

# CO-CREATING PERFORMANCE METRICS TO ENGAGE THE TEAM

When we surveyed leaders at small, growing organizations during this Covid crisis we found that 60%+ were looking for information on how to co-create performance metrics that engaged people. Very similarly 59% were looking for ideas or help to motivate individuals who seemed to have lost their focus or their drive. That makes a tremendous amount of sense. Typically as leaders we're intrinsically looking at the **skill and will** of those that we work with. **Skill is a combination of ability, training, resources, and processes. Will is the desire combined with commitment.**

Both the skill and will of others, and even ourselves, is much more difficult to grasp in a work-from-home environment. Although many people in the survey had some experience working from home, most were experiencing a ramp in the amount and volume of people that were working from home now, combined with added stress around the state of the world.

This means that **although some people clearly have the skill and the will to successfully work from home, many more were thrust into the situation with untested capabilities.** Add to that that many leaders also have untested skills in managing people remotely, and that's a recipe for something unexpected to come out of the oven. And in these uncertain times, it feels even more important to get consistency in business results.

For instance, let's look at Diane (names changed to protect anonymity). Diane is an up-and-coming leader in what was previously a fast growing company in the co-working space. Thankfully, it's a well run company with solid leadership that took decisive, albeit painful, action early. That decisive action meant laying off ~20% of the business, furloughing another 10%, and that everyone else moved to reduced pay and theoretically reduced hours. The company appears much better positioned than its competition to weather this challenging time. However, Diane (and the rest of leadership) now needs to engage the entire team to find new ways of working with clients, find new services to offer, and also respond to a plethora of clients that either can't or don't want to pay their rent.

The leadership approach chosen to re-engage people had a people-centered, but top-down mentality. Every day a new metric or deliverable from one department or another was shared with the front-line team who had to deliver. Someone had the idea of virtual tours, so everyone of the site managers had to create their virtual tour plan based on a template. Accounting realized they were about to bill everyone for services not rendered. This caused the site managers to have to go back in and adjust all of the automatic systems manually even though the system didn't behave consistently across all the sites. Community engagement had an idea that people would really appreciate a virtual community. So a Slack community for each location was mandated and targets for how much engagement should happen were outlined. Everyone missed the targets by more than 50% the first week. Goals were re-adjusted, efforts double-downed. Some sites across the Midwest had solid success. Locations in larger cities that were more tech forward struggled. People there weren't looking for another channel to engage on. End-users there reported Slack fatigue.

All of these well-intentioned ideas on how to keep the company experimenting were put in place, but was this the best way? Could they unlock this value with a different approach?

Covid-Watch, a non-profit focused on contact tracing, thought there was a better way. They began with a clear and consistent goal from the top, and then allowed each team to self-select a goal to work on. The top-level goal was to get the app from alpha stage deployed and in the hands of a government in 6 weeks. An incredibly short-time frame by any metric, and even more aggressive for a completely volunteer run organization. The goals for the various teams were everything from the number of conversations with potential governments, to the formation of a board, to formalizing financial decision making process. If they needed advice, there was support from other leaders and experts, but it wasn't mandated. **Senior leaders had veto power, not dictating power.** It's too early to see the results of this effort, but already it is creating alignment and a cadence of movement that feels palpable.

The path Covid-Watch chose maps to **five key points** that we would highly recommend. These ideas are defined in *The 4 Disciplines of Execution* by Chris Chesney and Sean Covey, **which we highly recommend.**

**01. Focus your goals on the areas that are going to make the biggest difference.** Don't focus your attention on things that are going to happen anyway. For instance, Diane had to worry about goals around updating finances. Sure, this is important, and should be measured, but it shouldn't be a goal per se. When you use the same term for goals and tasks that need to happen day to day to keep the business alive you overload people with goal fatigue. These goals are your leverage goals.

**02. No team should have more than one or two leverage goals.** This prevents the team from being overloaded.

**03. The battle you choose must win the war.** The sole purpose of the leverage goal for each team is to make sure the bigger leverage goals are won. That is why Covid Watch was closely paying attention to how goals rolled up from one level to the next

**04. Senior leaders can veto, but not dictate.** While the senior leaders will undoubtedly determine the top-level leveraged goals, they must allow the leaders at each level below to define their own goals. If an organization is engaging in goal setting, this is where things most often go astray. If you take away people's autonomy in what they focus on, they lose interest fast. At the same time, if people aren't sure what to focus on, they will similarly lose energy. So the solution is to make sure they're reaching for something that's meaningful and of their own design.

**05. All goals must have a clear scorecard and finish line.** It should be in the form of from X to Y by when. This is one of the more challenging steps. This is also the easiest place where imposed goals can be gamed. If it's someone else's scorecard, there is almost always a way for us to work around the system. However, if we define the score, then it's the way we measure ourselves. Approval from above creates the buy-in that is needed.

## GET STARTED

- What are your top two leverage goals for your team for this quarter, or the year, or the Covid stay-at-home period?
- Are there places that you see where you could add more team directed goal and metric setting? What do you think the impact would be of doing that for your team or your organization?
- How can you review, challenge if necessary, and support metric setting that is a realistic reach for your team?
- Are there any goals / metrics that need to be retired? Replaced?
- What is a more interesting or fun way of reporting progress that motivates your team to achieve the metrics they have designed?

If you would like to have a complimentary discussion to talk about how this can apply in your organization, please reach out to [travis@humanfirstworks.com](mailto:travis@humanfirstworks.com).