which we have it. If our message falls on deaf ears, we didn't speak with a desire to create listening. If we hold back out of fear of confrontation when providing feedback we may not be in service of the development of our people. If we assume we know what our client wants/needs and simply don't ask, we endanger the future of our relationship. Alignment is the glue that holds relationships together. It takes the courage to speak up, the interest to listen, the persistence to find common ground, and the tenacity to do it again and again.