



# Maintaining Healthy Cultures: It's Complicated

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**A WHITE PAPER FROM MYDLACH MANAGEMENT**

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# Care, Conflict, Communication: The Critical Three Cs

In any discussion of “successful” teams, you’ll hear the same names referenced again and again. For example:

- **The 1972 Miami Dolphins**, led by Don Shula—the only National Football League team to complete their season undefeated from opening day to the Super Bowl.
- **Toyota Motor Corporation**, a recognized leader in manufacturing innovation and production, whose approach to teamwork is now recognized around the world as “The Toyota Way.”
- **Google**, the multinational Internet services company that has gone from upstart search engine launched by two people to being ranked at the top of all worldwide corporations for its leadership and financial performance.

What do these teams have in common? What can we learn from their triumphs?

For one thing, these teams are led by exceptional managers who are skilled at blending proper goals and controls using data and facts—science—with communication and culture development—art.

One common denominator among these exceptional managers is that they endeavor for their teams to function within a healthy culture.

A healthy culture is defined as simply - and as intricately – as fostering healthy relationships at all levels. But, as we all know, creating and maintaining healthy relationships is a complicated venture.



Whether on the field, on the plant floor or in the boardroom, managers who excel at creating a healthy culture stack their teams with top-tier players and consistently apply three critical ingredients to the fusion of science and art.

These three ingredients—the three C’s—serve as the foundation of a healthy corporate culture that drives performance and leads to greater success.

## The Three Cs

The first C, **care**, is crucial. Your employees won’t care much about organizational success until they know that their managers care about their individual success. In this white paper, we’ll explore how managers with big hearts for their teams enjoy big success for their client’s companies.

**Conflict**, the second C, is not the kind you think it is. We’re not referring here to internal strife and discord. Rather, we’ll see in this white paper how the respectful and compassionate handling of conflicting points of view is often the catalyst for innovation, change, and explosive growth.

Finally, **communication**, the third C, is the core of every successful organization. We’ll see in this paper how using data and leveraging insights from your team will drive critical conversations—and ultimately accelerate profitable growth.

## Care: A Big Heart Leads to Big Success



Theodore Roosevelt said, “No one cares what you know until they know that you care.” In other words, your employee team won’t care about the success of your organization until they know that you care about their personal success.

In order to develop a healthy, high-performing culture, your team has to know that you have their best interests at heart. Exceptional managers know that care is an essential ingredient in cultivating passion and engagement among the members of any employee team. And they know that, like any relationship, the manager/employee connection requires effort.

Stephen Covey liked to talk about an Emotional Bank Account that exists within every relationship. As we engage with our teams, we are either making deposits to or withdrawals from this emotional bank account.

In other words, if we’re not intentional about investing into our employee team relationships, by default we are allowing these relationships to diminish over time—ensuring that we’ll lose our competitiveness.

A manager who cares also avoids erecting the invisible walls that crop up between employees and managers in lower-performing organizations. These walls aren’t consciously erected, but develop organically when employees don’t feel comfortable or safe engaging in open communication.

When management is perceived to be ego-driven, unwilling to listen, or operating under a “my way or the highway” directive, employees correctly sense that managers aren’t concerned with their personal success.

Maintaining a healthy, trusting relationship with your employees nurtures a caring, safe environment that allows everyone to flourish.

### KEEP ON “VERB-ING”

Although it’s not grammatically correct, it might help to think of the word “relationship” as a verb— something you have to do.

Successful relationships require action and continuous investment, because without that commitment, relationships wither and die.

Because A and B players always have choices about where they want to work, an unbiased way to quickly determine how successful you and your management team are at building a healthy, productive culture is to simply look around and count. Do you have more A and B players on your team, or do you have more C and D players?

If you have more top talent, then you’re likely doing a great job at committing to your relationship with your employees. But if you’ve got more C and D players on your team, it’s time to face that reality, then self- assess and make a change.

### EVERYONE’S TALKING

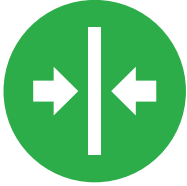
Make sure your team’s dialogue is attracting A and B players, and repelling the C and D players. No matter whether you’re doing a great job or not such a great job, your team is telling someone—and that message is either enabling or disabling your ability to attract and retain top talent.

Be intentional about investing into your Emotional Bank Accounts by sending the value message. When you ask your team for their insight and input, you’re telling them you value their intellect and insight.

When you listen and implement their suggestions, you’re saying that you value their commitment.

This kind of collaborative, healthy environment is the minimum requirement to attract and retain A and B players! It’s also the minimum requirement to enlisting the best thinking and performance from your team.

## Conflict: A Catalyst for Performance Improvement



When they hear the word conflict, most people have a negative reaction. This makes it difficult to think of conflict as an essential component of exceptional teams.

But it is, if you think about it: much of your work as a manager involves resolving challenging situations such as negotiating budgets, addressing performance issues, implementing and managing change, and dealing with difficult or defensive personalities. One way or another, you're almost always dealing with conflict or conflicting points of view.

It can help to move away from the normal paradigm suggesting that conflict implies a serious disagreement or argument. Certainly this is true in unhealthy cultures with ineffective communications, but within healthy, productive organizations, conflict is viewed as an opportunity to collaborate candidly and respectfully, resulting in better solutions and a deeper understanding of differing points of view.

