

Talk CNY S1X2 Transcript

Kate Hammer 0:07

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Kate Hammer 0:45

Today, we have a national expert in business leadership joining us. Todd Henry is the founder of Accidental Creative and a six time published author, positioning himself as an arms dealer for the creative revolution. Todd teaches leaders and organizations how to establish practices that lead to everyday brilliance. He is the author of six books, including The Motivation Code and Die Empty, which have been translated into more than a dozen languages. Todd speaks and consults across dozens of industries and creativity, leadership and passion for work. His latest book, Daily Creative offers daily sparks of inspiration and practical advice for creative pros. I'm your host, Kate Hammer, business coach and member at CenterState CEO.

Kate Hammer 1:27

Hey, Todd Henry, thank you so much for joining today. So great to have you here and to hear a little about management and leadership from you.

Todd Henry 1:37

Well, it's good to be here. Thanks for the invitation Kate!

Kate Hammer 1:39

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So one of the biggest questions that we see from the membership at CenterState CEO is how to lead teams, how to create a culture and office space or in a work environment that is going to help everybody feel awesome, and also be successful and perform well. And this is something that you write a lot about and your books, and speak on at conferences and keynotes all around the world. So please tell me some of the questions that you hear the most, some of the concerns that you hear the most in the area of how to manage a team.

Todd Henry 2:19

Yeah, I think one of the most common misunderstandings that people have, especially with leading talented, creative people, which all of us want to hire and, you know, unleash

talented, creative people. That's part of the purpose that we have as business leaders. The challenge, I think the unique challenge is that people don't understand what makes talented people tick. In the workplace, you know, or, you know, in the worst case scenario, sometimes as managers, we assume that what motivates us and motivates everybody. And so we basically try to layer that template over everyone. There really are primarily two things that talented people need more than anything else. If you want them to be positioned to do their best work, which is again, part of our job as business leaders, the first thing that they need more than anything else is stability. Talented people need clarity of expectations, clarity of process, they need to know that the rules of the game aren't going to shift halfway through a project. So they need it even when you're not certain. As a leader, they need to know very clearly what you expect of them, how the work is going to get done, what the outcome is going to be what the consequences are going to be of getting it right or getting it wrong, they need to understand very clearly what the rules of the game are that they're playing. So that's the first thing clarity of process is the second thing, how are we going to get this done? What are the expectations involved in doing this work, and they need to know that, again, the rules aren't going to shift halfway through the project, when you suddenly change your mind about something, you know, we're gonna go back and rework everything we've already done. So they need stability, that's the first piece the second thing that they need is challenge. Talented people want to be pushed, they want to venture into new territory, they want to take risks, they want to develop themselves, they want to do work that feels meaningful to them, that pushes them in some way. But they need permission to do that. They need you to push them, they need you to give them permission to go out and to take risks and to develop themselves. Now one of the things that is a problem, as you can imagine, is that stability and challenge exist in tension with one another. So as you tend to increase the amount of stability in the organization, you tend to decrease the amount of challenge people feel because things are more stable, they're more predictable, we're doing work that feels more repetitive, maybe or we've done this a million times. You know, when you increase the amount of challenge in the organization, you tend to destabilize the organization meaning maybe you're trying to build the bicycle while you're trying to ride it which every organization has to do from time to time. That's just reality. We have to maybe sometimes take on more than we can handle. That's how organizations grow and develop. But you can't live in that space forever. So if you find that your team is struggling or they're struggling with engagement or they're struggling with their collaboration, you know, maybe the team meetings are a little bit more tense than they should be, it's a good thing to step back and ask, okay, is it because either people don't have the level of stability that they need. I'm not providing them with the resources they need to be able to do the work that they are tasked with doing? Or is it because people are getting bored, because they don't feel the level of challenge that they want? And so therefore, maybe they're making things more challenging than they need to be just because they're trying to scratch that itch for themselves, or they just feel stuck in

the work that they're doing. And so that's a big part of what we have to do as managers is learn what each person on their team needs from us as relates to stability and challenge and then consistently provide it so that they're positioned to do their best work every day.

