

# You're on mute!



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As a phrase it's having a moment. How many times have you heard this over the last 4 months? But perhaps there's more to this phrase as we all turn our attention to creating the 'new normal' and the leadership it demands of us.

Network Homes was already grappling with the concept of creating a high trust culture to deliver high performance. We believe high trust and high performance are two sides of the same coin. Impossible to have one without the other. And then the pandemic struck. Overnight the world began working from home, testing this belief to the limit. We then realised how much 'trust' is still confused with 'presenteeism'. It's like a nervous tick for leaders to ask, 'how do I know what they're actually doing when I can't see them?'. The micro-management begins, and trust rapidly breaks down. And with it, discretionary effort, openness to learning and a sense of pride.

What's really called for from leaders as we move into what's likely to be the most challenging times we've lived through in decades, is not micro-management or even blind trust. Instead, leadership which empowers people to think for themselves, be unafraid to experiment or make mistakes, to challenge and ask questions, and to expect to be held accountable. In short, a culture where our people no longer feel they are 'on mute'.

In Nancy Kline's 'Time to Think' she states the most important factor to help others think for themselves is how well they feel listened to. So, this is the No 1 leadership trait I'm trying to hone. Here's my other top leadership traits I'd recommend we all hone for the post COVID-19 workplace:

## **# Active listening: be curious**

We need to give everyone a voice, tap into their creativity and look outside of old norms. Of course, 'listening to understand' rather than 'listening to respond' will be key. At Network we've been using the technology at our fingertips to check in regularly with our people, using pulse surveys on wellbeing and engagement to listen and identify hot spots quickly. And 'Network Thinks' are online events where our people can connect digitally to discuss important issues directly with the CEO such as BLM and the environment.

## **# Clarity: be honest**

With so much uncertainty and change, people need clarity. Which includes not being afraid to say you don't have all the answers. At Network our CEO and Executive team have

consistently held live Q&As and published a daily blog since we went into lockdown. We've just recorded our highest levels of employee engagement ever. Clear, honest and frequent communication was the most cited reason why our people felt wowed by Network.

**# Vulnerability: be prepared to be uncomfortable**

As we've seen into each other's living rooms through the Zoom keyhole many of us have shown more of our whole selves than we ever have. As leaders we've become human. People are building rapport and finding the confidence to speak up more. As the smoke screen of old hierarchies starts to get dismantled, leaders need to continue to show their vulnerabilities to build trust rather than rely on their old positional power

**# Radical Candour: be challenging**

Kim Scott explains in her book 'Radical Candor' if you really show someone you care personally, they'll accept you directly challenging them. As leaders we need to get much better at setting clear expectations and outcomes (not activity) and then provide radical candour feedback when someone falls short. And we need to ask others to do the same for us.

Only if we can create an environment where our people no longer feel they're 'on mute', will we find the breakthroughs and new innovations to ensure we have stronger, more adaptable businesses ready for the future.

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