



## **This Is Your Life Podcast**

Episode 15: “How Leaders Can Create Alignment”

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Hello and welcome to another episode of *This Is Your Life*. My name is Michael Hyatt, and this is the podcast dedicated to intentional leadership. My goal is to help you live with more passion, work with greater focus, and lead with extraordinary influence.

In this episode we’re going to be talking organizational alignment, one of my favorite topics. I’m going to share with you three key disciplines you must practice in order to achieve it and maintain it. I don’t care if the context of your leadership is your family, your small business, a large corporation, a network of freelancers or volunteers, or a church or ministry. You need to know these three disciplines and practice them faithfully if you’re going to be successful.

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So let’s talk about alignment. In my experience, weak leaders blame their followers for a lack of alignment. Strong leaders, on the other hand, know it’s their responsibility to create it. Alignment is not one of those things that just happens; it’s created. That’s an important distinction I think for you to make in your own mind.

Years ago I was making a major presentation to a perspective author back when I was just beginning in the publishing business. My boss was there, as was my boss’ boss, or the big boss. Our goal was to sign the author and win his business. Everyone on our team was nervous, especially me since I was the one doing the presenting. It was one of my first major presentations in front of a bestselling author we were trying to acquire for our publishing company.

Prior to that meeting, I had shared my presentation with my boss. It was a nicely bound presentation. It had slides and the whole nine yards. He reviewed it carefully. He offered some really helpful feedback. Once we were both happy with it, he shared it with the big boss. The big boss didn’t comment, so we both assumed he was fine with it. As it turns out, that was kind of his typical M.O.

As I was actually making the presentation, I could tell the big boss was uncomfortable. Just the way he looked, I don't know, but I just sensed it in the air. He didn't say anything, but he was visibly agitated. I just sensed we weren't aligned, but he remained quiet.

So after the presentation, the perspective author asked me several direct questions, and I provided what I thought were simple and honest answers. My immediate boss who was there chimed in a few times to agree or just to amplify in what I had already said. The author seemed satisfied, and in fact he gave us permission to proceed with a contract.

In other words, it was pretty much a done deal. He expressed his enthusiasm about doing business together. We shook hands. We flew out. We left. I was proud of the outcome, and my boss was happy about it. We moved on to the next thing. I think the big boss flew from there somewhere else, so we didn't see him immediately after that meeting.

A few days after the meeting, the big boss sends me a blistering memo. This was back in the days before email. I know it's hard to imagine, but there was a time when there was no such thing as email. He copied my boss and sent it directly to me. The bottom line was he wasn't happy with the financial arrangement I had proposed at the meeting. He challenged my motives even, going so far as to ask if I was somehow in alliance with the other side. It really, really hurt me. In fact, it was demoralizing and I almost quit my job as a result of it.

Here is what I got from that looking back. Although it was painful at the time, the experience was very instructive, particularly about this issue of alignment. As a leader, I'm responsible for creating organizational alignment with my team. So if something slips out of alignment and I'm unhappy with the outcome, then I have to ask a very important question. That is... *What was it about my leadership that created this outcome?*

I want to tell you, if you want to grow in your leadership, this is a critically important question, a question you should be asking yourself constantly as things happen in your organization. *What was it about my leadership that created this outcome?* By the way, that's both positive and negative. You can take credit for the things that happen that are good, but you have to take full responsibility when things don't turn out how you intended.

This is something I'm sure the big boss in my story example never asked himself. He was just in blame mode instead of asking himself, "What was it I didn't do?" Despite the fact that he had a chance to weigh in in the preparation before we made the presentation, he didn't do it. Then when things didn't go like he wanted, he got upset. I was not that pleased either, frankly, with his response.

As a leader, you can create alignment in your team by practicing three key disciplines. Again, I just want to remind you this is not just for people who are leading large businesses. It works in small business. It works with freelancers and volunteers. It works in the ministry. I've spent six years in the ministry, so I've been in that situation. It works in your family. Anywhere you're trying to create alignment, you need to practice these three disciplines.

1. **The discipline of contact.** Alignment is not an event; it's a process. Teams go in and out of alignment. It's not like you just accomplish it once, then you can check it off your to-do list, and you're done with alignment. No. Teams go in and out of alignment. Keeping your team aligned takes work. It takes constant work.

You're not going to keep your team aligned unless you have frequent contact with them. That's what I mean by *the discipline of contact*. They're going to do the best they can with what you give them, so if you don't spend time with them, it's inevitable they're going to make decisions you're uncomfortable with.

That's essentially what happened in the story I told about the big boss. He had an opportunity to weigh in. He could have met with me before the meeting, which by the way I would always urge you to do when you have a big presentation. Meet with your team. Make sure everybody is in alignment before you go on the field and play the game, as it were. He didn't do that.

