



Roundtable Member **Chad Crago**, Senior Manager, Leadership Development at Walmart Canada shares his advice for keeping a team motivated and confident after a stressful restructuring.

Mentoring **MATTERS**

Q *My organization is going through yet another round of belt tightening and I had to restructure my team and let two people go. There aren't any other moves planned (that I know of) but I can tell this has been unsettling for the rest of my team. How can I get the team focused and reduce the worry that "they're next"?*

Leading a team through a restructure can be one of the most difficult activities a leader is faced with. It's not hard to imagine the compounded impact multiple restructuring events has on both the leader, and the team. It goes without saying that a solid change implementation plan is required to manage the complexities of such a change. Beyond that, the best leaders I've worked with have been intentional in considering how they will show up from a more human aspect, to support their teams.

Think of yourself first.

OK, this may feel like the wrong thing to say, however, a leader who tries to take care of the team without being fully aware of where they are on the change journey is taking a big risk. The team will be looking to you to start building their own stories around the change.

Being aware and honest with yourself around your own reactions allows you to prepare, and to be intentional in your approach.

Picture a leader who hasn't paused to process their own feelings. How might this person react when the team asks questions that they haven't thought through themselves? What's the potential for the leader to unintentionally say something that adds to the frustration and uncertainty the team is already feeling?

Take the time to reflect and consider your own mindset and emotions around the change. Leverage your own leader, and others in your network to work through your reactions, questions and concerns. Taking care of yourself in this regard can help you appreciate what your team may be feeling as they manage through the change.

Communicate... transparently, authentically, frequently.

One of the biggest challenges in leading a team through a restructure is that we typically don't involve the team in the decision-making process. Out of respect for those most negatively impacted, we tend to keep all aspects of a pending change to ourselves until we are ready to announce.

Once we do announce, it's easy to understand how the team may feel frustrated. Frustrated that they had no opportunity to influence the decisions made, frustrated that colleagues and friends have been personally affected, and frustrated with the uncertainty they now face in their own roles. This frustration can quickly lead to a loss of trust with you as the team's leader and to a loss of engagement within the team.

The way you communicate with the team during this time will be critical in rebuilding trust.

I've found that when people aren't provided with information, they tend to jump to their own conclusions... and almost always assume the worst. Transparency and authenticity are critical in rebuilding the trust with your team. Share as much information you can around the reasons for the change and plans for transition to the future vision.

While sharing the technical details of the change is important, this is also an opportunity for you to be vulnerable and share how you have been moving through the change personally. In my experience, people instinctively know when leaders are holding back, and when they are being genuine. Sharing some of your personal reflections can help others on the team to process their own reactions and reinforce that you are all moving through the change together.

The key here is to maintain optimism around the path forward. As mentioned previously, if you haven't processed your own reactions to the change, you run the risk of being perceived as cynical or defeated.

An approach that builds trust is to share insights from your own journey through the change. How did your initial reactions mirror what the team may be feeling now? What information or reflections helped you move your thinking forward? What helped develop your acceptance and optimism for the change?

Finally, be prepared to have these conversations often in the coming weeks. It will take time and reinforcement of key messages for the team to truly align with the new reality.

Meet people where they are.

People are unique, and everyone on your team will experience change in their own way. More to the point, each person will experience each change differently. While we do our best to anticipate the reactions of our team, we need to be careful to manage our assumptions.

It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking we can anticipate people's reactions to a change. Especially if we've led the same team through similar changes in the past. While it's helpful to learn from past experiences, the fact remains that people are likely to experience each change differently. Perhaps there have been changes in their personal lives, or maybe they are feeling change fatigue. Whatever the case, we can best support our teams by remaining aware and creating opportunities to connect with team members to understand genuine reactions.

While you're making time to share information and your own journey with the team, be sure to place equal focus on listening to the reactions from your team. Keep in mind that people will engage differently in group settings than they do in one-to-one meetings. Leverage an approach that creates space to hear from the team as a whole, as well as time for you to connect individually with each team member.

Lead with intention.

Many leaders worry about their ability to successfully lead a team through a restricting change. A leader's intention makes a significant difference. Leaders who look beyond the project planning, and hold an intention of supporting their team, are the ones who are most successful in maintaining trust, team engagement, and accelerating the path to the team productivity.



Chad Crago is a certified coach and senior leadership development professional with over 20 years of HR experience, working with some of the largest employers in the finance and retail industries.

Chad is passionate about creating cultures where people are supported in becoming the best version of themselves. From creating an award winning new graduate development program to 1:1 coaching of executives, Chad helps to cultivate leaders at all career stages through meaningful interactions. A true facilitator, he makes connections between people and ideas to navigate through ambiguity and uncover the path forward.

This passion extends outside of the office and leads Chad to leveraging these skills in his volunteer work coaching and creating learning events with a variety of organizations.



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.