

How to leverage uncertainty to your team's advantage

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In a survey I conducted of 190 leaders last December, a whopping 83% of respondents said that what they were most looking forward to over the holidays was a break from work and the opportunity to spend time with family. And it's no surprise.

According to recent [Harvard Business Review research](#), the majority of employees are feeling overworked, overwhelmed, and burnt out, with both general wellbeing and workplace wellbeing on the decline. Closer to home, [Adecco](#) reports that Australian employees are experiencing some of the highest levels of burn out in the world.

So what's causing so much stress in the workplace? This month I surveyed my clients and readers again to ask what their biggest leadership concern of 2022 was. More than half said that navigating uncertainty was their biggest challenge, followed by strengthening team dynamics, both of which have been on the leadership agenda for years.

Who would think that three years since we first heard the word 'Covid', leaders would still be concerned with navigating uncertainty? Yet here we are.

So what can you do, as a leader, to prepare your team to make the most of uncertainty?

1. Work on the team

So often in my work with leaders I see managers focused on working *in* the team to deliver their KPIs. They're so absorbed in this that they can forget to also work *on* the team. The distinction here is between management and leadership. Often promoted because of their technical expertise, a manager knows how to garner resources and people to deliver good work.

In contrast, a leader knows their team's innate strengths, connecting their team's hearts and minds to their purpose to achieve outstanding results while helping them to find meaning in their work. Leaders inspire, impact, and transform their teams, becoming known more for their ability to influence outcomes than with delivering work themselves.

If you want to prepare your team for further uncertainty, you need to focus on strengthening team dynamics and elevating your leadership. Schedule time as a group to assess how the team is performing and discuss what needs to change. Redefine your purpose with the involvement of the entire team and redefine obstacles as opportunities to disrupt the market.

2. Build a culture of genuine trust, authentic collaboration and voluntary accountability

A recent [Gartner study](#) showed a significant decline in employee trust since the start of the pandemic, both in relation to their colleagues and their leaders. Traditional networking opportunities and team bonding have been put on hold the past few years, putting trust and collaboration on the backburner.

Building trust is difficult with a dispersed team, but that's exactly why it needs to be a key focus of your 2022 goals. This starts by leading yourself. Being open with your team requires you to be vulnerable and have courage, but doing so will show your team that they can trust you, and in turn, each other.

When your team operates with authenticity and a willingness to be open, there will be less fear of trying new approaches, leading to innovation. Mistakes can be seen as opportunities to grow, and challenges as a way to collaborate towards shared goals, working as a cohesive unit.

When team members operate solely on their own it's easy to have a singular focus on personal goals or deliverables for their function at the cost of the wider team. To align your team, develop a shared purpose that every team member contributes towards. Then, encourage a culture of self governance within your team where team members hold themselves and each other accountable for the team's success.

3. Rethink your approach to team building

The methodology and structure you use to “work on the team” is very important to deliver the outcomes of genuine trust, authentic collaboration and voluntary accountability. Most methodologies approach team building as a “problem to be solved”. Where are you now? Where would you like to be? How will you get there and what’s going to stop you?

Appreciative Inquiry takes a strengths based approach. It starts from the position of team strengths, moves to a shared positive vision of future team dynamics, focuses on what needs to change to make the dream a reality, and invokes an exercise around task prioritisation to ensure that your highest team potential is realised.

Here are some outcomes that my client’s have achieved in our work with Appreciative Inquiry:

- Doubling of revenue
- 84% increase in Net Promoter Score within 6 months
- Cultural change from “order takers” to a transformational mindset for the entire marketing department of an Australian Bank

To enable your leadership team to navigate uncertainty, deepening trust, enhancing collaboration and generating voluntary accountability are crucial. This is how leaders become the architects of their destiny.