If you don't spend time with people, again it's inevitable they're going to make decisions you're uncomfortable with. Here is the thing. It's your responsibility to initiate this contact. You're the leader. You're leading the team. You're the quarterback on the field. It's your job to initiate this contact. You can do this in a variety of ways. You can do it in your regular one-on-one meetings, staff meetings, or just by walking around. It's the discipline of contact.

2. **The discipline of communication.** Contact is not enough. You have to communicate. This is obvious, but I meet a lot of leaders who act as though this weren't true. People cannot read your mind. They need to know what you expect. They need to understand your expectations. What are the outcomes you're trying to produce in this project or with these goals or with this particular cause? Whatever it is, they need to understand explicitly what your expectations are.

They also need to understand the organization's overall mission and vision. You need to verbalize it over and over and over and over again. You cannot speak the vision too much. Andy Stanley says vision leaks, and I think he is exactly right. You have to keep filling up the vision bucket over and over again because your people forget it. They get so caught up in the daily activity of the organization that they forget about the vision. They get disoriented. They get organizational vertigo. Your job as a leader is to keep speaking into that the vision that keeps them connected to the larger picture.

Somebody once told me, and I think this is right, "Talk until you're sick of hearing yourself talk about the vision, and you're about half done." In other words, double it. Talk until you're sick of hearing yourself talk about the vision, and really you've only just begun. Double it. Keep, keep talking about it. Here is the thing. If you don't like something, you need to speak up before you get into a high stakes situation where dialogue is happening in real time. If something sneaks out you weren't prepared for or one of your people says something because you weren't prepared or didn't discuss it, own it. You can have a constructive conversation with them after the fact.

Maybe they were out of line or they were naïve or they were overstepping their bounds, but you can talk about that after the fact in a creative conversation or a creative criticism conversation. It's not really fair to them or to you to do this after the fact, second guess their motives, and judge them essentially for something you didn't do on the front end, which was to create alignment. That's your job as a leader.

**3. The discipline of connection.** Communication is not even enough. Yeah, you have to have the discipline of contact. You have to have the discipline of communication. You must practice the discipline of connection. Listen to this. For true alignment to take place, your people have to know and trust your heart. They have to be committed to your success and the success of the team.

You may be tempted to think you're entitled to their full engagement by virtue of you employing them. You're not. You can buy their presence, but you can't buy their hearts. You have to earn it. People will show up. They'll go through the motions. They'll nod when they're supposed to nod. They'll say what they're supposed to say. But that's way, way different than having true commitment that comes from the heart.

Alignment is one of those things that has to come from the heart. You're not just after agreement; you're after alignment, which is a very different thing. I would just urge you to consider the distinction between those two things. We get in a meeting sometimes and people agree, but they really haven't bought into the vision. They haven't bought into the project. They're not aligned.

In other words, they're not willing to exert their blood, sweat, and tears to make it happen. They're not willing to take a bullet for the team because they're not aligned. They may be in agreement; they're just not committed from the heart level. So you have to have the commitment or the buy-in at the heart level.

You can only create a connection in thus alignment when you open your heart and let other people in. I find one of the best ways to do this is to talk about the *why*. You've heard me say this on this podcast, and if you've been reading my blog you know I say this a lot. When people lose their *why*, they lose their *way*. It's really easy to do. People forget what's at stake. They forget why they're doing something.

I remember one time at Thomas Nelson... This may have been 2007, 2008. We had a very audacious goal for that year. Rather than talking about it in corporate speak, I got the executive team together. Actually this was about 50 or 60 of our vice presidents. We got them together. I just talked about the *why*, why it was important that we accomplish this goal.

Honestly it had very little to do with the finances. Certainly we expressed it in terms of a financial goal, but that was just a number. It was really about us growing as a team, accomplishing something significant in terms of making a dent in the universe, and making an impact on our industry. It was really about us being able to earn bonuses for our entire team so people would be able to do the things they dreamed about financially as families. I just talked like that. I just talked about the *why* of why we

were pursuing this goal and why it mattered because I wanted to connect with them. It wasn't manipulation; it was heartfelt, and I meant every word of it.

So three disciplines: the discipline of contact, the discipline of communication, and the discipline of connection. Alignment is critical if you want to get the right things done and move your organization forward in the most effective and efficient way possible. It's not something that's going to happen on its own. As a leader, you have to take the initiative to create it.

So let me ask you this question: ***Is your team aligned?*** Think about the project you're working on right now, the major initiative you've taken on as a team. ***Is your team aligned? What can you do today to create that alignment?***

If you want to comment on this episode, please go to my blog at [MichaelHyatt.com/015](http://MichaelHyatt.com/015), as in episode 15. I had a few questions come in on this topic when I posted it on Twitter and when I mentioned it at the end of the podcast last week, so I want to take those.

I had the first question from Nick Cook. Take it away, Nick.

