

The Real Revenue Driver

3 Ways America's Leading CEOs Are Driving Change, Innovation, and Their Bottom Line

As a CEO in this new era of complexity, you must sharpen your focus in cultivating a strong and loyal workforce. Because of the residual effects of the pandemic, employee disengagement and turnover are at an all-time high...and without people, the work can't be done.

"We've figured out the technology so that business can function well in this new world; but we haven't identified how to revive the human spirit and motivation."

-Patti Cotton

Companies are redirecting great amounts of revenue and energy to remain competitive and attractive. Increasing wages and benefits is just the beginning. Some organizations are holding "fun days" outside the office and parking lot parties. Bonuses, days off, and other enticements are other approaches. But for all the time and money spent, these efforts are proving ineffective.

The fact is, we are missing a foundational piece.

Human beings are wired for connection to create a sense of belonging. But even though many have returned to work, they are finding it difficult in this environment to reconnect in a way that reestablishes meaningful community. A large-scale survey of U.S. companies reveals that less than one-fifth of employees feel more connected since they have entered this new era. And studies show this is directly tied to the way they are committed and engaged to their company, their ability to contribute creatively, and the way they manage change.

As CEO, you are in the unique position to turn this around at your company, and there are three practical approaches you can take to fast-track this.

In fact, you can rebuild a culture of connection that is stronger than it has ever been. And this is key to your ability to drive change, innovation, and the bottom line.

1. Get to know your employees as human beings.

Unless people understand that they matter as human beings where they are, they will seek belonging elsewhere.

- **Connect personally before moving on to business.**

Take a moment to inquire as to your employee's weekend or how their day is progressing. If you are aware of a recent event or personal situation (or even the name of their cat!), ask about that. Taking the time to do this sends the message that they matter and that you take a personal interest in their welfare.

- **Listening means being fully present.**

A lot of us have learned how to listen and repeat back so that others feel heard. But unless you can do this in a way that says, "What you say matters," your employee will feel that you are disingenuous. Their trust in you will diminish. Practicing good listening includes paying attention, and this cannot be accomplished unless you are fully present. This means turning away from phone, computer, and other distractions, to be fully present.

- **Practice empathy.**

As you connect and listen, put yourself in their shoes and let them know how that must feel for them – celebrations, joys, challenges, and losses. The way in which you acknowledge their personal experience tells them you care.

2. Build trust with your employees.

Unless people feel they can trust where they are, they will not feel safe to commit at 100%.

- **Deliver on your commitments.**

Say what you will do, then do what you say you will do. Whether you make a personal pledge or a company commitment, follow through with this. Others

base their trust in you by how you deliver on what you promise. Further, the more you can do this with both big and small things, this lessens stress for those who work with you. They know they can count on what you say.

- **Practice connecting through eye contact.**

Science tells us that we have 2-3 seconds to establish trust as we come in physical contact with others, and this is done through eye contact. This is the same whether we are making new connections or interacting with those who know us well. The way we are wired means that as we approach someone, our “fight or flight” mechanism is alerted and is watching for signs we can trust. Making good eye contact sends a signal of trust, and doing so not only as you greet someone, but throughout the conversation, strengthens bonds and connection.

- **Communicate in the absence of information.**

Be someone your employees can count on even when you may not have the answers. If you have made a commitment, report in on this, even if there has been little progress. Acknowledge if there are challenges and let them know you are working to resolve these. Further, anything you can share as to how you are resolving which might elevate trust is helpful. For example, if a new product was due to be launched and a challenge with delivery exists, report on this, sharing that a team is working to resolve quickly and that you will bring new information to the next team meeting (or whatever is applicable, here). Then follow through by reporting back when you say you will.

3. Communicate their value to your employees.

Unless people feel they are recognized as meaningful contributors where they are, they will wander elsewhere until they find this.

- **Know your employees' strengths and gifts and recognize these.**

Your workforce may be so large that you cannot know this for every single employee. However, you should be fully aware of your own team members' unique gifts and abilities in contributing. Be sure to acknowledge these from time to time in a way that conveys that they bring value to their role and responsibilities. Here's an example: "I appreciated your report, Sandy. Your strength in being able to examine the problem from different perspectives helped me to better understand what we are dealing with."

- **Tie their contributions to the larger picture.**

People seek purpose and understanding that they do so by contributing to a larger picture or bigger goal helps them to feel they belong and that they matter. Be sure to point out how their work impacts the company and its ability to do business. Reminding them of how they help to fulfill the greater purpose provides a sense of meaning and value. "Ben, I can always count on the way you manage our key client relationships. I credit you with our high client retention which has allowed us to expand into other states this year."

- **Thank your employees.**

When you acknowledge and recognize them, be sure and remain "them-focused" rather than company-focused. This is done through the way you see how they contributed and the language you use to describe it. For example, thanking someone is much more effective if you use their name and identify what specifically they did that you feel should be acknowledged. "Thank you for all you do," is not nearly as effective as, "Lynn, thank you for always showing up in the morning with a positive attitude and a kind word. This really sets the tone for the entire team and our day."



Bonus Tip

Calling on the power of your executive team is paramount to effectuating this change throughout your company. Teach and apply these three approaches to your executive team members first, and then charge them with doing the same with those supporting them in their respective areas of responsibility. Large-scale change does not need to be difficult to be effective. The key is to align, coordinate, and hold the new learning accountable.

If building authentic connections within your teams and organization is an area that you would welcome support with, feel free to email the Cotton Group at patti@patticotton.com for a complimentary Discovery Call.

Patti Cotton – Breaking Through to Untouchable Results



Patti Cotton, MA, MAOD, PCC, President of Cotton Group, LLC, is a leader and proven business strategist whose background includes more than 25 years of multicultural experience around the globe working with start-ups, fast-growth, and Fortune 100 companies such as Amazon, Apple, Google, Verizon, Coca-Cola, and Morgan Stanley – to name a few.

With her unique perspectives and proprietary methodology, Patti unlocks incredible levels of growth, synergy, innovation, and collaboration with the CEO-level clients that she works with. Best known for helping business owners and their teams to vision, plan, and break through those roadblocks holding them back, she has single-handedly propelled million-dollar companies into billion-dollar industry powerhouses.

Her core specialty is centered in leadership development for emerging and experienced decision-makers, business ownership initiatives, organizational audits and assessments, strategic planning and visioning, and national and international corporate partnerships.

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