Kate Hammer 5:48

I love that simple, but very complex because of balance of the two. So what do you seem to run into, as some of the red flags some of the other ways that don't address those two specific things that you notice? Wow, a lot of leaders seem to be doing this other thing instead, like things that maybe we should stay away from and avoid.

Todd Henry 6:08

I would say that the probably 80% of the conflict that I experienced inside of organizations is the result of two things. Number one, I have expectations of you that have not spoken to you. And number two, I'm really upset that you've not hit those expectations that I've not spoken to you so unfair, right. But we as managers often assume things of our team, we assume that they know what we expect of them, we assume they know what quality work looks like, we assume they know what the process needs to look like or how to have a conversation with a client. We assume that they know these things. But we've never clearly articulated those things to our team. And when that happens, this dynamic emerges that I call "ghost rules". Ghost rules are invisible narratives that creep into our organization that begin to affect the organization from the inside out. People fill vacuums with their own story. So even if you haven't communicated to your team, what you expect of them, or you know what good work looks like or how conflicts should be handled. I guarantee you that your team believes they know what you think about that, even if you've not articulate it could be a ghost rule, it could be an invisible narrative that they've invented, that they're following. Things like "that'll never work around here" or "so and so will never go for that" or things like that. Those are examples of ghost rules. There are assumptions that teams are making often because there's a leadership void, because you've not been clear. So all of that to say you need to be crystal clear and precise in how you speak your team, your team needs you to speak with precision, and they need you to set clear expectations for them, so that they don't have to invent those ghost roles in order to function.

Kate Hammer 7:45

I love that. So is there a good method to check to see if your team is on the same page with you about what is true? And what is not? How do we find out if these ghost rules exist? And what's a great way to set the understanding?

Todd Henry 8:00

Well, first of all, you have to keep your antenna up as a leader. You know, ghost rules usually reveal themselves in a meeting in a conversation. People will say things that sound like

assumptive language. And when that happens, you need to immediately call it out and say wait a minute, you said something that really is really interesting to me. Let's talk about that. Why do you think that'll never work? Why do you think the client will never go for that? Why do you think this other department will never give you the resources, you need to be able to do this? It might be true, but it also might be a ghost rule. Let's pause, let's talk about it. And let's identify it. And let's try to prune those ghost rules wherever we can. Because sometimes we let those things go and what happens, they just become part of the cultural ethos, you know, they just continue to grow like weeds in our garden. And when that happens, you know, more often than not, they begin to steal resources from the more valuable parts of the organization that begin to erode our culture. So if we want to grow a healthy culture, we have to prune those weeds whenever we encounter them and not let them grow alongside all the other fruit that we're trying to try to grow.

Kate Hammer 9:03

Yeah. So it's not just about setting an understanding having your mission statement or you know, something written somewhere. But about that daily experience of constantly checking in or checking things right as you hear them in the moment.

Todd Henry 9:17

Yeah. 100% Yeah, cultures are not built, they're grown. And like anything that's grown anything that's organic, you have to constantly tend a culture. It's fine. It's great to have a mission statement. It's great to have a vision. It's great to have words hanging on your wall. That's fine. Those are good things. They're great. They're great aspirational compasses for us, right? Yeah. But the reality is, those things have to be enforced day by day by day. And the way we do that is through little decisions that we make as leaders as managers, what we're going to tolerate what we're not going to tolerate, we tend to get the culture that we tolerate. And so we have to be very careful on a day by day basis a to earn the trust of our team to be a leader worth following and be to ensure that we're shaping and pruning and refining the culture as we go so that people realize these aren't just words that we say. But these are things that we live out. When people start to sense that your that your words and your actions are misaligned, we all know this, right? We know that that's where trust comes from is when you have integrity. But you know, sometimes because of our insecurity, or because of just it's inconvenient sometimes to stop everything and have that conversation. So we just let things slide. Well, if you just let things slide, eventually, you're gonna get the culture that you deserve, right, that's just going to become part of the norm of the culture. So we have to as a leader, our job is not just to get the work done. But our job is to develop the team to tackle new and more challenging work. And part of that is developing that culture. It's continuously refining and pruning, and shaping the culture so that we're getting the culture that we know that we need in order to get the work done. As a leader, there are really three things that we were responsible for responsible for the talent, of

