

Andy:

Hey everybody, welcome to the Reboot Podcast, Wisdom for Work series. My name's Andy Chrissinger. I'm a coach and facilitator here at Reboot. And I'm here with my colleagues, Jen Cody, Chris VandenBrink and Jim Marsden. Hey everybody.

Jim:

Hey there.

Chris:

Hey Andy.

Jen:

Hey Andy.

Andy:

So today we wanted to talk to you all about one of the aspects of how you might engage your team to bring out their best and in particular around the idea of setting direction and bringing clarity to the work. We do a lot of work with teams, including at times leadership and management training. And one of the things that I've noticed in the last couple of times I've been with teams is there's a particular quote in one of our training modules by Brene Brown. We pull this from her book, *Dare to Lead*. And the quote is, clear is kind, unclear is unkind. And for whatever reason, the last several times that I've done that module with teams, that quote seems to stand out and grab people's attention in really interesting ways. They'll say that.

For some reason that really speaks to me. Clear is kind, unclear is unkind. And so we thought we'd let that be the guiding idea or principle for today's conversation. And maybe start by asking the question, when we work with teams, when you all have worked with teams, particularly recently, what are some of the ways that you see a lack of clarity showing up and what is the impact of that lack of clarity? And then we'll turn our attention to how we might work with that once we see it. But let's start there. What are some of the ways that we've been noticing lack of clarity showing up in team life?

Jim Marsden:

I can jump in and share a little bit about what that brings up for me. It actually takes me to that graphic image of the forming and then jumping down to storming before we come up to norming and performing. And the lack of clarity can be a contributor to the storming portion. But from a human behavior perspective, it's often the case where people are coming together with best of intentions and really excited and wanting to do something positive together. But there hasn't been the clarity or the conversations yet to talk about what are we doing, how do we be together, what actually brings out our best when we're together. And instead, there's the unexpressed internal imagery of that clashing with one another.

And so it's with best of intention that the storming starts to happen. And it's almost in the

hindsight that we see, well, we haven't been clear. It's not as if somebody was trying to be clear. They were just trying to express what is should be obvious to everybody, isn't it? Until we discover it actually isn't obvious to everybody. And we all may be carrying different movies. So, um, that's what was coming up for me and just seeing that and co-founders coming together in early stages of starting a business or with teams of any type, just quite natural part of human behavior to try to do the best and make it happen and then find themselves into the, this isn't working as I had hoped.

Jen Cody:

So I wanted just to touch upon that and add to Jim what you were saying around clarity. And Andy from the quote of Brene Brown of setting clear direction within a team. I've been working with many clients and, you know, from the high level of the vision down to of the company, down to the individual purpose of an individual contributor or a manager or a human in their role is really defining what is that, setting that clear direction and knowing how their everyday task or impact has strides kind of in the company and really affects the larger goal of why they're there really does help engage people to bring out their best. And without that being known it's really kind of hard for people to find their value and what they do day to day.

Chris:

Yeah. Thank you for sharing that Jen, that I can build off of both what you and Jim just said. And, um, for whatever reason in the teams I've been working with recently, what I've noticed is, um, there, there is sometimes clarity in one direction of a team, but not another.

And what I mean by that is there might be a client who has their own team. And they've done a good amount of work to create clarity in roles and responsibilities and what the ethos of the team is. But maybe there's less conversation cross-functionally with other teams and, or that client might be on member of the executive team and there's not as much clarity on that team's roles and responsibilities.

And I think, you know, Andy, as soon as you ask that question, what is the impact of the lack of clarity? The term righteousness came to mind, and this is jumping kind of a couple steps ahead, but when you're not speaking with other people who are engaged in a similar goal, you start to develop your own belief that the way you're doing it is right. And without that conversation, you start to kind of get entrenched that your way is better than the other, right? Whether it's members of your executive team, members of cross-functional teams. And then you start to get, it's possible to get really stuck, which really speaks to, I think, the opposite of clarity, which is more of the hidden stories, the hidden agendas, that when you create that clarity and have that conversation, you get some movement.

Andy:

Yeah, that takes me back to where Jim started us out with the Tuckman Development Model and the curve kind of heading down from forming to storming. Often, you know, we'll say a team at its earliest stages, usually there's a period of time where everyone's on their best behavior,

trying not to step on each other's toes, because maybe we're especially worried about fitting in or belonging or figuring out where our place is in this new system.

And then as we start to settle in and we start to develop those views and those views, maybe even begin to get entrenched, but we haven't really discussed them. That's when we start to bump into each other and you, and you see this sort of natural dip in team performance down the curve, but then if we can, if we can work with that, if we can bring the, what hasn't been spoken into the realm of, you know, what's seen and speakable, then we can start to go back up. Again, we can start to norm and then perform.

