

## J. Michael Locke

### Musings

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#### #26: Creating Community April 17, 2020

Few individuals want to operate in isolation. There is a series on YouTube called “Study with Me” where you can virtually sit with the YouTube poster while you both study. Viewership is up 52%! This is one of the worst parts of the Covid 19 crisis. Everyone is stuck at home and roughly 30% of US households have one person.

Leaders need to make their organization a community. It is good business. Employee retention is directly correlated to employee engagement. Is it “just a job” or does the employee feel s/he is part of a team and community? A happy and engaged employee leads to a happy customer.

Creating a healthy community starts with how new members join. How is your orientation program? Not the “read the manual, HR policy stuff” but the true onboarding. My guess is many of you don’t even have a set orientation program. Create one. Start with a rudimentary – here is a schedule of lunch and learns – where you can meet the various departmental leaders. Assign the new employee a “buddy” from a different department who can make their first months easier. The highest rates of attrition are always in the first six months. If you can get someone over this hump (as Dr. Henry Bienen taught me the statistical “hazard” in the hazard model), your outcomes will be much better.

For those running schools, this same logic applies to students. Make sure you are measuring retention by quarter or semester so you can see that first period drop rate. The Chancellor of Texas Christian University (TCU) knows the importance of this. Leveraging the work of Michael Stallard who wrote *The Connection Culture*, TCU created a Connection Center at TCU. According to Chancellor Boschini, “their only job is to program and provide a myriad of opportunities for people across campus to connect with one another in ways they might not have otherwise done. They have the charge to work across all lines: student, faculty, staff and even alums.” Students who are engaged will not drop out.

Technology and the resulting availability of data have created new opportunities to measure engagement and proactively get in front of a retention issue. For example, most schools offering online learning programs measure when students are in the learning management system and for how long. This data on activity shows you if someone is engaged or not. Good schools run it every day and create “warning systems” for those who are not active. There are differing views on doing this with employees. There are software packages you can get to monitor employee screens or track the number of emails sent. I am not a fan of monitoring employee email or “log on” time. I think you have to trust your team. Still, you can measure engagement the old school way – do individuals come the company social events? Do they ask questions in company town hall? Do they wear company logo apparel if it is provided?

Organizations where all members are engaged in the community are more successful.

Speaking to our community at large, the Covid 19 crisis is magnifying the segmentation of our workforce. The difference in impact between hourly, retail workers and salaried, knowledge workers is dramatic. If you combine the last four jobless claims reports, the number of Americans who've filed for unemployment is 22 million. Disney furloughed 43,000 amusement park workers last week while Google is hiring. On the stump, Bernie Sanders would commonly note that three people (Bezos, Buffett, Gates) have more wealth than the bottom 50% of the U.S. population (160mm people / \$245 billion). We must fix this disparity. Societal cohesion will depend on it. Famed investor Ray Dalio had a good piece on this last April: read it [here](#).

Businesses / employers are an increasingly important part of building community in our society. Church is no longer a cornerstone. According to the Wall Street Journal, less than half of American adults attend church regularly, while 26% claim no religious affiliation. Employees are more geographically mobile so the local town is less influential than it was historically.

Building community in your company is not only good business practice, it is morally important.

Be safe. If you are receiving this, you are most likely a salaried, knowledge worker. Tip \$20 when you get your carry-out lunch today.

jml

### *Second Thought*

In Musing #20 "What We can Learn from Peloton", I discussed how education needs to look at modality flexibility and the future of blended or hybrid models. See the following email from Ted. Is this the future education modality?

## Introducing **TEDx**Chicago TED Circles!

With our main stage event in flux, we wanted to bring the community together while we're physically distancing. We welcome you to join **TEDx**Chicago TED Circles.

A [TED Circle](#) is hosted by volunteers. Circles watch and discuss a TED Talk and then engage in meaningful dialogue encouraging the diversity of thought, fostering genuine intimacy through the exchange of ideas, and learning from each other's perspectives.