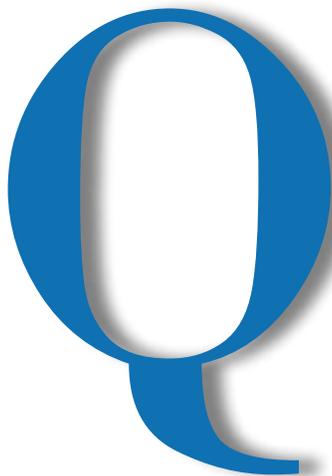




Roundtable Member,  
**Micheline Davies**, Senior Vice President of Seasonal, Gardening and Party City at Canadian Tire, shares strategies for staying close to the needs of your team during the pandemic.

## Mentoring **MATTERS**



*The anxiety and stress of the pandemic has taken its toll in my organization; we've been seeing a higher level of involuntary turnover. As a manager, what strategies can I put into place to stay close to the needs of my team, and to help create a better employee experience?*

## Micheline's Point of View

We've all experienced the uncertainty and unease that the pandemic has introduced into our personal and professional lives. As a retail executive who leads seasonal businesses that are highly weather dependent and volatile (seasonal is sometimes referred to as the "wild west" of retail), my team has grown accustomed to disruption as a part of their day jobs. Little did we know how much we'd need to lean into that resilience as we continue to ride this COVID-19 roller coaster.

It's never been more critical to ensure we're aware of our teams' needs and ensuring they are set up for success. It may seem like Leadership 101 but it's worth a reminder that the needs of your team and the needs of your team members aren't one and the same. As a leader, you need to be both an effective communicator and an effective listener.

### *Purpose as Your Team's North Star*

When leading a team, it's always important to establish a shared purpose and to establish that shared purpose as the North Star for your team. Whether you're connecting in meetings or in formalized employee forums, the need to ground the team in your shared purpose is key.

Given the twists and turns that have come up during the pandemic – for many organizations, it has challenged your business models, your customer base, etc. – you will need to revisit and adapt your purpose. For us at Canadian Tire, our purpose is to equip Canadians for the jobs and joys of life in Canada. Through the pandemic, we shifted to be laser focused on the jobs and joys that were being undertaken during the pandemic (gardening, outdoor furniture, patio heaters) and made the call to source products differently so we could move with more agility. As we learned more about what our customers valued, we expanded and clarified our purpose – and kept that refreshed purpose at the forefront of our conversations.

## *Leading with Empathy*

It's easy enough to stop at what the team needs, but the pandemic reminds us that our teams are made up of individuals, each with different personal circumstances and requirements. As leaders, we've needed to over-index on 1:1s, checking in with employees and paying attention in virtual meetings for cues that might indicate an employee's engagement is flagging. Empathy reigns supreme here as their ability to succeed in a pandemic is related directly to their sense of security. We need to put ourselves into their shoes and their personal situations and understand and share their feelings.

We all need to ensure our employees feel safe identifying any barriers to completing their work and be creative in determining solutions, which could include flexible work hours where possible, revisiting priorities and looking across the team to understand how best to get work done.

### *Change It Up*

Now that we're in the second year of the pandemic, it's a good time to take an inventory of the tactics you're using to drive team connection and engagement. What worked in April 2020 – daily huddles, zoom social time – may be leading to ennui in April 2021. You may not have figured out the optimal way to connect with your team, but continue to try new things.

With my team, we've held formal two-hour town halls. We've done a series of ad hoc 15 minute stand up meetings. We've had our junior team members curate the content for a series of monthly 30-minute updates. We've built gingerbread houses together to celebrate the holidays. It's not perfect, but we try new things, ride them for as long as the team finds value and then we move on to something new.

### *Where are You "On hold"?*

My biggest insight from leading during the pandemic came from paying attention to the team enablers that I somehow managed to "put on hold" as I \*subconsciously\* waited for work to return to normal. I observed this late last year and put priority focus on increased development planning, networking and career management for my extended team. We came up with a new and improved development planning process where our top talent meets with our full leadership team (vs their individual managers) to review and align on their development needs and opportunities. This was a good example of technology enabling us to have a more robust conversation and widen the net of participants.

We also continue to set up networking events so the team has broader access to peers across the organization. With so much disruption to our regular work routines, it's easy to forget about development and progression – when in reality, they're more important than ever as we look to retain our key talent. If you're able, it might be worth scrolling through your calendar from 2019 to see what your team engagement activities looked like pre-pandemic and understand if you've put anything on hold.

### *It All Comes Back to the Basics*

Leading through the pandemic has been a real test for all of us, but it all comes down to the leadership basics: purpose, empathy, innovation and self reflection...and stepping up your game to adapt to today's largely virtual environment.



**Micheline Davies, Senior Vice President of Seasonal, Gardening and Party City at Canadian Tire**, was recognized in 2020 by the Women's Executive Network as one of Canada's Top 100 Most Powerful Women.

A career retailer, Micheline leads the \$2billion+ cornerstone Seasonal and Gardening portfolio at Canadian Tire. Micheline oversees the market-leading merchandising function of the Patio Furniture, BBQ, Christmas, Lawn and Garden and Outdoor Tools businesses, where she has P&L accountability and a mandate to deliver innovation that helps Canadians with the jobs and joys of life. Prior to her current role, Micheline led Canadian Tire's Store Design and Merchandising team, where she spent seven years transforming the store environment, from department resets to new store builds, winning three Retail Council of Canada Excellence in Retailing awards.

An adept leader of large teams and a passionate developer of individuals, mentoring is a hallmark of Micheline's professional makeup. Micheline is also a member of the Strategic Board of Forward Together, where she strives to amplify her scope and support women across best in class Canadian businesses.



**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.