So I wonder, you know, when we work with teams that are in this space, some flavor of, you know, lack of clarity or storming, however we might wanna frame it, what are some of the things that you all get curious about, some of the ideas or frameworks that you might wanna bring in to help support a team through that phase?

Jen Cody:

And Andy, right before we go into the tools, which I have a couple in mind, there's a quote that I came across with also from Brene Brown, and she talks about how "Daring leadership is about serving other people, not ourselves. This is why we choose courage."

And I feel like that blends what all...all of us have been saying so far around this concept of what we also reference in the trainings that we do is 'how do you measure the success of a leader? By the effectiveness of their team.' So it's important to understand the model of team development as Jim talked through the Tuckman model of the forming, storming, norming, and performing and adjoining.

And it's also really important to understand your people while you're providing clarity and direction and setting expectations. And we talk about this in ease, but it can be, it's a lot to balance as a leader in an organization while also running day-to-day goals that need to be achieved.

So one of the things that I think about when I, with these quotes and kind of where we're headed with this, and I'm just gonna touch upon this briefly is the, an operator's manual. That's what Reboot calls their tool for getting to know the individuals in your team. And this provides clarity as a leader. This engages folks on the team because it's a document that asks questions with the intent of knowing their working preferences and what motivates them? How do they work on their best day? Where do they get stuck? Things of that nature. What is important to them? What do they value?

And there is this aspect that I wanna tie in that knowing the people that are on our team, helps build this relationship, and then in turn builds this conversation that will open the door for more clarity and setting expectations. And I know we've done other podcasts on psychological safety and really building trust, which is actually really at the foundation of engaging our team to bring

out their best.

Andy:

Yeah, that's great, Jen. Thanks for bringing up the Operator's Manual. And I think we have some links that we can share in the show notes to other resources that we published in the past about the Operator's Manual. So that's a great one, getting to know your team rather than taking so much for granted or making assumptions, filling in the gaps where we don't have the full context, we let them tell us how would you like to receive feedback when the time comes?

What do you look like when you're at your best? What do you look like when you're stressed and overwhelmed? And what kind of support would you like during that time? That's just a couple of the questions that you might find in that resource.

Chris:

And I might jump in here and kind of thinking about, you know, who, who's listening to this right now and where might they be at? And if I'm a leader of a team, I think it's worth asking yourself, uh, what, what do you know specifically about the members of your team, the individuals on your team, how much do you know about them? Not just personally, right. Or where they're from, but how they like to work and how they like to receive feedback.

And I think that, um, uh, I want to dispel if anyone has a myth or a notion that there is a right way to lead a team. I think it's important to, to acknowledge that every team is different because of the individuals that are on it. And so there is no right way. And when, you know, Jen is speaking about the Operator's Manual, that that's where that tool can really fit in is to, to start to acknowledge that the team that you are leading is going to be unique which means it's going to need unique ways of working together, communicating, inspiring all of these sorts of things.

Jen Cody:

One quick thing I want to touch upon, Chris, and then Jim, you might want to have something to say here as well. But in my own experience, I wish I had this tool prior to my leadership history before becoming a full-time coach. And where I think this would be really helpful is knowing my team better by using this tool would allow me to set aside my own mental models of what I feel and what I think this human in front of me would work best for them as we're working together as a team. And so it would help me turn towards more understanding, maybe even compassion, and be more open to supporting this individual versus what might've come up at times is judgment, right? Which goes back to this lack of clarity or resistance or confusion in the space because I don't have the clarity that's needed as to how to engage my team to be their best.

Jim Marsden:

So I might build on that as well, Jen, and also some things that you had shared there, Chris. I'm thinking right now about when teams are really stuck. And if I'm a manager and that situation is playing on, well, part of what I'm gonna be feeling, likely to be feeling is a sense of urgency and pressure. And so how do we show up when there's the pressure cooker?

And some of the things that are kind of traditional ways, based largely on momentum rather than conscious choice... It's gonna be like force. That might be the tendency to try to break or push through. And yet paradoxically, what really might be the most effective, and it's really effective, is to pause and slow down and take a breath and to head towards curiosity. And this is hard because in the tension, the manager is likely to see some things, come to some conclusions, and act as if those conclusions are the reality. So there's this helpful little adage to just recognize that I have a perspective, but my perspective is but one of many. And then what are the other perspectives that are out there? And so to move towards curiosity and then actually inquire into the diversity of perspectives that may be playing out...and with the best of intentions, by creating either some kind of mess or stuckness, moving with curiosity and listening rather than force and telling might actually present some new choices that might be there. And that's hard when the pressure's on.

