

Skill | Connecting People to Purpose

“Laddering” is the practice of making a higher organizational or individual purpose real and tangible in everyday work and life. We call this “high purpose clarity.”

For leaders, it should be used when delegating, assigning, and reviewing tasks as well as when communicating new changes or tasks. It’s also helpful to ensure decisions can be clearly mapped to delivering the stated purpose (just replace “Task” with “Decision”).

For individuals, laddering helps connect daily work and life tasks with either your own or the bigger purpose.

The key is to state the task/decision/action/etc. Then, as you move up the ladder, state a measurable concrete objective the task enables. Then connect that measurable objective to a another, higher order, measurable objective and so on until you can connect it to the bigger purpose.



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CONVERSATION IDEA:

HELPING PEOPLE CONNECT TASKS AND GOALS TO THE ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE

The laddering concept is helpful in guiding conversations to connect an individual's tasks, goals, or priorities to the bigger team and organizational purpose. Below are questions and prompts that you might use to foster these conversations.

1. Have each team member create a “ladder” for each yearly goal in which they connect the goal to at least three measurable objectives and connect those measurable objectives to the team and organizational purpose.

In a conversation, together, review their goal ladders and fill in any gaps they may have missed. This is a great time to reaffirm what they make possible and help them “see” their purpose.

2. Many people, instinctually, think small about tasks. Therefore, asking questions like, “What does your work/goal/task make possible?” or “Who is impacted by this goal?” are helpful ways to cultivate a “so, that” mindset.
3. In a review, ask the team member if there are any tasks that they're having difficulty in seeing the bigger purpose in or are struggling to complete. Ask them what more information you can provide to help them see the bigger picture.
4. Create a “ladder” for each employee. Share with them how the work they did measurably enabled the bigger purpose. Be specific. This is a great review exercise.

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CONVERSATION IDEA:

CONNECTING PERSONAL PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE

The laddering concept can also be helpful in connecting people's individual purpose (their strengths + impact) with the larger team and organizational purpose/mission.

Instead of the "task" at the bottom of the ladder, the team member can write their purpose statement. Or, they can pick one of their strengths or impact areas and "show" how that strength or impact areas makes the larger team or organizational purpose/mission possible.

Or, you can write their purpose statement and create a ladder and SHOW them how you think their purpose uniquely enables the team or organizational purpose.

Some question prompts for this type of conversation are:

1. Which of your strengths do you think can most help us achieve our team or organizational purpose/mission? In what ways can I help you use those strengths more?
2. What impact do you want to have made here 5 years from now? What can I start doing to help you make more of that impact?
3. Given your strengths, what role do you want to play in accomplishing our team/organizational purpose? What do you need to take that role on?
4. To live your purpose at work, what do you need to start doing? What do you need to start doing? What do I need to stop doing? What do I need to start do