

**GET
BETTER
SOON**

TALKING DONKEY PRESS

CURE:
ALIGNMENT THAT MINIMIZES
FRICTION

Ideal organizations understand how to minimize the stress and strain caused by friction. Organizational friction is caused by misalignment of systems, processes, and the inability to identify problems.

Fires caused by industrial friction need heat, fuel, and oxygen to spark and burn. In organizational terms, the heat can be the clunky systems that lack explanation. Fuel is the human element that keeps broken systems operating from hesitance to change, short-sighted vision, and position preservation. Oxygen is the policies, a misinformed market, or rudderless leadership that keeps the dysfunction alive.

Alignment is the cure for friction if implemented at pressure points. You can be an alignment intentionalist if you know how to identify the heat points, reduce the combustible material, and use the unintended outside forces to your advantage.

The heat points that generate friction come from broken systems and people processes. What is difficult for customers when interfacing with your organization? Are there dumb policies that benefit the organization's

processes over the customer experience? These heat points will burn through customer goodwill.

Does your organization have cumbersome, antiquated processes causing multiple steps of engagement with vendors or stakeholders? Do you still operate with a fax? C'mon man.

Of course, there are always dumb processes in place. As an alignment intentionalist, you will need people's buy-in to make changes that last. If you hurriedly make changes without an alliance, the initial changes revert to old habits and systems when the pressure of change passes.

You need to show what a better system looks like before implementing new systems. Verbalizing a new reality doesn't mean you'll have the actual system in place, but it does mean you can illustrate the thought process of how it will work.

More people will embrace something new if they see it thought out.

Getting people to accept alignment is a process. Few people enjoy change. Emphasize the purpose statements/mission/vision phrases to help people embrace change. Help them see that ultimately, this alignment will create a better way of serving more people with better steps and intentional effort.

Alignment is easier to accept with clear vision. Show people what alignment looks like and demonstrate what it will feel like.

“This is how we will conduct hand-offs between departments.”

“These are the tools (buttons we push) to make this action automated.”

“Look at the difference in time spent on this project now compared to how it was before.”

To sustain alignment, you need to illustrate the story of progress.

Communicate the results of your alignment once the system is going. Market how the new system benefits people you serve, customers, stakeholders, company leaders, and coworkers in other departments. Doing a before-and-after comparison is a great illustration.

Before the change, we were able to
_____.

After implementing the new system, we were able to
_____.

When you communicate this, you don't need to share the origin story of how the system changed or the journey. Stick to what affects people's outcomes and they will listen because it matters to them.

Whatever changes or alignments happen, be sure those changes support the overall mission and purpose of the company. What good are changes that (while they may be good) actually create a mission-drag on the organization? Those changes will be temporary, and your effort will be wasted.

As an alignment intentionalist, look for processes that frustrate the end user and the current user. Look for the heat points (processes) of why the system sucks. Understand the dynamics of combustible material (human element) that keeps dumb systems alive. Influence the oxygen (external forces you can't control) with vision, illustration, and demonstration of good results.

Your focus on alignment will not only bring value to the organization, it will also bring streamlined focus to your efforts, increase your energy, and create better working opportunities with colleagues.

CURE:
MAKING DECISIONS THE RIGHT
WAY

Ideal organizations don't have leaders who make roller coaster decisions. Roller coasters are temporary thrill rides, and most people would never sign up to ride a roller coaster for hours or days.

In some cases, organizational decisions are like roller coasters with hasty whiplash decisions, massive overreaction, external pressure, or self-preservation tendencies. Quick decisions originating from reactionary influences might seem good in the short term, but can cause invisible, longer-lasting harm in the form of trust erosion.

If you make decisions in your organization, consider these thoughts in your process.

Your core values should transcend wallpaper. Leadership think-tanks say organizations should have no more than 3-4 main core values they work from. More than that can cause value thinning (my word) on what really matters. If you have 8-10 core values, which one is more important? Which three are most important? What unwritten core values exist?

Regardless of how many core values your organization has, make decisions based on those values. Good core values describe how that core value is used in an organization.

For example:

Integrity

(Pretty broad, kind of vague...need clarity)

*We value honesty in our dealings with vendors,
customers, competitors, and regulators*

(That's better, shows that honesty is important)

You know what integrity means to this organization. Any decision hinting in concealment, or sacrificing something right for something now, can be filtered through the lens of honesty. Is this honest or not?

Use your core values to influence all decisions to reduce organizational friction. If you make decisions based on the alignment of your core values, people will trust your decisions.

They can read core values.

They understand definitions.

They know if you're making an aligned decision.

Make decisions with others involved. Trust your people to make the decision a reality. As in, if you're going to make decisions that involve other people, reveal

it to them first before broadcasting a decision. If you don't include the people who will execute an idea, do not move forward with an announcement and hope for the best.

Gain your people's input for the plan before you publicize it. Presenting a plan before getting the buy-in or expert consultation of those doing the job will erode your credibility. When you successfully get others involved, the decision's effect will be powerful.

Make decisions with timelines in mind. Good decisions need the right timing. Good ideas fail because the timeline provided to execute the idea is an asinine assumption of reality.

Excuse me, we have how long to do this?

I think I misheard you. There are how many steps to make this possible?

Who was the genius who thought this through?

If you make decisions for other people but don't know the timeline of how long it takes for them to work the idea, secure their input.

If you bypass timeline conversations, be prepared for an increase in organizational friction and leadership credibility drain.

Determine the importance level of your audiences.

With this decision, who are we serving? Who gets priority? Who else needs to be involved? Do we need buy-in from others before we make decisions that affect them?

Decisions that need more permission will just take longer. That is OK. Getting buy-in is risky and opens the idea to criticism, but it can also mean the idea is worth doing, and worth doing well with others.

