

SCALING transformation

BY DAVID GALLOREESE

The transformative moments in our lives—finding love, grieving loss, braving reconciliation, and risking failure—generally happen outside of work. If we tout these experiences inside our office walls, it's in passing, or not at all. What does that mean for the health of our organizations? At Medallia, we think it's detrimental. Our culture is founded upon the principles of openness and growth, the belief that our business objectives and culture are inherently entwined.

That's why we've invested more than 10,000 hours (and many more dollars) in an onboarding program that focuses not on functional skills training or how to succeed at the job, but on self-reflection and how to succeed as a person.

Creating transformation from day one

Ask anyone here, and they'll tell you that Medallia's onboarding program is different. We ask people to identify an area of their lives—be it a fear they want to overcome or a relationship they want to mend—and commit to facing it head-on. The results have been pretty profound.



How 10,000
hours changed our
company culture.

I recently spoke with a Medallian who chose during onboarding to confront the loss of a parent. His mother had passed away from cancer years before, but he felt so uncomfortable being vulnerable that he'd never really

Learning in the Hands of Everyone

When David Galloreese came to Medallia as the vice president of people and culture, the company was already a fast-growing startup in the new market of customer experience and there was no learning pathway for employees in many aspects of its business. What emerged was a process where employees help figure out those pathways and make them evolve. The growth and development function assists with content creation and curation, but there is a basic belief that learning is in the hands of everyone.

There are three types of learning programs at Medallia: the infusion of the learning culture; functional learning and expertise; and customer experience basics (helping customers and partners understand Medallia's feedback product and services and the data they generate, and what it means to be customer-centric).

Galloreese, who is now senior vice president of people at Sam's Club, led global people and culture at Medallia, which is comprised of centers of excellence in sales enablement, leadership development, cultural onboarding, and enabling learning in other departments through tools, methodologies, and coaching.

Such functions as accounting follow industry standards of development, but others don't. Sales enablement is one that doesn't because those employees work with products, services, and customer relationships that are unique.

Even though teaching others is considered part of almost everyone's job, not everyone is equally good at it. When Medallians are encouraged to act as teachers, they receive coaching as well as opportunities to practice before going live. They follow the TPAM model: theory, practice, apprenticeship, and mastery.

Some employees gain teaching experience through an in-house group called "I would, I want," where people sign up to teach or learn things that interest them such as languages or music. It's all run by the people who do the teaching and learning.

Medallia is in the business of collecting and analyzing customer experience data, so of course it solicits continual feedback about all aspects of learning, from the content to the facilitation, to what's the most relevant thing to do next. The company has data about the full learning loop for sales enablement staff—how they are recruited, how they are brought on board, and how they perform at various stages in their careers.

"Learning is a mindset," says Galloreese. "Learning comes through self-reflection and knowing where you are and where you want to go."

processed the grief. "I chose to compartmentalize my feelings rather than open up and address them," he said. During onboarding, he decided to face the discomfort.

The experience was deeply impactful. "For a high achiever who always felt like he had to appear strong and perfect, being able to be vulnerable and ask for help improved all my personal relationships," he said.

Another Medallian commented: "As cliché as it sounds, those three days were truly transformative. I think there is something profound about sharing with people you just met that brings out personal/mental/emotional issues that you may not have known about or may have known but had been too afraid [or] hesitant to share even with closest family and friends."

I've heard stories like these time and again, and what always jumps out is how changed people are in their personal and professional lives. It's not just feel-good nonsense. When people are comfortable bringing their whole selves to work, they're more willing to ask questions, take risks, and learn from their mistakes. The result is that we accelerate our learning curve by cultivating an environment of openness and growth.

Ownership

This brings us to one of the fundamental principles covered in onboarding: the idea of ownership. Medallia's mission is to make every single person—from the CEO to the front line—an owner of customer experience. We change the internal cultures of the companies we work with by making them customer-centric.

We ask people to develop the same mindset about our internal culture. We want them to consider it their own, fight for it, and carry it forward.

It isn't always easy. During the past five years of global expansion, everything from our road map to our org chart has changed—many times. Understandably, the changes have been difficult for many people. A natural reaction is to feel victimized, especially at work when we do not control all the outcomes. We try to move people away from victimization and into

ownership despite how difficult these moments can be.

The importance of owning our culture and growth was highlighted during a recent company meeting when a Medallian asked our co-founder, Amy Pressman, “What are you doing to preserve Medallia’s culture?” She paused before responding, “Preserve it? Why would we want to do that?” She explained that her goal isn’t to keep Medallia’s culture the same, nor should it be ours. Rather, it’s to empower every person to take our fundamental culture principles and adapt them to who we are today.

Scale

Owning growth requires adaptation. We now train qualified Medallians from every office to lead onboarding programs in each region. These Medallians are not hired to run onboarding. They’re passionate individuals who want to have an impact outside their 9-to-5 lives. By leveraging people from different backgrounds and regions, we’re creating an experience that is equitable across the globe, but unique to each geographic location.

At a recent company happy hour, I had the opportunity to speak with a group of three Medallians from three different departments. As the conversation turned to Medallia’s onboarding program, I was delighted to learn that each of them had gone through onboarding at different times with different facilitators, yet each described the experience as being transformative. That was a clear sign that we’re doing something right.

Growth mindset

A final theme during onboarding is having a growth mindset—the idea that talents aren’t fixed, but are something that can be developed continually over time. We try to foster an environment where people can admit what they don’t know, take risks, fail, and learn.

This is a radical shift from the “fake it till you make it” mentality that’s perpetuated in today’s work culture. We joke that we’re actually detoxing people from years of feeling pressured to be perfect and have all the answers.



The bottom line

As the head of our people and culture department, I received a lot of feedback about Medallia. Much of it centered on our unique and transformative culture. People are continually surprised by how different our environment seems. What I’ve found is that many companies pay lip service to the principles of openness, authenticity, and growth, but few are able to consistently put these ideas into action.

We’ve found a way to do just that with our world-class onboarding program. Our goal is to foster an environment that allows people to face personal and professional roadblocks.

“There are things that I’ve learned from onboarding that I will carry for the rest of my life, and I’m so grateful to be a part of a company that provides the time [and] space to have these open dialogues,” said one Medallian.

If we’re doing our jobs right, we’re changing people’s lives both inside and outside the office. That is what transformation is really about.

■ **David Galloreese** is the former vice president of people and culture at Medallia. He is now the senior vice president of people at Sam’s Club.