course, like hiring and training the talent and making sure people are deployed properly, we're responsible for the culture, which is the how and the what of how the work gets done, and how we interact with one another. And then we're responsible for the work itself, right? We tend to think we're just responsible for the work, but it's possible to do good work, while completely destroying your culture and completely destroying your team, you know, what's going to happen, the work will eventually suffer, your talent is going to leave, because they don't want to be a part of a destructive culture, they have lots of talent has lots of options, they have a lot of places they can go. So they don't want to be a part of a destructive culture. So they're going to jump ship as soon as they can, right. If your talent goes, your culture is going to devolve more, because you have, you know, who wants to be a part of a culture where all the talent is jumping ship, then the work is eventually going to suffer anyway. So if you solely work, focus on getting the work right at all costs, you're eventually going to do poor work, because you're not maintaining your culture and you're not deploying your talent properly.

Kate Hammer 12:01

Yeah. So we talked about the importance of staying consistent, and understanding, you know, what the expectations are, and making sure that that's really clear. But sometimes, as a leader, we do have some sort of requirement, we do have some sort of need to make a shift, and what the result needs to be. So when we require that agility? How can we communicate in a way that is not destructive?

Todd Henry 12:28

If your team can see that you are pivoting that you're adapting that you're learning and you're changing direction based upon information- that's fine. That's great. I mean, that's what we do, right? The work we do is complex, we're going to learn things, we're going to redefine the problem as we go, that's fine. That's the way it is. What we want to avoid are indiscriminate changes of direction, because we were checked out, we weren't fully giving our thought, or energy to the project or because we weren't getting buy in from critical stakeholders at important parts of the of the project. So this happens often where maybe I as a team leader, I'm communicating clearly I'm communicating my objectives to the team, and I'm giving clear direction, but I'm not securing buy in from stakeholders for that decision. And then so two weeks from now, somebody decides they suddenly are really interested in what we're doing. And they come in and they completely change everything that we're doing. Well, that's a violation of my team's trust, because it's my job as a manager, my job as a leader to ensure that I'm getting buy in from critical stakeholders at those important moments in the project. So as long as your team sees that you are protecting them, that you're doing due diligence that you're communicating, and you're learning, you're adapting, you're growing, and you're staying in touch with them as you go, you're not going to lose their trust, because we all understand the rules of the game that

we're going to learn, we're going to have to pivot, there's going to be some wasted work, that's always going to happen as we learn things that we change, and we adapt. But it can't be because we're not mentally checked in. It can't be because we're indiscriminately making decisions. And then suddenly, we get really interested two weeks from now, when we change everything that can't happen. Your team needs to know that you're fighting for them, that you're protecting them that you're doing everything you can to get buy in from critical stakeholders, at every important juncture of the project. If they see that listen, then people are going to trust you, they're going to follow you, they're going to know that you're doing the best to get the team to the right place. We just have to make sure that we're communicating to the team that we value, their focus their time, their energy so that they don't feel used and abused, which unfortunately is often the case in organizations where leaders are checked out.

Kate Hammer 14:35

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And you know, you had mentioned initially when we first started talking about this thought that we know what motivates us or we tend to have an idea of it potentially. And then we might apply that to the people in our work environment. If we want to know more specifically, what might motivate our employees. How can we go about that process to really home in on the individual?

