

Centered on Trust

In the past eight months, we've seen a worldwide, seismic shift in the way all professional entities do business. Strong companies have shown resiliency despite processes often doing a complete course reversal over the period of a few weeks. Like a ship weathering a storm, crisis has a way of revealing how strong a structure is at its core. It's the same with organizations. If your principles aren't sound, there can be disastrous fallout.

Phil Bristol, founder and CEO of Sacramento-based Projectivity Solutions, an executive, corporate and leadership coach and consultant, knows this better than anyone. He has been helping companies, organizations and managers improve the strength of their professional entities for more than 35 years. Projectivity Solutions, which he founded in 1990, offers a range of services based



Phil Bristol

“Trust is at the heart of culture, leadership, company valuation and growth.”

on more than 130 years of “peer-reviewed scientific research that is the basis for our practices,” Bristol says.

Once a comprehensive analysis is done, Projectivity Solutions' experts determine organizational need and create a strategic, customized plan to quickly implement and build sustainable performance. “This can drive company value in ways many clients never imagine or anticipate,” he says. At the heart of the solutions – and the foundation of strong company culture – are trust-based relationships.

“When people really see each other and all elements are working well, they will enhance the customer experience, satisfaction, and increase quality of the product or service,” he says. “It's all centered on trust and in the same way a company always wants to come through for its clients, it should feel the same commitment to its team members as well. This helps the customer experience and quality increase, which will drive profitability and company value.”

Projectivity Solutions' comprehensive solutions are called X-Rays (Business X-Ray, Relationship X-Ray, Financial X-Ray, and Mindset X-Ray).

Clients can start with assessments and then drill down deeper once they determine their highest-priority need. “We advise based on analysis of the assessments.

“When assessing and coaching leaders, we are trying to get very clear on the rules and responsibilities and the processes in place that go beyond job description,” he says. “It's about uncovering the key results expected from each position. Then we work with leaders to create a new way of interacting. We use the relationship assessments, for instance, to determine communication styles and motivational forces that move each person into action and oftentimes they coincide – which are great relationships. But many times, they don't. It's just each person's natural way of engaging and if we're not aware of how to shift our language and/or our understanding, then there's natural friction.”

The assessments enable Projectivity Solutions to diagnose root causes of a client's issues and the most effective ways to facilitate treatment. Bristol compares the assessments to diagnostic equipment in healthcare. Doctors can analyze symptomology “but until you run a CT, MRI or x-ray, you don't have objective confirmation.” Once you do, you

can create a course of action to treat the problem.

“Once we uncover the factors that are creating or exacerbating a problem, we can put a name on it and have a conversation about it,” he says. “Then what we create what we call the ‘3A+ conversations,’ which are designed to build personal accountability and foster trust. To create a culture of trust, periodic, stress-free conversations between a supervisor and staff member are needed. The company will determine the frequency that works best for them.”

The 3A+ conversations center on capability (skills and aptitude), impact (helpfulness to others) and effort (diligence and focus). The intention is to teach management to ‘speak the language of leadership,’ which is a way for leaders to actively engage with others.

“This is about having a balance between technical and functional expertise and honoring the humanity of others around you,” he says. “Having the best technical skills and substandard people skills – or the opposite – isn’t enough. We have to have clear goals to work toward to find this balance.”

Properly defining culture on a corporate level is a major first step to help align goals and Bristol cautions that businessowners often have a skewed view of what “culture” is and what it represents.

“Many people think culture is having a pizza party, doing a ropes course or some kind of gift matching or doing something for the community,” he says. “But what’s really important is how people are treated. Are they being motivated by kindness and wanting to help or are they being coopted into doing these activities in the name of culture?”

The answer probably is key to identifying companies that might have great “fun” benefits but are still allowing leaders to foster toxic working environments. Another step in building strong, positive leaders is what Projectivity Solutions calls the “SAM” conversation. In the age of remote work, “this is more important than ever.”

“SAM stands for ‘see, adjust and measure,’” Bristol adds. “Managers need to ‘see’ their staff members – what are they going through? Do they have kids at home they are helping to educate? How are they coping? When they really understand the challenges of their staff, they can work together to overcome them. And we teach leaders to ask the really tough question: ‘Am I doing things that are creating challenges for you?’”

Bristol explains that getting the answer to this question may not be easy and it hinges on the level of trust between the two parties.

“If the trust level isn’t very high, you may have to ask that question several times and come at it in different ways,” he adds. “But even when you don’t get an immediate answer, the leader is sending a message that says you are willing to understand and work on it. When that conversation is had, then you can determine what adjustment needs to be made – the A in SAM.”

Once the adjustment goal is determined, the company decides together how to measure progress and if both parties are doing their part. How frequently will you check back on the goal to make sure the intended impact is actually happening for mutual benefit?

“It’s a simple little thing but what it does is open the door to transparency and that’s really the core to trust,” Bristol says. “And now, in the age of COVID, where companies are no longer bound by geographical dispersion for hiring, leaders may have team members from all over the country. Using these check-in tools to make sure your staff is functioning at highest efficiency from a productivity and an emotional wellness standpoint.”

A few other key strategies to help organizations spot mistakes they’re making and how to reverse them are to determine “outward mindset” vs. “inward mindset.” To put it succinctly, inward mindset is when the leader or organization has a “me-oriented philosophy.” Everything is about *them* and hitting their numbers, quotas and tasks.

“Those are important, of course, but when they’re more important than connecting with people, managers and leaders send a message that they view their staff as an obstacle or something that’s annoying that gets in the way,” Bristol says. “Or they think of them as a vehicle, a tool, to write something or to sell something or produce something. When they aren’t being seen as helpful, then they become irrelevant and ignored. That is extremely counter-productive and tears down teams.”

This is one of the “eight deadly attitudes” that Projectivity Solutions helps clients identify and reverse before they seriously undermine an organization. And if they’ve already done damage, how to repair it.

“When we can just listen and learn and ask questions and invite trust, we can be able to understand what the roadblock is, then we can begin to fix things,” Bristol says. “This leads to a much higher-performing team and that will drive company value.” — By Susan Belknap, 2020 California Business Journal.

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