

The answer to What is *Why*

Many leaders continue to make the same mistake: they neglect to communicate the “why” of their vision to their teams, and miss the vital step of connecting the company’s vision and goals to day-to-day work. Instead, they focus on the “what” and the “how.”

Why should you communicate the “why”?

Motivation

Motivated employees embrace the company’s vision and make it *their* vision.

Autonomy

Employees who understand the “why” are excited to figure out how to get things done.

Collaboration

Collaboration drives efficiencies and creates opportunities for all to experiment and learn.

Performance

Like athletes, motivated employees are energized to perform at a higher level.

Innovation

A motivated, informed workforce becomes a hub of innovation.



85%

The all-important “why”

According to [Gallup's](#) “State of the Global Workplace,” 85% of adults are not engaged in their job. Companies with more engaged employees see higher productivity, sales, and profitability.

Communicating the “why” affects every level of the organization

Linking the “why” of strategy to the work getting done requires two-way communication. You have to allow both for executive communication to flow out and for information from the teams to flow back in.



Leadership

Leaders (that’s you) define, set, and excite the company with the vision, strategy, and objective for the business. Your direction must be clear, concise, and explain why what your company does really matters in the world.



Portfolio

Portfolio members work to take the strategic direction and define key objectives for the portfolio that help the business achieve its goals. They keep track of how the objectives are performing and report these back up to the executive level.



Program

At the program level, work items are created to help achieve the portfolio and product objectives. Cross-team planning occurs to understand the scope and commit to major pieces of work. As the program progresses, the status of work is reported back up against the objectives.



Team

Teams assess the potential work items and the objectives they support in order to determine the best way to meet the vision of the company. As work progresses, the team reports the status of their work up to the program.



Individual

Each individual, knowing their skills, the work they’ve planned with their team, and the objectives of the business makes the best decisions for the customer, themselves, their team, and the company. The completion, status, or changes in work to meet the objectives are shared back with the team.



Customer

Your customer plays a pivotal role across the *entire* process, from setting a vision that delivers the compelling value to writing lines of code for features that work as the user expects them to. You must plan and communicate your customer’s “why” as if they’re a member of your organization.

Communicating the “why” to your employees is a simple act, but takes practice to do effectively. When done well, it creates a ripple effect throughout the company.

Here are five things to think about as you explore new ways of working.

1 Reflection

Review the goals and vision you have set out for your company with your leadership team. Do they spark excitement in your team? If not, consider reframing them so the focus on the customer and the long-term mission are clearer.

2 Motivation

Every successful company wants motivated employees: give them a rallying cry! Make sure your goals and vision are repeated everywhere: on the website, during town hall meetings, in the office, in the signature of your email, and on the front page of your internal workspace.

3 Performance

Take an open company approach and share the results of your teams’ performance and progress toward goals weekly or monthly. Celebrate both the successes and the failures and make sure to emphasize lessons learned.

4 Autonomy, collaboration, innovation

During your next planning cycle, ask your portfolio, product, and program managers to lead planning by communicating only the company goals to their teams. See what the teams propose to do to reach these goals. You just might find pockets of innovation that wouldn’t have surfaced otherwise. Think of it this way: “Why down, what’s up?” As a leader, your goal is to drive the “why” down and across your organization. It’s up to your teams to deliver the “what” back up to you.

5 Walk the Talk

Whenever you hold a meeting or have a request, put the “why” front and center. Tie the meeting or project to one of your company’s objectives. If you can’t do this, it might be worth revisiting whether the work is needed in the first place.

