

Six Steps to Reset a Demotivated Team

Today's teams operate in a state of constant change. New hires join, key players depart, roles shift, strategies pivot, and conflicts inevitably arise. Yet, many leaders, caught in the daily grind, fail to pause and reset their teams after these significant shifts. The most effective leaders, however, understand that sustained success isn't passive; it demands intentional renewal.

When internal dynamics, relationship tensions, declining motivation, or strategic shifts create more than just minor hiccups, a team needs a "relaunch"—a structured process to get back on track.

1. REASSESS: DIAGNOSE BEFORE YOU ACT

The temptation to immediately "fix" problems is strong, but acting without a proper diagnosis often exacerbates issues. Before making any changes, deep-dive into what's truly going on. Consider these critical questions:

- ▲ **Alignment:** Is the team united on its purpose, goals, and priorities?
- ▲ **Relationships:** Are there unresolved conflicts or trust deficits?
- ▲ **Engagement:** Has motivation, engagement, or well-being declined?
- ▲ **External Factors:** Are external pressures impacting performance?
- ▲ **Resources:** Does the team have what it needs to succeed?
- ▲ **Commitment:** Is there a shared investment in team relationships?
- ▲ **Leadership Impact:** Are there issues with your leadership style or perceived fairness?

Recognize that not all team members will openly voice concerns, especially in group settings or directly to you, due to cultural norms, personal history, or power dynamics. Beyond one-on-one conversations, explore anonymous pulse surveys or designate a trusted team member to gather and report unspoken themes. If psychological safety permits, facilitate a structured, inclusive dialogue where everyone can respectfully share their perspectives. The goal is not forced transparency, but to uncover the real underlying issues in a way that suits your team's context. Only then can you address root causes and relaunch with genuine intent.



Key Insight: While individual conversations are essential for diagnosis, the actual "reset" must occur collectively. Over-reliance on private discussions can inadvertently reinforce team divisions. The real work lies in collectively confronting challenging truths.

2. RECONNECT: BUILD TRUST AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Team turbulence invariably erodes trust. For example, a senior pharmaceutical leader dismissed a team composition change as minor, but the new member's dismissive and sarcastic behavior fundamentally altered power dynamics and diminished psychological safety for the entire team.

Relaunching begins by rebuilding psychological safety—creating an environment where everyone feels secure enough to speak up, share experiences, challenge ideas, and even engage in constructive debate. Here's how to foster it:

- ▲ **Lead with Vulnerability:** Initiate team check-ins to understand how members are truly faring, both personally and professionally. Share your own experiences.
- ▲ **Encourage Open Dialogue:** Use structured team retrospectives where each member can speak, be heard, and be acknowledged. Share your own lessons learned and commitments for change.
- ▲ **Foster Constructive Feedback:** Implement a structured process where feedback is viewed as a shared responsibility for collective improvement.

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3. REENVISION: CLARIFY “OUR JOB TO BE DONE”

What is your team’s core purpose? What’s the future vision, and what’s at stake? Teams thrive when rallied around clear, inspiring visions, especially during periods of change. Frame the relaunch as a proactive opportunity to realign on “what” you’re doing, not just a reaction to problems.

Managers often assume alignment on purpose and strategy, but this is frequently not the case. It’s vital to make the implicit explicit. To achieve genuine alignment:

- ▲ **Clarify Vision & Strategy:** Reaffirm the overall vision and the strategic roadmap to achieve it. Align on a few key, measurable outcomes for both the short and long term.
- ▲ **Reaffirm Purpose & Value:** Remind the team of its essential purpose and its value to the organization and customers.
- ▲ **Set a Forward-Looking Tone:** Inspire optimism and a sense of agency about the team’s ability to shape its future.

4. RECONTRACT: CLARIFY WAYS OF WORKING

Misalignment often stems from confusion about roles, priorities, and collaboration methods. During a relaunch, redefine the “team operating system”—the foundational elements of how team members interact and support each other. Consider:

- ▲ **Roles and Responsibilities:** Ensure everyone clearly understands their expectations, encompassing both written duties and unwritten deliverables.
- ▲ **Decision-Making Processes:** Clarify who makes which decisions and how input is gathered from the team.
- ▲ **Team Norms and Expectations:** Define expected behaviors, ideal meeting cadences, collaboration practices, and how feedback will be given and received. Regularly reinforce these, particularly across borders and time zones.

5. REENERGIZE: BUILD ON SUCCESSES

To ensure the relaunch sticks, combat the tendency to revert to old patterns by focusing on quick, visible wins. Identify one or two achievable objectives for the first 30-60 days, and publicly recognize team members for achieving them. Small successes boost confidence and reinforce positive new behaviors.

A team’s energy is shaped by its daily interactions. Relaunching is an ideal time to introduce or refresh rituals that foster alignment and engagement:

- ▲ **Bi-weekly Check-ins:** Short, focused meetings to align on immediate priorities.
- ▲ **Wins and Learnings Reviews:** Celebrate progress and reflect on lessons after significant milestones.
- ▲ **One-on-One Coaching:** Prioritize regular, growth-oriented developmental conversations between leaders and team members.
- ▲ Encourage colleagues to support each other with expansive questions that strengthen skills.

6. READJUST: SUSTAIN MOMENTUM

A team relaunch isn’t a one-time fix; it’s an ongoing, iterative process. To maintain momentum:

- ▲ **Track Progress:** Continuously monitor the team’s advancement against its new goals and priorities.
- ▲ **Provide Micro-Feedback & Accountability:** Offer frequent, brief, and targeted feedback. Hold each other accountable to the newly established ways of working.
- ▲ **Regularly Reassess & Adjust:** Periodically review what’s working and what’s not, including roles, decision-making, and team norms.

Like any living system, teams require consistent care, attention, and intentional renewal to thrive.

Relaunching a team isn’t a sign of failure; it’s a hallmark of effective leadership.

By pausing to reassess, reconnect, reenvision, recontract, reenergize, and readjust, leaders can revitalize their teams, strengthen trust, and cultivate the clarity and momentum essential for sustained high performance in our perpetually changing world.

