

Episode #54: How to Generate Empathy During Pandemic-related Transitions

Welcome to THE CAREER ACCELERATOR, the podcast where corporate managers will find tips and tools to deliver results through others.

In today's podcast I pose the question: How can you generate empathy during pandemic-related transitions?

I'm your host, Percy Cannon.

In our last episode I challenged you to discern how your organization values and balances profit and people.

I outlined what the two extremes could look like in an organization: one with a heavy focus on profits and the other centered on people.

I also gave you two personal examples of organizations that proactively valued and balanced both profit and people.

Finally, I challenged you to determine if there's room to make any adjustments to the profit and people equation in your organization.

Today, and in the next few sessions, I will provide a series of principles that can help you and your team successfully transition from remote to hybrid or in-person work arrangements.

The principle for today is, the more empathy you build into the workplace transition process, the greater likelihood that it will be a success.

Wikipedia defines empathy as *the capacity to understand or feel what another person is experiencing from within their frame of reference, that is, the capacity to place oneself in another's position.*

What I have seen in the last four decades, combining my time inside large corporations with my more recent experiences mentoring corporate executives, is that many, and perhaps most of the transition processes I have witnessed, tend to be "top-down." The executive team decides to apply a new business model, implement a technological improvement, close a plant, or establish new workplace policies as the pandemic winds down.

The way this process is usually kicked off is when a senior executive makes the big announcement, usually via email, to all employees.

But how much empathy is built into this announcement email and throughout the overall transition process?

William Bridges outlines a series of suggestions you can implement to effectively deal with the human side of organizational change in his book *Managing Transitions*.

One of them is to clarify and communicate the basic purpose behind the outcome being pursued. And within this, he argues that it helps to explain what specific problem or challenge the proposed plan is expected to solve.

In the case of moving from working remotely to a hybrid or full in-person mode, it may help to first understand what employees like and dislike about working remotely. Here are three areas to get you started:

1. **Are you and your employees suffering from Zoom and Teams fatigue?** You are likely bombarded with requests for video calls pretty much from the time you wake up, usually through lunch and, if you don't put a stop to them, even during the evening hours. Strategic agreements seem to take longer to be reached... Could this be a result of focusing more on short-term issues, which can be solved within a typical 30- to 60-minute video call? Strategic challenges, which require deeper discussions, may be suffering, as they are hard to tackle through Zoom or Teams.
2. **How effective have your onboarding programs been for new hires?** How are they dealing with the challenges of working within teams of people whom they have never met in person? And how about developing a working relationship with a boss whom they have never physically met? And how well have they embraced your company's culture without ever stepping into your office building?
3. **How productive are you and your employees working remotely?** On the one hand, you have probably saved a lot of time commuting to and from work. On the other hand, how much time have you lost in terms of slower decision-making? Do you miss the informal exchange of ideas in the hallway, which can save time spent in meetings?

Summarizing, the odds of a fruitful transition out of working remotely will be higher if the problem or challenge is well explained and reflects the human component.

In other words, the likelihood of success will be higher if you show empathy during the transition process. Do your best to generate and leverage your understanding of your employees' feelings. It will be clearer and easier for employees to understand the purpose of your new workplace policies. And it will increase the probability that it will "be bought" by them.

Returning to the announcement email that will be sent by the senior executive, the more empathic you are when explaining the problem to be solved and the purpose of the new policies, the greater the odds it will be well received and "bought" by employees. Using the three areas shared before, employees will want to understand how the new policies will address their Zoom or Teams fatigue and improve the new-hire on-boarding process, and how their overall productivity will be improved.

In our next episode I will continue to share principles that can help you and your team successfully transition from remote to hybrid or in-person work arrangements.

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Percy's BIO

Are you an executive or manager in a large corporation who wants to accelerate your career growth and promotability? Percy provides corporate executives, managers and leadership teams with customized coaching programs that help them develop the skills and capabilities needed to significantly increase their business results through others and accelerate their career growth.

Percy is an “alumnus” from three multinational corporations, Procter & Gamble, IBM & Microsoft, with whom he spent close to three decades. Since 2011 he has been helping corporate executives, managers and employees ***make the rest of their life...the best of their life®***.

Percy has worked in the United States and across several countries in Latin America as an Executive Coach, Leadership Team Consultant and Keynote Speaker, serving companies such as Microsoft, Procter & Gamble, Citibank, Tiffany, DSM, Farmatodo & Avianca.

Percy is a Certified Professional Coach from Wainwright Global, Authorized Partner for "The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team" and "Everything DiSC", a certified "Go-Giver" speaker & coach, and a CAPA PRO member, the official consultant and practitioner alliance for several methodologies from best-seller author Patrick Lencioni (e.g., "Organizational Health", "The Ideal Team Player", "The 6 Types of Working Genius", "The Truth About Employee Engagement" and others).

Percy published his first book in 2012-13 in English (*The Business Apostolate: Insights to Define and Achieve Your Mission in Life*) and in Spanish (*El Negocio Más Grande de su Vida*). He launched his first iPhone & iPad application, *LifePlan*, in English & Spanish, in 2016, and his podcast, [*The Career Accelerator*](#), in May 2020.

He is a consulting partner at Grupo Azimuth and the Chapter Director for the COO Forum in Southeast Florida. He has lived in 9 different cities and 5 countries, and speaks English, Spanish and Portuguese fluently. Percy is married, has 3 children and 6 grandchildren, and is a passionate runner & reader.

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