

Connection and Support

Month 1 Leadership Practice

Purpose

Connection and support play an important role in how people experience their work. While burnout and well-being are influenced by many factors, growing evidence suggests that social connection, belonging, and support contribute meaningfully to professional fulfillment, engagement, and resilience. This month's leadership practice invites you to explore these ideas in two directions: outward toward the people you lead and inward toward your own sources of connection and support.

Why This Matters

Leadership involves more than managing work—it also helps shape the quality of relationships and support people experience within a team. Research suggests that people who feel valued, connected, and supported are more likely to experience engagement, professional fulfillment, and well-being. Connection matters for leaders as well. Maintaining meaningful relationships with trusted peers, mentors, and colleagues can provide perspective, support, and resilience during challenging times.

This Month's Leadership Practice

Over the next several days, have two 15-20 minute conversations focused on listening:

1. **Direct report conversation.** Have a conversation about their experience of connection, support, and belonging within the team. Explore what helps them feel supported at work and what contributes to a sense of connection with colleagues.
2. **Take time to reflect on your own sources of support.** Leadership roles can sometimes limit opportunities for candid conversation, making trusted peer and mentor relationships especially valuable. Have a conversation with a peer, mentor, or trusted colleague about who you turn to when work is difficult, and what relationships help you navigate challenges and sustain your effectiveness.

Conversation Prompts

For your direct report:

- “Do you feel like you belong on this team? What makes you feel that way—or not?”
- “When work gets hard, do you have people here you can turn to for support?”
- “Do you feel valued and respected for your contributions—not just your output?”
- “What would help you feel more connected or supported here?”

For your own reflection:

- “Who do I turn to when I need honest advice about a difficult situation?”
- “Who can I talk to about how I'm really doing—not just how the work is going?”

CU Thrive Leadership Circles

- “How supported do I feel in my leadership role? When did I last have a candid conversation with a peer about the demands of this job?”
- “What would it take to feel more supported in my leadership role?”

Reflection Questions

After completing this month’s leadership practice, reflect on the following:

1. What did you learn about whether your direct report feels connected and supported? Were there signs of isolation or exhaustion you hadn’t noticed before?
2. What did you discover about your own sources of support—or lack of them? How supported do you feel in your leadership role? What relationships help you navigate challenges and sustain your effectiveness?
3. How might strengthening connection and support within your team contribute to engagement, well-being, and professional fulfillment for team members and leaders?
4. What’s one thing you want to carry forward into the leadership practices ahead?