

TANZANITE LEADERSHIP

QUESTIONS FOR ERIC – September, 2020



TANZANITE
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT™

Q: What is the best way to juggle my kids distance learning in the Fall (from home) and my full time job at the same time? How do make sure my team know that I'm still dialed even if they don't physically see me as much as before?

E: *I think this is the #1 biggest issue for employees in the COVID era, and parents with school-aged children who must work from home have to juggle work & parenting, plus be a school supervisor, IT Manager and many other things at the same time. It's brutal. So my answer is (as it is with lots of challenges): communicate and be transparent. Let your team know when you're going to be available. One of my team members with two children now has a work schedule from 8am-Noon and 1-3pm. Then when the kids are in bed, she catches up on stuff from 9-10pm. Not an ideal schedule, but now that we now her availability, we're able to work through it. Drop e-mail or other communication to team members at odd hours (I start work at 5am, and I'll send Slack messages for no other reason than to let people know I'm thinking of them). When someone has good news, e-mail everyone. Communication doesn't have to be in person, on Zoom or on a phone to be effective. Make sure they know you're thinking about them.*

Q: What are some COVID incentives that employers have been doing for their staff either on a continued basis or as a thank you? For example we offer COVID pay for all staff who continues to come in, free meals, and we've removed the cap on PTO for managers?

E: *My favorite is still giving a hard working employee a "free" day off (not charged to PTO accrual). It doesn't cost anything and the gesture is appreciated. I think removing the PTO cap is a step in the right direction, but right now my experience is that no one is taking any PTO. (Side note – MAKE THEM TAKE THEIR PTO).*

Ask them they what they'd like most for an appreciation gesture. Once you wade through the "I'd like an RV" suggestions, you'll find several things worth doing and effective. Take 3-4 ideas given to you by your team, then offer each employee their choice of one.

Q: Have you heard of anything creative that other employers are doing to keep up engagement? I think that many of our staff on the front lines are really burnt out.

E: *They are burned out, and I don't even know which company you work for! Everyone is burned out. We've all been so busy and distracted that engagement has largely been forgotten – and that can't happen.*



Do a quick pulse survey of your team (5 questions). Find out what's barriers they're having, then sit down with leadership and think of ways to solve those challenges. The more information you have, the more effective you can be as a leader.

Q: What is the one thing that you have shared/taught us that you are most proud of?

E: *A really nice question to ask but one that isn't so easy to answer. I get the most joy when someone tells me that something I taught or shared really resonated or impacted with them. Making an impact is what gives me energy.*

That said, I think that I'm getting the most response on the Gratitude Builder that we do at the beginning of each workshop. If you recall, the original question for the past few years has been "What have you done that you're most proud of?" I love accomplishments but starting thinking that too many people during COVID would say, "I'm most proud of making it through the past month!"

I've been doing a lot of research into the importance of gratitude in one's life, so I decided that it was time to make sure we put gratitude front and center of our workshops.

Q: How do you plan ahead when you don't know what's going to happen? For example, I would like to plan for a trip but scared to leave my team hanging. However, I know I should trust my coworkers to jump in but I know worrying about them will consume me during my trip. So how do you just let go of your responsibilities and pick up where you left off? I always feel like it's easier said than done.

E: You have a couple of questions wrapped up here.

#1: Long range planning can't be done right now. Too many variables. I'm an advocate of 60-day planning – no farther than that.

#2: Go on the trip. Think of this as no different than if you took a vacation in 'normal' times. Do your diligence. Prep everyone (in case of "this", contact "that" person, etc.). You're not letting go of your responsibilities. You're fulfilling your primary responsibility – to yourself and your family. Your team will survive.

Last year, we went to Italy for 9 days. I didn't check e-mail once, and didn't receive one phone call. It's initially humbling, knowing your team can get along just fine with you, but it's ultimately rewarding. Trust me.

Q: What is the meaning of life? Will Biden win the election? Will we have a vaccine for Covid by the end of the year?

E: *Just once, I wish you guys would ask me some tough questions.*



Q: How much control does HR have over promotions? At what point do they become meaningless?

E: *Um. Somebody has an issue with HR...*

But it's a fair question. In an ideal world, HR should only facilitate the process of performance reviews and promotions; that is, design the forms, consult when requested with management, and ensure that reviews and promotions are conducted without any bias.

You are welcome to contact me directly if there are more individual issues here.

