

As a leader, talk is cheap. Action is what counts and practice makes a difference. Below are practical steps to improve performance.

- **Set the table with clear expectations.** Practically everything you achieve in business begins with expectations, so why would achieving strategic alignment be any different? Be clear with your team in every planning and strategy session that the ultimate goal is alignment, not just creating a few cool plans and ideas that won't ever get executed without alignment.
- **Determine at the end of the meeting what will be communicated out.** Communication plays a critical role in creating alignment, so before you end a strategy meeting, everyone in the room should align on key messages to be shared, who will share them, and the audiences you'll share them with. Not only does this ensure alignment in the room, but it increases your chance of aligning the rest of the organization with you if they know what's going on.
- **Listen as if your life depends on it.** Too often, we fail to reach alignment because we're too busy forcing our opinions and ideas on everyone else. Alignment requires understanding, and understanding requires listening. As LeB said in Episode 57, listening is a gift you give that helps create understanding and alignment, and we know you need that to execute.
- **Having a strategic plan doesn't guarantee alignment.** Patrick talked at length about this in Episode 57 and it's backed up by data: 70% to 90% of companies fail to fully execute their strategic plans. The plan itself is useless without execution, and execution will never happen without alignment at the top followed by cascading alignment throughout the organization by the people who will ultimately execute it for you. Don't stop at having a plan; do the heavy lifting work to reach alignment.
- **Trust plays a crucial role in alignment.** Without trust, your team will never engage in the conversations needed to achieve strategic alignment. Instead, they'll avoid conflict, vent and second-guess each other outside of meetings, point fingers and avoid accountability, and ultimately prioritize their own needs above the greater good. Trust is earned, changes over time, and is built on feelings of safety with and among each other. And you'll never align without it.
- **Alignment is a journey, not a destination.** Patrick spoke in Episode 57 about romantic partners having to work together through the years to come back into alignment

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### Gaining (and Regaining) Strategic Alignment

Episode 57

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whenever they find they've drifted apart. It happens and is inevitable, and couples that survive do so because they have tools to address their issues and a commitment to the relationship that's stronger than the desire to quit. Alignment in business is no different: it ebbs and flows through the seasons of your business. Knowing that going in helps manage the discouragement that comes from thinking "I thought we were aligned, but now we're not." You were aligned, and you will be again if you have good tools and a commitment to the team. Alignment is a never-ending process.

- **Embrace 'Common Language, Common Tools'.** One thing that binds organizations together is a common language and common tools. Alignment becomes exponentially much more difficult when people don't understand each other or what tools each other is using. Adopt 'Common Language, Common Tools' as a mantra and philosophy. It's not about the number of tools you have, it's aligning and mastering a few good ones and ensuring you speak the same language together.
- **Core Values are a great place to start working on alignment.** If you're looking to increase alignment as a team, Core Values can be an immediate glue to bind the team together. Use them as the lens through which you look at everything, including the important conflicts you're working through as a team to bring you closer into alignment.
- **Purpose can do the same thing.** Most companies still have work to do to find language around purpose, but once you agree on it as a team, it can be like the trim tab on the rudder of a ship stabilizing your organization. Just asking questions about purpose – What is it? Are we fulfilling our reason for being in this business? – can be a good alignment check.
- **Help your people prepare to show up well to strategy meetings.** Some employees think on the fly while others need time to gather thoughts before they actively engage and participate in a strategy discussion. First, know yourself and what you prefer, then build relationships with your people to learn their tendencies so each person can come fully prepared to participate and contribute. It likely means sending out a detailed agenda with meeting topics and objectives well in advance of the meeting. Think days and weeks, not hours.
- **Healthy conflict celebrates differences.** Good conflict, the kind that moves you forward and closer to alignment, celebrates differences as team strengths rather than reasons to cut conversation short. Rather than agree to disagree, lean into each other's different points of view seeking to understand and broaden your own perspective, not become

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frustrated because others won't see yours. You simply cannot achieve alignment without healthy conflict.

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