

Team Alignment: You Owe it to Yourself

**“WE OWE ALIGNMENTS TO OUR TEAMS AND
TO OURSELVES.”**

IT IS NOT EFFECTIVE OR FAIR TO EXPECT OUR TEAMS SIMPLY
TO KNOW WHAT WE ARE THINKING

TEAM ALIGNMENT: YOU OWE IT TO **YOURSELF**

When it comes to team alignment, I can't help but think of Alan Greenspan's famous remark: "I know you think you understand what you thought I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant."

Say what?

Without looking back at it, try to repeat the quote. I've tried repeatedly and still can't do it.

The confusion we feel is similar to what our teams feel when we haven't aligned their understanding of what we mean with our understanding of what we meant.

WHAT IT IS TEAM ALIGNMENT?

An alignment itself is an event during which we provide our teams with context - a frame of reference through which our purpose and intentions can be fully understood.

Context enables team members to make decisions that align with our purpose by enabling them to answer the question: "Would this action I am about to take move us toward or away from our identity and vision?"

A complete team alignment provides them with context from the general to the specific and makes clear each of the following:

1. Our **vision**
2. Our **culture**
3. Our **goals**
4. Our Plan
5. Our organizational structure

6. Job descriptions

7. Our Processes

8. Our KPIs

VISION

Our visions for our companies state our purpose and our “whys”. A great vision inspires us and our teams. To do that, our vision has to be more than just: “To get through this job,” or “To make money.”

A former client’s vision “World peace and cultural understanding through a compassionate, profitable IT staffing experience” is a great example of an inspirational vision. It may not resonate with us, but it sure does with him and with his team.

It also resonates with his thirty-five thousand LinkedIn followers who respond to his every post and comment.

CULTURE

Our cultures define our shared values, or as Brian Tracy says in his book Focal Point, “Our values define what we stand for, and more importantly, what we won’t stand for.” The “NetFlix Culture Deck” is an excellent example of a culture statement that provides clear context for Netflix employees.

GOALS

Goals are the intermediate guide posts that mark our achievements and progress toward our vision. They tell us if we are on the right path and are opportunities to celebrate or to correct our course along the way.

PLANS

Plans lay out the specific steps we intend to take to reach our near-term goals.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Our organizational charts are collections of boxes, each of which represents a function in the business. The boxes are arranged in a hierarchical order that shows how the functions relate to each other and, as a consequence, who is responsible to whom.

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Job descriptions define the specific tasks assigned to each box on on the org chart. They tell the team specifically who is responsible for what.

PROCESSES

Processes tell team members "how we do things around here."

KPIS

KPIs, or Key Performance Indicators, are the score. They are the objective measurements that tell team members how they will be measured and how well they are doing in their jobs.

WHY TEAM ALIGNMENT MATTERS

Bob Nelson, author of the book "1001 Ways to Reward Employees," says that the number 2 demotivator for employees is "unclear expectations." (The number 1 demotivator is organizational politics, which, on examination, is itself demotivating precisely because it results in unclear expectations.)

Employees want clarity.

They want know the purpose of their work, what is expected from them,

how to do their jobs, where they fit within the organization - and - they especially want to know how they will be measured. Team alignments, coupled with our behaviors as leaders, provide that clarity.

THE PROCESS: IT BEGINS WITH US

As we read through the 8 point list of alignment elements, many of us will find we are not prepared to provide clarity to our teams because we are not clear in our own minds.

Not even close.

That means that the process must begin with us. It must begin with our defining each of the 8 elements. If we are not clear on these things, how can we possibly make them clear to our teams?

GETTING STARTED

That last paragraph can be discouraging. Creating all of the 8 elements sounds like a daunting task first because most of us have never done it before and second because we are embroiled in the day to day operations of our businesses.

We can understand the logic and see the benefits. We'd love to do it, but it's not likely to happen if we have to create all 8 points just to get started.

There is an alternative.

We can begin with a minimum, and that is to define our visions and our cultures. There's no getting around that. Those two elements belong to us as leaders. They are our standards as owners. They are what we will or won't stand for. We can't delegate that.

However, once we have those two elements defined, we can add “being a fully aligned company” to our visions and align our teams on our visions and cultures. We then schedule future alignments for which we enlist the team’s participation to help create the remaining 6 elements of a fully aligned company.

Their participation not only reduces our workload but also refines their understanding and increases their buy-in. Plus, we might even learn something through their participation!

We owe alignments to our teams and to ourselves. It is not effective or fair to expect our teams simply to know what we are thinking.

Until we have aligned them, we will continue to suffer the effects of team members who didn’t realize that what they heard was not what we meant.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Has your organization ever suffered from misunderstandings? Does your team know your vision for your company? Do you have a vision for your company? Do your team members know how their performance is evaluated? Are you frustrated that the team just doesn’t get it?

If you have any further questions, please don’t hesitate to mail me at Martin@annealbc.com or visit www.annealbc.com



Martin Holland

Martin Holland is the son of a successful entrepreneur. He grew up hearing about margins and markets, R&D and sales, risk and return on investment. He learned to love the language and rigors of business and grew to believe that business is both the most human of all endeavors and the highest calling. After selling a company in 2011, Martin became a coach in order to help other owners build profitable businesses that do not require their day-to-day involvement.

A native of Norman, Martin earned a B.A. degree from Hastings College in Hastings, Nebraska and a Masters in Business Administration degree from the University of Oklahoma. Over the past 7 years he has written business plans that have raised over \$52.4 million in bank and investor financing. He has helped 157 (and counting) business owners reduce stress and increase performance through clarity of purpose, better marriages, more money, and more free time away from the business.