



How to Turn Leaders Into Heroes

A POPin Resource

Abstract:

Leaders who can solve the employee engagement and retention concerns in their organization will reach hero status, but it's harder than you would think. Research indicates that 70 percent of business initiatives fail before they can attain any valuable success. Often, the teams working on making these initiatives a success know the truth but fail to speak up, mainly from fear. Teams fear for their jobs, and prefer a peaceful environment to challenging organizational leaders. This culture creates an environment with low productivity and morale among teams.

The challenge points to a lack of communication between stakeholders and the employees they manage. When communication fails, leaders cannot engage fully with team members, which in turn lowers individual engagement and internal communication. As a leader, you must have certain conversations with your employees to ensure you create a culture of honest and continuous engagement, which will make you a hero.

The most important step is for leaders to step out of their comfort zones and ask the most difficult questions. This may not be intuitive, however it's crucial for success. As a leader, you must encourage team members to pose the answers to these questions without fear of reprimand and victimization. Then, once you've collaborated on solutions, you can create strategies and implement them towards organizational goals. Some of the key factors to consider when looking for critical conversations to have for your business include:

- How you can have actionable conversations with your employees
- How you can facilitate effective communications between business leaders and your employees
- What questions will lead you to the critical conversations you need
- How you can improve employee satisfaction and engagement within your organization
- How you can encourage honest feedback between different stakeholders
- How these conversations will influence your organizational goals, and what investments you will need.
- What benefits you can expect from having critical conversations



Introduction

Numbers do not lie — statistics from Gallup indicate that 70% of business initiatives fail before they can make any tangible progress. Worse still, the people working on making these initiatives successes know from the start whether the initiative will succeed or fail. Interestingly, the right conversations can save business initiatives and turn leaders into the heroes that employees turn to when things get hard. Those conversations also lead to more organizational success. But, what exactly are the conversations you should be having? And how can you use conversations to drive engagement?

Real business conversations solve real business problems. Brilliant ideas only work when leaders have the buy-in of the teams that do the actual work and drive these ideas to fruition. Even better, the best ideas start when leaders allow the entire team to contribute to the problem solving process. Essentially, when a leader lets his or her employees become involved in a decision, he or she takes on a hero role. However, until recently, leaders did not have the tools or framework to candidly engage with employees in the continuous decision making process of the organization.

Until POPin, engaging with large teams was a logistical nightmare. Additionally, employees lacked a safe platform to express their opinions, share their hands-on knowledge and even challenge strategies that were doomed to fail. The reality is that challenging leaders and managers with the truth is often career limiting and in some cases, can send you home packing.

Critical conversations only work when you prioritize the truth. As a leader, you must learn to ask the right questions and learn how to accept the truth. Admittedly, this takes time especially in critical situations when you are trying to save the business or stay competitive. POPin understand that the right conversations can save your organization, which is why business leaders can access success recipes to help them get the conversation started immediately.

The Role of Business Conversation

Before you grab your cape and start engaging with your employees, it is important for you to understand how these conversations fit in the overall success of the business.



Your role as a leader is to achieve set business goals. Often, you will develop strategies, delegate tasks, supervise team members, and evaluate the overall progress of the team. However, the only way to ensure your work runs smoothly is to convince your team to believe in the goals and strategies you present. Getting the buy-in of your team is quite challenging, especially in teams where employees refuse to challenge your idea out of fear.

First, you have to acknowledge that you need the insight of your team when defining the problem you want to address. While you may have a general understanding of issues on the ground, your team will always offer better insight when identifying challenges. For example, religious seasons in a predominantly Christian community may affect sales; sales agents can help you identify when to slow down on activations.

Later, when you are trying to resolve the problem, the team members are your most valuable asset. You have diverse ideas, creativity and input from people who are in touch with consumers. The decision making process becomes more fruitful, and you can now work on a holistic solution that addresses both the materialistic issue and systematic problems.

After engaging your team in the whole process, you do not have to spend time getting their buy-in into your ideas. You will have an enthusiastic team ready to implement the ideas and work towards the new goals. This level of engagement will give your initiatives a better chance to succeed- which will reflect well on you as the leader. That is where the hero status comes in!

While many leaders understand the principal of communication within their organizations, it was practically impossible, until recently, to get the input of everyone in the team. However, POPin makes it easy to engage team members in critical conversations. For example, leaders testing out prototypes in overseas factories can get feedback from the team immediately, and even get a vote on the best prototype for the market.

POPin as a Conversational Tool

While initiating critical conversations around fundamental issues in your organizational success, you need to focus on three key areas:



Discovery

The first conversation on POPin allows you to identify the truth in less than 72-hours. Team members can contribute to the conversation anonymously and help you get to the root of the problem fast.

Problem Solving

Once you identify the problem, you can outsource solutions from the team, which helps you resolve issues faster, and get solutions with a higher success rate.

Action

Now that you have a solution, your team is ready to get to work. You have an easier time implementing 'our' solutions versus 'my' solutions.

Starting Critical Conversations

Once you have POPin in your organizations, you can access recipes tailored to different business challenges with set POPin questions and suggestions on activities you can undertake between sessions. After assessing the problem at hand, you can use the recipe either as it is or edit it to suit your organizational needs.

Depending on the nature and sensitivity of the conversation, team members can either contribute anonymously or use their emails for identification. For example, anonymity in the discovery stage will help you get honest feedback; however, you will need to identify individuals in the problem solving stage so you can assign tasks better or even follow up on specific ideas with the individual.

Once you identify the recipe you need, set aside time to initiate the conversation. For example, initiating conversations with the financial team at the close of the financial year may fail to produce desired results.

Some suggestions to help increase the effectiveness of your conversations include:

- Send an invitation email to your team explaining the process, its importance and include a brief introduction to POPin. Emphasize on the importance of honesty throughout the process.
- On the launch day, send an invite to POPin sessions with a brief that explains the exercise, how you will use the answers and questions employees can expect
- Thereafter, send a reminder email inviting the remaining team members to share their opinions.
- After you receive your responses, tally the results and create a list of the top items and/or issues. Once you have your list, send another invitation asking member to agree or disagree with the list, encouraging them to make their voice heard.
- Lastly, once you have all the information you need, close your session and thank everyone who participated in the session. In this email, include your top insights and your new action plan, including new ideas you think will need deeper consultation in a different session

These steps give a simple procedure; depending on the issue at hand and the feedback you receive, you might spend more time on some steps, or even launch additional sessions to address other issues that come up.

Conclusion

Your team knows a few things that can save your business money and time. POPin facilitates the critical conversations you need to solve real problems affecting your business. As a leader, you spend less time worrying by involving your employees in the problem solving process. You also increase team engagement, which improves productivity and eventually, the bottom line.

Through POPin, you interact with other leaders at the POPin Leadership Forum where you also have the opportunity to improve the recipes for your organizations and give us your feedback.

