



Roundtable Member,  
**Clare Anscombe Bennett,**  
**Director, Paid Media & Ad**  
**Operations at WildBrain,**  
shares strategies for building  
team bonds when everyone  
is stretched for time.

## Mentoring **MATTERS**



*My team is always stretched for time. We've had a lot of changes recently and our team meetings tend to focus on immediate priorities and dealing with whatever fire is burning. I don't feel like we're building bonds as a group – which I know is important – and yet, I don't want to add another meeting into our already time-crunched calendars. What advice can you give me?*

## Clare's Point of View

It's normal in the peaks and troughs of a team's lifecycle for there to be periods of excess stress and workload. As a leader you are not alone in facing this challenge, yet the lack of control can be unnerving and cause us to question our leadership capabilities.

So, before we talk about how we can take meaningful action to help, it's a crucial step for us to recognise that, as leaders, we are not infallible or perfect. We don't always have the answers to every challenge, but we can employ a toolkit to help navigate harder times and knowing when to use it is the sign of a great leader.

Over the years, working with many diverse clients and teams I have built up my own toolkit of useful tactics to empower me during harder periods.

### *Setting & Navigating to Your North Star*

This is an important first step in any leader's toolkit! While you may not be C-suite level, understanding where your team needs to get to, whether it be 6 months, 12 months or 5 years down the line, should be the foundation of your team's goals. Defining, setting and communicating that vision is so crucial when empowering and motivating a team. Why? For the team it helps them understand on a macro level, why what they are doing is important. All those little fires they are putting out each day contributes to the bigger picture for the department.

For a leader it helps you stay accountable, making it easier to step back from the everyday and think about the smaller, incremental actions you can take that gets you closer to the north star. And sometimes, when time is stretched and the team stressed, even the smallest steps forward feel huge. Celebrate them, progress is progress.

## *What Moves the Needle?*

Now you have your north star, what is next? Getting drawn into firefighting, the constant battle to stay afloat is incredibly draining for leaders and their teams. So, it's important to remember the value of your time and to negotiate it well. There is naturally flex in this, but we all know over promising and under delivering erodes relationships. So don't do it. You want to have enough time and energy to devote to what moves the needle, whatever that is for your business. And if you are clear on your ultimate goal, what makes the biggest difference should align to that. Negotiating our time is not poor practice, it means we are able to deliver our best work in the time we know is required. A great leader will empower their teams to know the value of their time and to be able to prioritise it effectively.

## *Finding Efficiency*

As a leader you can't control everything but focusing on what you can control is critical. Having the awareness of where your teams time is, and where it should be is essential in solving problems. This could be anything from protracted processes, manual reporting, delays with other teams. These relatively small things add minutes, hours onto your team's delivery not to mention the frustration that takes their energy away from those really important tasks.

Homing in on these things doesn't require expensive or intricate software, it can be an Excel sheet or a chat in your 1-to-1s. Digesting that information and finding ways to help creates the bonds of trust with your team and drives efficiency in the processes you can control making the demands on their time lighter.

## *Creating Bonds*

When I think about the relationships with all my teams over the years, the deepest, most effective have always come from adversity. Difficult challenges, high intensity, client politics – these situations have always yielded the closest working relationships. The skills developed by yourself and your team during these times can be some of the most useful you'll ever build.

While that extra meeting feels like a drag on everyone's time, those moments of connection are so valuable. Taking the time to acknowledge the challenge, celebrate the small steps, downloading all those emotions really helps everyone feel valued, listened to, and supported. As a leader knowing when to help your team step back and detach exemplifies great leadership; after all we are more than that one urgent email or presentation and so something short and simple can have a big return.



**Clare Anscombe Bennett, Director, Paid Media & Ad Operations at WildBrain**, has over 12 years in the digital industry. She has led teams across the globe, across industries and across channels. At the heart of all those years, her belief in the positive impact of effective leadership has remained steadfast. Clare is committed to empowering and developing people for their own journey.



**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.