Roundtable Member **Agatha De Santis**, VP Human Resources at Indigo Books and Music, shared her perspective with our team on how to build a kind culture.

Mentoring **MATTERS**

Q *The previous leader of my unit was a real 'command and control' type who led by fear. I am trying to build a culture of kindness and generosity within my team. What are some tactical things that I could do to build that type of culture?*

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I've worked in a wide range of company cultures: from micro-managed, stay-inside-your-sandbox organizations, to energetic and collegial teams. No question – I believe in the power of a supportive and empowering team environment. And I've learned it doesn't happen overnight, and it doesn't happen without real leadership effort. Here are a few things that have helped me to build a collaborative and caring culture within my team.

First, share who you are and build real relationships. Each person needs to see who you really are, so authentically share about your personal life. If you want a caring and generous team, you have to be open and honest, starting with yourself. It's just plain exhausting to behave 'a certain way' at work, and then be someone totally different when you're a parent or spouse or sibling.

Start with 'the real you', and build relationships with each person, one person at a time. Tell them about your family, your hobbies, your home, and ask with real interest about them. Focus on the whole person, their personal life as well as their professional life. Be curious and interested – what really engages them? What are their strengths and passions? What do they aspire to do? What are they struggling with? Being real and seeing them be real can help you not only create a culture where people are eager to show up for work every day, but one where you help them grow and develop, and where the relationships last beyond roles and teams.

Partner in the work. To create a caring and generous culture in the team, how we partner among ourselves and others is critical. I encourage my team to work collaboratively with each other, and to role model that throughout the organization. When a member of my team brings me a first draft or proposal, I will often ask: Who have you partnered with to get input? Who have you validated this with? If I'm approving work done in isolation – as brilliant as my team is -- I'm not breaking down silos.

Asking for others' opinions and ideas contributes to creating a generous and kind culture that goes beyond just 'feeling good.' It makes the solution more robust and integrated with the needs and

realities of the business. Having stronger relationships, networks and influence across the business helps each person on my team develop and grow.

Be consistent in how you live it every day. Being who you are, building relationships and partnering with others is not something that you do at the beginning and drop when things get busy. Living your team culture is your 'business as usual.' And it's the continuous visible and tangible examples that will help your culture thrive. Get out from behind your desk. I schedule the first 30 minutes of the day to stop by my team members' desks and say hi, catch up on what's happening with them at home and at work. When I meet with my team, I don't sit at my desk, with them sitting across from me. I have a round table in my office that I call the 'magic' table – we sit side by side, brainstorm and do work together. I'll grab a coffee with someone to have a deeper conversation versus a "how did it go?" fly-by. My team expects to get a quick text with encouragement or thanks, and they do the same for each other.

Finally, be resilient. Building a team culture takes time and patience. Be prepared for turnover – as funny as it seems, a kind and generous culture requires a different way of working. It's not for everyone and some may self-select out, especially those who are comfortable being micro-managed and not being empowered. Support them by being transparent. Ask lots of questions to break old habits: "Help me understand how we get there…" or "What are some things we need to do differently?" Share the intentions behind your actions.

If the whole company culture is fear-based and command-and-control, you may have an even tougher road ahead. You may find it's best to personally self-select out. Your desire to create a generous and supportive team culture goes beyond work. It speaks to your core values. You owe it to yourself as a leader to be true to yourself, and build the team culture that creates value, grows people and makes people want to come to work and bring their best.

Agatha De Santis leads the Talent team at Indigo overseeing Talent Acquisition, Talent Development and Talent Management. She has more than 20 years of Talent Development experience and is dedicated to helping people find their true passion. Agatha is a business focused HR Professional who is a synthesizer of conceptual ideas and an experienced initiator of purposeful and impactful organizational change.

Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.