And then one last thing that comes to mind that I'm thinking about, what if everything is just kind of blowing up? I think one of the things I see that is just an important basis of any team is that there's a shared sense of purpose. And so it might be helpful to return to what is that shared sense of purpose that serves as common ground for us to even be together in the first place. And returning back to that and having a bit of a conversation is kind of slowing down to actually go ahead more quickly, but more coordinated. So that too might be something that folks could turn towards.

Jen Cody:

That's great, Jim. I don't have too much else to add, but just to say the power of slowing down just for a minute, even though it doesn't feel like there's time for that, and turning towards curiosity, right? And regrouping on shared purpose. That's fantastic.

Jim Marsden:

Can I add a little bit more? It's going back a ways here. I was thinking about some of the ramifications or ripples, if we're not moving towards clarity. One thing, given what I just said there, I'm noticing that in the expression clear is kind, unclear is unkind, it may play out in the form of an individual, to be clear individually.

But I think moving towards clarity is a team sport when it comes to teams. It's not up to any one individual, even though one may feel it's on my shoulders. So I feel like to let it be more of a team 'we're moving to,' nothing's better than knowing as a team that we're being clear rather than just individuals or they are, they are, they're not, whatever. So that is something that stands out. And then I was thinking about implications when this isn't here.

And one of the things that I see that is super common and really a bummer is burnout. And what I feel is in the context of teams and individuals burning out is if I feel like burnout isn't really an indication of I have too much work to do or I'm doing too much without enough of a breath, but that I'm actually doing work that I'm not seeing the purpose or the meaningful contribution that

comes from it.

And it is somehow out of alignment, even though I feel like I'm still needing to show up and do my best. And that competing commitment that has not been resolved, if that remains unresolved, I think that is a major contribution to burnout as well. So that's something else that was coming up when things are not clear.

Andy:

It's so interesting that you bring that up, Jim, because as this conversation was progressing, I was reminded of a framework, a communication framework that we talk about a lot. And Chris, I think you actually recently published a blog post about this, the idea of It-We-I the conversation levels. And I was thinking, I wonder how it we I can help us if we sense there is a lack of clarity in a team.

in the experience of a team. You know, if we turn to the It-We-I framework, we might ask ourselves on what level are we stuck or on what level do we lack clarity? So what you were just talking about, you know, the experience of burnout inside an individual, to me, that's an I level, maybe other things, but that's definitely rooted in the experience of one person's identity. There's work that is...I'm actually not my work to do, but I am doing it. And I might even feel like I can't stop doing it. And so it creates this inner-outer misalignment. So that might be one, one experience of 'I' level, lack of clarity.

Jim Marsden:

So I can see it playing out in the 'We' level in a pretty big way too. And it's something where I feel like we should be doing this together, but I'm feeling isolated. Or I'm not sure I belong. So there's something in connection that is playing out at the 'We' level as well there. And when we haven't really worked out as a team how we do things together, then I may find myself in a situation where I'm really trying, but it doesn't seem to make a difference in how I'm not being seen or I'm being misunderstood. And it's a breakdown of connection leading to isolation, with ripples in the 'We' and the 'I' at that point.

Jen Cody:

I'll just add to what you both have said too. Just something real quick too about the connection. And Jim, you talked about being on a team, right? We're on teams because the work that needs to get done cannot be done by one person, right? So we form this team, we have groups, and connection is really why we're there for this overall purpose.

So I'm just kind of tying things together to say the more we can define the company purpose down to the individual, the 'I' purpose you know, Andy was talking about the eye and setting this clear direction as Brene Brown speaks about, then we feel this connection back to self and the whole, you know, um, which it solves some of this engagement that is found in many companies. And Chris, I'm wondering if you want to talk to the 'It' piece. I feel, I feel like there's something in there for you to speak to.

Chris:

Well, there's a lot that I'm thinking about right now. And I might, what the, It-We-I brought up for me is, you know, Andy said when we're getting stuck at different levels, um, I just want to name that, um, we're kind of giving a lot of different lenses for which to look at where breakdown can happen. And I think as a leader, it's sometimes a lot of, it's like hard work to know which lens to, to use in the moment.

Are we the person who is burning out and we don't feel that connection? Is a member of our team feeling that burnout and they're missing that connection? Are we noticing conflict, sometimes even anger in cross-functional conversations? Member of our team with a member of another team that we might be friends with the leader of that team.

And so I just wanna name that I think that part of the skill and the difficulty here is knowing at which elevation and with which lens to look to pay attention in any one of these moments. Because I think that can be a clue, a guide to whether it's an It-level conversation that has been hidden from view that we need to surface. Is it a We-level dynamic that hasn't been brought to the table? So that's what's been coming up for me.

Andy:

And contextual awareness as well, right? I mean, how much clarity is actually reasonably able to be expected given the stage of the organization, what's happening, you know, in the market. Um, you know, that what clarity looks like for an early-stage startup is very different than what clarity looks like for an established organization that's scaling. Um or at some other stage of its life. So recognizing that as well is really important.