Success requires collaboration, and to achieve collaboration you'll usually have to wrestle with conflict. Highly effective managers and teams rewire their brains to accept and welcome this.

Managers who isolate themselves from conflict lose their opportunity for the best kind of collaboration and success. They may think that the organization is running smoothly, but only because they have closed themselves off to critical feedback and dialog. In reality, these managers are creating an **emotionally unsafe environment** where no one thrives or enjoys the benefits of engaging in healthy, collaborative dialog around conflicting points of view.

## CREATING STRENGTH AND ACCELERATION

Every encounter with a conflicting point of view is an opportunity to create a positive outcome, whether your idea gets adopted or not. Wrestling with conflicting points of view, and reaching a great solution (a win-win) builds your team's confidence in its ability to deal with conflict productively.

Success and confidence are key ingredients to creating acceleration, and ultimately to evolving your company into a highly competitive organization.

Not coincidentally, managers and teams who view conflict positively also tend to practice a high degree of care and respect with their employee team.

And as you'll read below, they are also skilled communicators, asking the right questions, delivering feedback, and receiving input and insights in a way that minimizes defensiveness and maximizes collaboration within a safe environment.

## Communication: The Core of All Successful Organizations



A global survey discovered that one-third of all employees are satisfied with the communication that takes place between them and their managers. This means that a full two-thirds of employees are dissatisfied with employee-manager communications, and by default their relationship.

Think about that—the vast majority of employees are less engaged with their managers, their jobs, and their organizations than they should be. In other words, 66% of employees around the world are underperforming!

Talented but disengaged employees aren't highly motivated to work with management to quickly identify and attack challenges, obstacles and opportunities with the appropriate sense of urgency.

This is a problem, because in business speed wins. The faster you identify and attack key priorities, the better your performance—and the stronger your competitive advantage—will be.

## **EXCEPTIONAL COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL**

Effective communication is central to all successful relationships and organizations—and the A and B players you want on your team consider it mandatory. Top talent gravitates to managers who have mastered the art of effective communication with direct, respectful and compassionate messages. You can't build highly effective teams or accelerate profitable growth without it. In short, managers who create healthy cultures and engage in critical dialogue, collaboratively and respectfully, win every time.

## **IT TAKES COURAGE**

Part of being an effective communicator is learning how to communicate courageously, respectfully, and compassionately in difficult situations.

*This is the hard part.* Many managers suffer from “nice people syndrome.” These managers are smart and nice, but they lack the courage to have some of the tough conversations required to achieve success. When they avoid difficult conversations, performance slips and the A and B players become discouraged because they expect courageous, respectful and compassionate dialog.

Believe it or not, courageous communication is an acquired skill. Mydlach coaches many CEO's, executives and managers—especially sales managers—to learn how to combine data and facts with intellect and relationship skills in order to nurture and ensure courageous communication.

## **DEFENSIVENESS IS AN OBSTACLE**

People with defensive personalities who play hide-and-seek with the truth make performance improvement discussions a bit more challenging. They don't readily take responsibility for their deficiencies, attitudes, behaviors and poor performance.



When a defensive employee disagrees with your assessment, remind him or her that everything stated in your assessment falls in one of two categories: a fact that needs to be corrected, or a perception that needs to be changed. In either instance, the employee owns responsibility for correcting the fact or for changing the perception.

But defensiveness is also a communication obstacle when it comes from the manager's direction. The leader who can't accept feedback without lashing out, intimidating others or belittling them has become a cliché—a stereotype. Defensiveness produces a command and control culture, where an open and receptive environment produces passion and engagement, which ultimately creates competitive advantage.

Obviously, this approach to communication poisons the health of the company culture. But what leaders like this can't or won't see is that that **the work of detoxing the corporation usually needs to start with them** if an organization's management team is to realize its full potential.

Creating effective communications within any organization is one of management's greatest challenges. That said, it's also one of the most important challenges to embrace on all levels. Open dialogue increases the flow of information across departments, geographies, and divisions, creating massive competitive advantage by fully leveraging the collective intellectual capital of the entire employee team, partners and clients.

The effectiveness of a manager's employee team is a direct reflection of that manager's current skills and capabilities. The enviable greatness realized by sports teams like the '72 Dolphins, or by companies like Toyota and Google, is a feat that requires more than just "the right people and product at the right time." It requires a managerial mindset and dedication that is ingrained in the corporate culture—and remains uncompromised—from day one.

How does your team compare? If your company's performance has not yet reached its full potential, start the improvement process by assessing your management team's effectiveness around care, conflict and communication. Small improvements in each of these areas will yield significant results!

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Phil Mydlach is a results-oriented executive and management coach, speaker, workshop facilitator and consultant who helps clients fast-track their company's growth by blending the science of management performance with the art of building healthy cultures and effective communications. In short, Phil gets teams to work together to achieve significant results.

Phil draws on the tools and techniques developed over three decades of business ownership to help accelerate growth for his clients.

To learn more about Phil's philosophy and practice, visit [mydlachmanagement.com](http://mydlachmanagement.com) or [connect on LinkedIn](#).