Todd Henry 15:04

Yeah. So there was some great, phenomenal research actually, that I was brought into, I was actually privileged to be able to write a book about this a couple of years ago, called the Motivation Code. And it was based on 50 years of research into peak achievement moments, what it was that really felt gratifying to people in those peak moments of achievement. And there are a couple of questions you can ask your team to help you assess those peak achievement moments. But, I mean, the first one is, you know, think of a time when you've achieved something that was meaningful to you, or that remains meaningful to you to this day. Number two, what specifically did you do, you know, in order to achieve that outcome, so for some people it might be "Well, I was part of a team that accomplished a lot of great things", or "I had an idea, everybody thought I was crazy, but I saw it through to the end. And I proved everybody wrong", right. Or it could be "I worked really hard. And I got the grade that I had wanted on an exam, even though I doubted if I could do it, but I just worked really hard". And it was really more about the process of achieving that. So once you begin to understand not just what they did, but why it was important to them, you can have a more meaningful conversation about how to apply some of those themes, some of those principles to their day to day work. So for example, if you find out that somebody's three biggest peak moments of achievement, were all a result of being a part of a high functioning team and yet you have them sitting in a cubicle doing work on their own all day, it's no wonder that they're disengaged, it's no wonder that they don't feel connected to

the work, it's because they're highly motivated to collaborate. That's part of their core motivation. If you have somebody who is motivated by getting things done by checking things off lists, and yet you have them working on giant open ended multi year projects with no clear milestones, then of course, they're going to feel disengaged, because they're motivated to move things forward that check things off, you know, to get ahead. So just understanding that on an individual level can really help you get more granular and how you shape people's workload and also how you communicate with them about their job itself.

Kate Hammer 17:12

Yeah, absolutely. Just a quick plug, I love this book, Motivation Code, and use it myself as a business coach. It's one of the books I most often give to clients. I love flagging it with all the good posts and notes and thoughts, because the way that you approach the assessment is so unlike any other we think of like Myers Briggs, or whatever, but how you have the person actually write their stories, and you're really looking at keywords and language and the way that people feel about those experiences, just makes it so unique. So, such a great book, I'm so glad it exists in the world. It's good stuff.

Todd Henry 17:59

Thank you. The only reason I got involved with the research is because somebody did the assessment with me, one of my colleagues who ended up becoming one of business partner with him in this venture brought me in and help me do the assessment. And it completely nailed me in a way that no other assessment ever had. So that was, yeah, you know, when I was like, okay, I need to somehow get involved with this. And that was in 2016. It's a really amazing technology.

Kate Hammer 18:22

It is. And if you've ever had that experience for anyone listening now, it's like, when you take a test anything to do with personality and motivation, and you're questioning yourself as you are answering the multiple choice questions like "well, I guess sometimes this is true, and sometimes that's true". All of that is sort of just eliminated, and you're going in kind of blind, you don't really know how anything's being measured at the front end of the test. And that's extremely helpful in just staying really honest and sincere about what you're getting across, and therefore the information that you get back. So love, love that tool on a individual level. And again, very frequently recommending it so. Alright, so let's wrap it up. We talked about some really great things. Todd, you provided such awesome takeaways, I know that anyone who's listening who's in a management role, or you know, has some sort of scenario of leadership, even if it's a individual who, is solely running a business, like I am like, as a business coach, there's just so much to take away here when you think about how

you're interacting with people and, and what the needs are and what people need to be able to understand and feel. So, any final thoughts as we close this up?

Todd Henry 19:35

Yeah, I would just say, you know, recognize that as a leader, as a manager, as a business owner, your job isn't just to get the work done. Your job is to lead the work. Those are fundamentally different things. And so recognize that you know, you have to approach the leading of the work as your primary job, not just the outcome of the work, not just getting the work done, but the leading of it is really your job and that's a fundamentally different skill set than doing the work itself. This is a problem for a lot of entrepreneurs, right, who start doing business and they they're doing the work. And then suddenly they have other people working with them. And they want to keep doing the work, but you can't Your job is to lead the work. And that's a very different thing. And that would be that would be my encouragement to people is just recognize that that is the core definition of your work is to lead it not to do it not to get it done.

Kate Hammer 20:26

Oh, boy. Well, thank goodness, you've written several books on this. You gotta look them up. We're gonna link them all in the show notes. Thanks, Todd for coming today.

Todd Henry 20:35

Yeah, thanks so much.

Kate Hammer 20:36

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