

Transcription - Positives From Covid When You Are In A New Team Leader Role

Welcome back. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. As we record this, it is the beginning of a new year. We've had a little break and we thank you for allowing us to have that little break. So we're back, we've got lots of information to share with you. Today, we're going to talk about something that is particularly relevant at this time of year. It's the beginning of 2021, we have been almost twelve months in dealing with covid-19 and we're going to talk about the advantages that have come out of this situation for team leaders. Fulyana's got some particular information that she'll share with you.

How this came about was, I was talking to one of my mentees and again I want to flag that mentoring is so good because you are learning all the time from your mentees. I've mentioned that before and I like to acknowledge that again.

This person is starting as a new team leader. It's his first time managing people and I was so impressed with many, many things about this person, but in this case, he's talking about how lucky am I becoming a team leader during covid. And I thought, tell me about what are you thinking. He said, look, we are in this environment. Everybody has to do things differently. Everybody has to think of new ideas, innovation, working from home, technology, processes, procedures. We have to be more dynamic and move faster. So, as a new person coming in to lead the team, I'm so lucky because normally people think, another new person, now we have to learn about that. But, everybody was already open-minded. Everybody is looking for collective solutions for us to deal with the Covid situation, the working from home, the collaboration over technology, etc.

So he's saying that in the past, we always said, well, that's not how the old leader did it or thank god this guy is different or whatever. Now there's less emphasis on the individual style and more about how can "we" as the team. And he said, even in the short period of time I've been in this role and why I'm saying it, is they come to me and they say, I've got a suggestion, why can't we do such and such? And he said, to be honest, observing previous very, very good leaders that didn't happen until much, much later from the team where they were open and coming to the team leader.

In this case, they're coming to me much sooner because they're very eager to make the change, to make the differences and to make things happen in a new way. The other thing is the sense of urgency is different. Before, you as a new leader, you heard people say it's been working really well, if it's not broken, don't fix it. And now people are not thinking like that anymore, they're thinking for here

and now, I've got to do this and that might change in a month's time, I don't know. But for now, we need to think differently. We need to do it differently. People aren't so objectionable to the fact that we are trying new things and being more resilient about what if it doesn't work? Nobody is worried about that anymore. You obviously want to do it where it will work, but you're prepared.

There's less fear of failure. Less fear stopping them from taking on a new idea. The fear of failure is not so bad because we're trying new things. It's what's the result? And then going through what worked, what didn't work. How can we massage it? How can we make it, shape it differently so it does work?

The other thing is he was saying they're kind of treating me not just as a leader, but as a team member. If you're going from a team member to the team leader, there was a separation even though it was very subtle, even though it wasn't so deliberate, it was you're now not one of us, you're the leader and that's not happening right now. Is that because of you or your style or how you work with people? He said I would love to take credit for that, but I don't think so. I think that it is more about people are being collaborative in this situation, that was, you know, inflicted on us.

I think perhaps too, that there's less of the environment reinforcing hierarchy because they're not all in the same environment. It's not that the leader is in the corner office or they're not in an open plan office. The message that we hear constantly, every day, is "we're all in this together". If that's infiltrating everything people do in a day then it's going to be reflected in the work situation. So they're obviously thinking that there's a lessening of the hierarchy structure in organisations because it's not reinforced by place, by communication or lack of communication. because we have to be careful about how often we communicate and where we communicate and how we communicate and what we communicate. Where we could hide behind an interoffice email or a notice on the noticeboard, that can't happen anymore and has to be far more person to person interactivity. So there's not, again, that reinforcement of the hierarchy. I think that the shift has changed from the way people view the team leader to being exactly what he is saying - to be a part of the team.

And that will be interesting to see how that changes in the next 12 months. Whether when some of these organizations don't go back to working in one place at the one time and how that metamorphoses into the structure that is evident when there is a physical presence. How long will that take?

I think the challenge for many leaders that have come to be leaders in this last

12 months, is that shift. In essence they've had an easy transition in the last six months because it hasn't been a physical transition, it has been more of a digital and visual transition. I'm interested to see what happens to these leaders when they are in a more physical framework than they are at the moment. As you said, it is the degree of how much will become physical.

I also was interested to know that when there was a decision, a decision to make something happen, that he and the team did not agree with but it was more an organizational drive to make it happen. I was interested to know how the team reacted to that. He said in his past experience, the team were saying to put it back on the leader to say, well you didn't fight hard enough, you didn't convince them, you didn't present all the information to them, or the issues or concerns and stuff like that. In this case, I did make the call, I did my job which is like I don't agree with it but this is the reason why they wanted it. This is the reason why, this is the expectation of the outcome and this is what we have to do. I had no arguments from anyone and no gossiping about it or anything like that. It was, okay we hear you, we had our say, let's get on with it and we'll give it our best.

I think it's probably not a good thing in many ways because I would worry about where that resentment is being sent other than where it would normally have been. If we go back twelve months to a decision they didn't agree with, there's disappointment and resentment and you're left with a "hangover". Now we have a situation where a decision has been made, nobody's happy with it, everyone's still in the same boat at this point in time. Will that just build and build and build until some other insignificant trigger point somewhere down the track where they are all back in a previous framework and a situation arises where they feel like the leader has let them down and they start to stack. So they bring back all of this that happened when we were in the other situation. Our responsibility as the leader is to be listening to be aware of where they might be ragged edges and to address those quickly so that it doesn't get put aside to be able to stack on to the negatives when something else triggers it.

It's good advice and keep it in mind. I choose to think of it as not a negative, I choose to think of it as maturity because we've been exposed to something much bigger than any of us ever would have thought about. That helped us prioritise. Don't sweat the small things, this is not a life changing situation where we don't agree with.

Two things. Yes, we are sort of more mature, more the priority thing, but the other one is knowing that I can change it again if it doesn't work, while in the past, there was this bit where you're stuck with it for whatever reason, because

you don't want to look like you made a mistake, you want to save face, whatever, you stick with something that was introduced that didn't work. But your point is valid in that, keep that in mind, so that you don't have that problem. But hopefully it's because maturity is developing.

The other thing that supports what you are saying, is that people are less likely these days to align themselves with what they do because they have had time and opportunity and necessity to do other things. So they can't just say, I am a such and such, identify themselves with their job which we've talked about previously. They've had to find so many other things to fill in time, things to do or they've had the opportunity to take up the things that they haven't thought about. So there's less about identifying themselves with the job that they do but they talk more broadly about what their skills are. In that sense it works for this topic so it's one of the positives that has come from Covid.

For a team later coming into this situation, I wonder if it would be different if you had been, if you had become the same leader eight months ago, when all of the changes were at their most dynamic. Would have been more difficult to become the team leader at that point, given all of the things that were being thrown at you? Perhaps the people who became team leaders at that point saw less positives than the ones that it has happened to more recently.

We'd be interested to hear from people who have had this experience in the last 12 months. So let us know if you've been through that experience in the last 12 months and what positives came out of it for you. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.