

STYBEL PEABODY & ASSOCIATES, INC.



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A Technique to Foster Corporate-wide Trust

Robin, a newly appointed CEO, has a problem with trust. She heads a life science company on track to go public. There are 150 employees located in Boston, Austin, Dublin, and Tokyo.

Under “normal” conditions, her highly educated scientists and IT professionals prefer to focus on their tasks. They do not have a strong team spirit. They tend to mistrust people outside their departments and outside their local geographic areas.

In this blog, we will focus on the use of an online tool Robin can use it to increase trust within and beyond department boundaries.

Zoikas

ProVisors is a B:B networking organization. A basic premise of its culture is that members refer other members to their clients only when members "know, like, and trust" each other.

"Know, like, and trust" is difficult to achieve when work conversations are restricted to work. On the other hand, some employees are uncomfortable discussing their private lives.

The ProVisors framework is to establish randomly assigned break-out rooms limited to three participants. The Russian word for three people working together is "troika." Within ProVisors, "Zoika" is an unofficial word for a toika using Zoom.

Limiting the group to three participants guarantees that everyone gets a chance to speak. The random nature of the assignment process guarantees that people will meet colleagues outside of their functional areas and geographic regions. They will meet people at all levels in the organization from the chair of the board to the intern.

This is a trust-building exercise. The random nature of the assignment makes it likely that people may meet each other several times in 24 months. Building trust takes time and involves multiple contacts.

Zoika Questions

Topics for discussion should be assigned in advance. The art of writing Zoika questions allows people to reveal themselves and yet place boundaries on their private lives.

Below are some potential Zoika topics. As people get familiar with the concept, Robin can ask employees to submit their own Zoika questions. Because of the random nature of assigning people to Zoikas, you can recycle questions.

Each Zoika should be 90 minutes.

Sample Zoika Questions:

1. What is your favorite piece of music and why?
2. Who is your favorite singer or band and why?
3. Who is a person in history that you admire most and why?
4. Who is a teacher you have had that you admire and why?
5. Name a person who greatly influenced you to make the career decisions you have made?
6. Why did you select the career you chose?
7. Other than your current boss, who is the best boss you have ever had?
8. What is your favorite movie and why?
9. What book made the biggest impact on your life and why?
10. What do you wish to be remembered for after you have gone?
11. What's the best vacation you ever had and why was it the best?
12. Describe something you have done at work you are proud of.
13. Tell a story about an accomplishment at work that makes you proud.
14. Tell a story about a failure at work and the lessons you learned.

Zoika Logistics

The important thing with Zoikas is consistency. Robin might begin the program with one online meeting a month over the next 12 months. In this way, each employee will meet 20-24 people from around the company.

When you are dealing with different time zones it may not be possible or convenient to make scheduling arrangements. And it may be impossible to set up a monthly time that everyone can agree to.

One way of dealing with this is to randomly assign people into groups of three. One person's name is starred, and this person needs to contact the other two employees with a list of three potential times, respecting the difference in time zones. Employees rank order their preferences. The person who is starred then sets up the 90-minute online meeting.

If that sounds too complicated, you can appoint a Zoika master to arrange meetings. This person can be an employee or a consultant.

Engineering Trust into Corporate Culture

Trust does not come naturally. The first step is to get to know people beyond their job descriptions. Zoikas can help. It is inexpensive, fun, and does not consume much time. Try it for two years and then evaluate its impact.

Measure impact by surveying employees about the degree to which Zoika participation has increased trust and reduced the corporate silo culture.

Participants should be able to discuss specific work-related events where Zoika-based relationships helped facilitate solutions.

As Robin's company grows through, Zoikas can be one effective tool to help integrate employees involuntarily thrown into her corporation.

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