

Seeking Collective Balance in a Precarious World

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During a recent business trip to Vancouver, I spent some time walking around Stanley Park where I came upon an artist creating a series of zen rock towers. I stood and watched as he carefully balanced one stone upon another, positioning them in such a way so that they wouldn't topple. He had created a small village of these towers, each perched meticulously atop larger boulders. As I observed him, I reflected on how creating balance in our own lives for our individual well-being is so linked to cultivating collective balance in our global work environment.

In my trainings and consulting work, I often attempt to bring my clients out of their heads and into their bodies to become more aware of their somatic response to cross-cultural interactions. Too often they recount tales of woe due to lack of understanding, miscommunication and unfamiliarity with their colleagues overseas which leaves them feeling exhausted and overwhelmed by seemingly unsurmountable task of getting things done. As we delve deeply to uncover how our cultural identities are shaped and how our frames of reference contribute to biases, prejudices and stereotyping, I'm often struck by the sense of separation and lack of control people feel when they're working in culturally-diverse and geographically-dispersed settings. A frequent question I hear is "how can I develop trust within my teams when we don't have the chance to meet face-to-face?"

When we become trapped by the belief that *our* way of working is the most effective, we lose the opportunity to explore alternative perspectives that may provide us creative insights into other approaches and foster synergy into new ways of doing something. When we focus on the cultural barriers, it's easy to forget how interconnected we are all, whether we're trying to align our company or organizational goals globally or find common ground within our teams to progress with our work. The risks are therefore high if we're unwilling or unable to cultivate collective balance as it can have a detrimental impact on engagement, motivation, productivity and performance.

Creating collective balance is therefore an aspiration not only for our own mental and physical well-being but also to create high performing global teams at work. It reminds us that we are part of a greater whole and that we need to take steps to build a strong foundation in order to succeed. Below are some suggestions to consider as you seek ways to better align your global teams:

1. Never assume that your message was interpreted in the way it was intended. Clarity is paramount to ensuring a smooth transition of a message, particularly when there are linguistic barriers and differences in communication styles. Be sure to reiterate what you heard from your

- perspective and probe to ensure that your message was understood in the way you meant it.
2. Create the time and the space to connect with your team members on a personal basis. Many cultures require a high degree of trust *prior* to engaging in a task. Pushing people too quickly to share information or ideas before establishing a strong relationship with them may backfire and cause further unwanted delays.
 3. Be willing to truly listen *and* apply other methods of problem-solving. There are many paths and even when it doesn't seem the most intuitive from your point of view, you may find that integrating different approaches will open the door to finding creative solutions.
 4. Remind yourself that Rome wasn't built in a day. To develop a solid team, you need to figure out how to incorporate the unique ideas and different work styles of each member and show that they are a value-added member to the whole. The more inclusive you can be, the more durable your base will be.

Remember that at the end of the day, you need to work collaboratively to create whatever amazing product you've set out to do. While it might seem to be a daunting task to rely heavily on someone you've never met to get your job done properly, reminding yourself of your interdependence can allow you to dedicate the time and patience to build your own towers to success.