Leading Through the Storm: The Power of Listening, Empathy, and Integrity

By: Kimberly Young, KC Animal Health Corridor

In times of uncertainty, teams don't just look to their leaders for answers, they look for presence, stability, and trust. Turbulent environments, whether driven by economic shifts, organizational change, or policy shifts, test not only the resilience of a business but the character and capability of its leadership.

Three traits become non-negotiable in these moments: active listening, cross-functional understanding, and moral clarity. Together, they form the foundation of what teams need most during difficult times: a leader they can believe in.

Active Listening: Being Fully Present

In periods of uncertainty, leaders often feel pressure to move fast and project confidence. But speed without listening can lead to missteps. Now more than ever, teams want to feel heard. They want to know their concerns aren't just acknowledged, they're genuinely understood.

Active listening isn't about waiting to speak. It's about creating space for others to share openly, without judgment or interruption. It's about asking follow-up questions, reflecting back what you've heard, and making decisions that take people's input seriously.

The best leaders in turbulent times don't assume they know how their teams are doing. They ask, they listen, and they act based on what they learn.

Cross-Functional Empathy: Seeing the Bigger Picture

During uncertainty, stress rarely stays contained within one team. Decisions ripple across departments. Solving a problem for one function could inadvertently create challenges for another.

That's why understanding cross-functional pressure points is critical. Great leaders seek out different perspectives before they act or make decisions. They know how to ask the right questions:

What will this mean for Sales?

How will Administration and Marketing be impacted?

What business functions/units will be impacted by this decision?

Empathetic leadership doesn't mean avoiding hard choices or decisions. It means making informed ones with full awareness of the downstream effects. When people feel that their unique challenges are seen and respected, collaboration is strengthened, and silos start to disappear.

Being the Moral Compass: Leading with Integrity

Perhaps the most defining trait of a leader in uncertain times is the ability to be a moral compass for the organization. When people aren't sure what comes next, they pay attention to how decisions are made and what values guide them.

Integrity shows up in small ways: owning mistakes, being transparent about what you know (and what you don't), and choosing long-term trust over short-term convenience. It also shows up in big ways: standing up for what's right, even when it's not easy or popular.

When you lead with moral clarity, you give your team something to anchor to and values become the lens through which decisions are made.

No one can predict the future, but leaders can shape how their teams experience the journey. In the face of the unknown, being an active listener, understanding your

organization cross-functionally, and being a consistent moral guide isn't just good leadership, it's what keeps organizations grounded, connected, and moving forward.