Jim:

It has me thinking about conflict. And so with the storming comes the conflict. And yet, in that realm, I feel like one of the things that's valuable to be doing as a team, doing it together, is getting curious about our orientation around conflict. And even having conversations, kind of sharing openly when there isn't pressure on it to discuss, hey, what does conflict look like to you? And noticing the unique kind of profiles of that for us each individually.

What I feel is an opportunity moving from the storming into norming towards performing is we may actually be able to overtly reorient our relationship with conflict by outing it rather than trying to avoid it or be nice about it. And that too, you know, that's the way kind of brings back competing commitments. I wanna work through this hard thing, but I don't wanna be disrespectful. Now where does that put me? So if having very open conversations about our relationships with conflict and how we might do this as a team to support one another because we're heading towards something we'd prefer, is just to show up as allies with one another and to do great when there's conflict as opposed to avoid.

Jen:

And Jim, what I am tying back to what you had said before about the pause, you know, and taking time to pause and turn to curiosity. And in that same place as we're turning to curiosity, what I hear you add to that is naming something that might be in the space around the conflict, right? That could be really helpful.

Jim Marsden:

Yeah, yep, yep. It can come in the owner's manual too, you know, there as well, just preferences and stepping stones into a deeper conversation around conflict as well.

Andy:

Yeah. Just a real practical example of this. I was with a team very recently in an offsite facilitation setting. And one of the things that they were beginning to see about themselves was some conflict aversion, some conflict avoidance. And so we started to uncover that in the course of the conversation.

And one of the...one of the practical implications of that we realized is that there were a couple of folks on the team that were given to, you know, being a bit verbose in team discussions going on a little bit too long and like the rest of the team kind of zoning out a bit. And what we realized is they didn't really have the skill to interrupt each other effectively when that was happening. And there was this kind of quality of niceness and I don't want to be, I don't want to offend anyone.

Andy:

So it became this like slightly humorous, but with very serious implications that the question of can we actually agree that it's okay to interrupt each other? And what will we do in meetings when that happens? And can we make that okay? And so, yeah, we'll see. We'll see how that adoption of that new behavior or new move goes. But I thought it was a pretty good example of what you were just talking about. You both were just talking about.

Chris:

And I'll just kind of underline, I think that ability to pause and name the, the we-level quality of conversation that's not working and come up with a new behavior, it is maybe the most important skill here, right? Versus starting to come up with some, some meaning-making and stories that the members of our team aren't doing a good enough job or they're not in the right role. That's where we start to go when we lack the clarity of the dynamic.

Jim:

Sometimes, just as alternatives too, because this may strike a chord for some folks, sometimes that same kind of entrenchment that you were just talking about can be on my shoulders. So it's like, well, it must be on me. I must be the reason why we're so stuck. And so then I'm trying to do something, but I'm on my heels already and I'm only concerned by what are the things that I might be able to do. And I'm missing the whole opportunity and resource of what's here around me.



Jen:

And Andy, when you spoke about the example recently of conflict and Jimmy, you had brought it up and Chris, you had spoken something about this too. It reminds me of the dynamic-ness, if that's a word of the relationship that is ongoing about how we establish norms, sometimes maybe over and over of what's working. That this isn't just you engage your team and then you're done and you go about scaling, that this is an ongoing process that can really nurture the relationship as it grows.

Andy:

Yeah, and can you give yourselves the grace to be bad before you're good? You know, and I think that's the that's one of the things that I feel the most when I'm going in and working with a team is I know I'm going to be with them for a day or two days will surface these things, but then they're going to have to go back to normal life and practice these behaviors if they have any, any chance of sticking and becoming new behaviors. And so.

Jen:

Yeah, totally.

Jim:

Yeah.

Andy:

One of the things that I'll really try to encourage teams is look, it's gonna be awkward. If you're trying, as you move through this, it will be awkward. Then that's just normal. That's the normal part of growth. So can you let yourself be not perfect at this as you're working through these things? So I think that's another thing I'd wanna emphasize to anyone out there trying to lead teams or be a part of a team and make changes. It can be discouraging, but it's especially discouraging if you hold this kind of standard of perfection. Like once I see it, we've got to be perfect at it tomorrow, or we're failing somehow.

Jen Cody:

Can we let ourselves be imperfect while we learn? That's what I hear you say, Andy. Yeah.

Andy:

Yeah, and maybe that's a great note to end on. And anyone out there trying to lead a team, trying to be a good member of a team, it's hard work, but it's work that's worth it. And we'd encourage you to hang in there, keep looking for the moves that you have available to you, leaning into the areas where you have agency to make a shift, and you can do that from any seat on the team not just the senior-most leader.

Well, thanks gang for being here. That was a great conversation and I really appreciate our time.