The bigger the idea, the more buy-in needed, the greater benefit that decision can have with everyone involved. Don't make buy-in decisions alone or increase pressure towards completion. First identify the audiences so the big idea can thrive.

Be consistent, remember, and build from your previous decisions. Notes from meetings are building blocks for consistency and mission focus. Every good decision should build on other aligned decisions.

“What did we decide before?” is a question that secures the right building materials for the job at hand. Would a contractor begin building a brick house and suddenly change the material to wood or steel? It can be done, but if it isn't in the original plans, structural integrity suffers, material acquisition gets complicated, and timelines deteriorate.

Decisions built on previous decisions use the same building material to finish the job well. If decisions are

made that move the project in a different direction, that's great! It still needs to be connected to what was originally thought through.

Keep record of current decisions as building blocks for the future expression of the vision. Connect decisions to make it easy for others to follow.

Imperfect decisions are better than perfect non-decisions. Sometimes you have to get stuff done. Even without all the information, you can still make decisions based on core values, history, audience priority, and the right thing. If you have to slow things down or take longer to make decisions, explain why.

Indecision without explanation is fatal to trust and morale. "Just trust me on this" is OK if you have trust and relationship credibility, but it's a card you can only play once or twice in the entirety of a project.

Think of indecision - without explanation - like an avocado. If you try to explain something without all the information (about a non-decision) too soon or too late, the momentum related to the decision is gone. Avocados are only good at the right time.

Timing matters. Do the right things fast, move towards the best realities with confidence, and keep trust intact along the way.

The best decisions are made from a steady internal compass. Decisions should be a *response* to external

changes and trends, not a *reaction*, shaped by external influences. The *how* in making decisions is just as important as the *why* in making decisions. Everyone in the organization doesn't need a detailed explanation for every decision, but those most affected by your decisions need to be considered in how you come to decisions.

Decisions made with trust, audience, and timelines in mind will be stronger and more supported than decisions made in knee-jerk reactions to other circumstances. At times, you will need to make some decisions with limited information, a shortened timeline, and on your own. That's part of running an organization, or project, and adapting to changing markets and audiences. However, if you only make quick decisions in *reaction* to things, you risk losing trust and credibility with every haphazard, random decision made. Be intentional, careful, mindful, and confident with your decisions.

How you make decisions for your organization will build your credibility. Explaining *why* you make decisions will increase ownership. Combining those two factors will strengthen the health and foundations of your organization for growth and new things.

The value of making decisions the right way helps increase stability, credibility, and ownership within an organization. People will buy new ideas faster with evidence of good decision-making processes.

CURE:
QUESTION EVERYTHING, ASSUME
NOTHING

Ideal organizations don't exercise their strength by jumping to conclusions. Organizations consistently make good choices and move forward by verifying answers and encouraging questions.

Questions should be welcome in a growing organization. Asking why should not be a red flag. Questions should discover the simplest way to arrive at an answer and shouldn't muddle or complicate the process.

The best questions are like a press release. What/where/when/how/why/who can strengthen every project, every initiative, and provide clarity and vision for everyone involved. Here's how these questions can be used:

What: If the *what* can't be explained in a sentence or two, simplify and clarify what is to be accomplished. *What* is the basic building block of removing assumptions. *What* questions include details concerning the functions of the project, the end goal, and timelines.

Where: This helps assign ownership. *Where* the project is happening is *where* the project is owned. *Where*

questions include details about participation, contribution, responsibility, collaboration, and where to work..

When: This helps clarify timelines and prepares for adjustments to schedules. *When* timelines can represent checklists, installment schedules, personnel shift schedules, and completion dates. *When* questions create margin to maintain creativity, energy, and focus. *When* questions clarify scheduled time for the project.

How: This aligns tasks that complete projects. *How* questions clarify roles, responsibilities, and who/what else is needed. *How* questions create opportunities for growth and learning, such as, How do I do this? How does this work? Can you show me how you expect this to be done?

How questions create accountability. Tasks are visible and known. The system needed to complete the project is available to anyone who participates.

Why: This defines vision. *Why* questions fuel motivation and include everyone. *Why* questions illuminate transparency and the destination. Answers to these questions clarify the process or mission; they shouldn't create confusion. "Just trust me" is not an acceptable answer for a *why* question. While sensitive information may need to be revealed at the right time, *why* answers can increase ownership for the next step, the next phase, and ultimately the destination. Shared information is project fuel.

Who: This clarifies the audience. *Who* questions help *why* questions identify the audience. *Who* answers help clarify how the product is made, why it is created, when it needs to be completed, and where the responsibility lies. *Who* answers combine all the reasons for a service or product in the first place. Discover your audience. Provide the right product or service the audience asks for. Be sure to frame all of your answers relating to *who* you are in business for.

Create a culture where asking questions is normal. Organizations fail when partially equipped people work with limited information. Especially true if these people aren't confident enough to ask questions confirming clarity before starting the journey.

You can build a question culture by asking your own questions differently:

Instead of: Are there any final questions?

Consider: Is there anything missing or unclear before we finish?

Instead of: Do you understand what I just said?

Consider: How does my input apply to you concerning this project?

Instead of: Wouldn't this be great?

Consider: I'm just thinking out loud here; could you see a way to make this idea possible?

Instead of: Why is this so hard to get right?

Consider: What am I unaware of hindering success for this project?

If you can cultivate a healthy question/answer culture in your organization, you'll eliminate faulty conclusions, assumptions, and tunnel vision. When you build a team that asks the right questions, you'll increase confidence, clarity, and camaraderie.

The value of asking the right questions, being confident to ask questions, and arriving at the right answer helps organizations reach goals and deadlines. The value-add to people in that organization will help them work with fewer restraints and a higher confidence level.