Q: How do I deal better with a Manager who is personally negative towards me?

E: *First question to ask yourself is why that Manager is personally negative to you. What might you have done? If you can't honestly answer that question, the best advice I have – and this applies to many situation – is try to talk to that Manager yourself. Find out – as nicely as possible – why that Manager is negative. But you should be prepared to give specific examples, because the initial response might be, "I'm not negative to you."*

If there are specific reasons, then you should be prepared to take those comments or observations constructively, and examine what you might do better, or differently, to change that attitude.

Unless, of course, there's a discriminatory reason, in which case – get in touch with HR.

Q: How have you and your wife been doing? How are you coping with everything? Have you found that house in Maui yet?

E: *Thanks for asking. We are grateful – we both are working, our families are healthy, and we're able to get out and about to exercise regularly. We have been amazed that working out of the house has not resulted in friction – in fact, we'd both say we've grown closer during this time and more fully appreciate what the other does for a living.*

(Wow, think about that. If asked that question a year ago, I would have laughed if I'd answered we were grateful to have a job and be healthy! A year ago, I took those things for granted).

Like with you, it's about adapting. We were going to Europe next month; instead, we're driving through Utah and Arizona's National Parks for 10 days. Our problems are first-world - another reason to be grateful.

Then there's Maui. It's been hung up (we can't get there to look at places right now, obviously). And while COVID has absolutely proven that my wife and I can work remotely – and effectively – I think I will need to be onsite on a frequent basis when we return to the office (whenever that will be). So – pushed off for a while, but not too long.



Q: How do I fix what has been a broken system for many years with little assistance or time to concentrate on the multiple issues my team faces daily?

E: Seems trite to say, “you’re not alone” but – you’re not alone. These are brutal times for managers (and everyone who’s working – but remember: at least we have jobs).

Here’s the Official Swenson Transformation System (patent pending):

- 1. Make a list of what’s broken with ‘the system’.*
- 2. Work with your team (and your boss) to determine the priorities – which is most important.*
- 3. Attach a reasonable time frame to get them done and gain agreement among all your stakeholders to understand and agree to these deadlines.*
- 4. Now focus on the “multiple issues” your team faces daily. What can be done to reduce your role with these issues and reduce the number of issues? Is it more staff? Is it better staff? Is it a reallocation/redeployment of team members?*

I have a feeling if you first fix the broken system, then the multiple issues issue will either go away or be reduced. Reprioritize your goals and objectives.

Q: It can be challenging to effectively communicate to departments when frustration is involved. Perhaps they missed a deadline and didn't communicate it right away. What do you suggest we do in those circumstances in order to avoid sounding frustrated in an email when responding back to them?

E: *To the extent possible, express your frustration verbally instead of via e-mail. You need to have a conversation to understand the other side of the story and that’s not possible in an e-mail.*

I am not 100% effective in controlling my frustration – especially when everyone is working remotely. In the office, I can just call out to someone and have that discussion. Now, it’s not so easy.

I find that waiting a while is my best go-to for reducing frustration. If I found out about something after 4:30, I’ll wait until the next morning to address it. If I find out about an issue in the morning, I’ll wait until the afternoon. Sometimes that doesn’t always work. But normally a ‘cool-down’ period gets me re-focused and more productive than frustrated.

Q: When do you think things will get back to normal? What will new normal look like?

E: *If by ‘normal’, you mean the ‘way things used to be’, we won’t ever return to that again. But nothing ever is the way it used to be.*

I’m not tying vaccines to getting us back to normal. Think about it in terms of the “best case” scenario: let’s say a 100% effective vaccine is found by November. If that’s the case, then someone needs to make 330,000,000 copies of that vaccine for the U.S. (to say nothing of the 7.4 billion people who don’t live in the United States. Then, we



need to actually vaccinate all of those people. Who goes first? How long will that take? And then of course there are the anti-vaxers who will refuse to get vaccinated. What do we do about them?

No – that scenario will take years and years. Instead, I'm encouraged by the researchers who are developing inexpensive tests that provide immediate results. Think of it – people could go to work, get a quick test with immediate, accurate results, and go into the office (or restaurant, or retail store, or bank branch).

That seems to be a more realistic possibility. Hopefully by mid-2021.

What does the new normal look like? Good question. We're starting to see it now: more remote work, different workspaces, more delivery, more technology with which to communicate.

As always, thank you for your questions. Keep them coming!