**Nick Cook:** Hi Michael, my name is Nick Cook calling from Columbus, Ohio. I'm just getting started blogging and building a personal platform at [whattheworldneglects.com](http://whattheworldneglects.com). Michael, my question for you in terms of aligning teams is what were some of the primary personal growth areas you had to improve in? What were some of the primary ways you had to change in your journey from being a beginning leader to being an experienced leader when it comes to aligning teams? I'm personally a young leader. I'd like to hear some of your feedback on changes and improvements you think are necessary to get effective at actually aligning a team well. So I look forward to your response. Thank you.

**Michael Hyatt:** Nick, great question. As a young leader, I realized I was an introvert. Frankly I saw meeting with other people as something that was inefficient and largely a waste of my time. I had to learn that we created the vision most effectively when we created it together. So I had to blow off efficiency in one sense for the sake of ownership in a very real sense. So I had to learn to get the team together and create the vision together so we had ownership in the vision.

Another thing I had to learn as a young leader was to keep speaking the vision. I'm telling you, I haven't always done this well. There have been times I forget to speak it or frankly I get tired of hearing it myself so I think everybody else is tired of it. But they're not getting tired of it. They're not getting tired of it because they're getting the vision beat out of them on the battlefield as they're encountering day-to-day problems. So you have to keep speaking it as I already said.

I think you also have to keep calling people to the vision and calling them to step up and perform. This one is not easy either because I felt like maybe I was pushing a little bit too much or I was being a little too aggressive, but I learned people will step up when you expect them to step up and when you call them to step up.

I can think of one meeting in particular we had where we were very close. It was in August, maybe about seven or eight years ago. I don't know. It was in August when it was a very big month for us. We were shipping into the fall selling season preparing for Christmas. It looked like we were going to miss the month by a couple of million dollars because we couldn't get the orders out of the warehouse.

I remember sitting in an executive committee meeting and asking our distribution manager, "What would it take to make this possible? Failure is not an option," to steal a line from *Apollo 13*. "We have to get these orders out the door. We committed to the Board. We committed to ourselves. We have to stand for this and make it happen."

It was amazing to see what happened just by asking that question because the guy who was running that distribution business wanted to be a hero. He stepped up. His people made it happen. It was awesome, but it was because I asked the question. It was outside of my comfort zone. As I've said on this podcast before, most of the solutions to your problems are outside of your comfort zone. I was willing to step out there. It's not always easy, but it's always important.

By the way, another thing I went through in terms of training that was enormously helpful to me in terms of learning about alignment was I took my whole team through a course put on by Gap International called *The Alignment Intensive*. It was phenomenal. It was about a week long. It was in Philadelphia. I'll have a link in the show notes to where you can get more information about this.

It's not cheap, but it is great because we all worked on it together. It gave us a common language to talk about alignment. We began to work on some real life problems in the context of that seminar along with about 80 other people from all kinds of different industries. So it was just huge in learning how to create alignment on demand.

The next question comes from Lawrence Wilson. Lawrence?

**Lawrence Wilson:** Hi Michael, this is Lawrence Wilson from Fishers, Indiana. My blog is called *Suburban Pastor*, and you can read it at [lawrencewilson.com](http://lawrencewilson.com). My question is how do you create alignment among team members you've inherited from a previous leader? They still have some loyalty to that other leader's vision. I love the podcast, and I look forward to hearing your answer. Thanks.

**Michael Hyatt:** Lawrence, that also is a great question. I inherited a similar situation at Thomas Nelson because my predecessor, Sam Moore, was really kind of the founder of the company in the sense that he had bought the company from the Scottish company and had really built it up in the U.S. He'd been the CEO for 47 years, so he had a long and illustrious career at Thomas Nelson. I was his handpicked successor, and I was the guy who had to take it over after him. There was a lot of allegiance, a lot of loyalty, and a lot of culture he had created just by virtue of his own charisma and his own behavior. It was all good.

I think one of the first things you have to do if you're going to influence sort of these people who have this loyalty to a previous leader is you have to respect the past. You cannot disrespect it. If you do that, they'll resist and they'll get even more hardened against the changes you're trying to make.

So I would say first and foremost respect the past and acknowledge their loyalty to the past and to your predecessor. See that as a good thing because that same loyalty, if you're skillful enough to transfer it to yourself, will serve you well. It's a good character trait. We all want people who follow us, who are loyal to us, who are faithful when we're not present, who speak well of us when we're not present, and who do the things we want to do or have done in the way we want to have them done. So that's a good quality, and I think you need to speak to that and to acknowledge it.

Then your role as a leader is to enroll them in your vision. Enroll them in a new vision. If they don't get enrolled, again I would say what is it about your leadership that's keeping them from getting enrolled? I think you have to be inventive. You have to be creative. You have to be compelling. You have to have a ton of reasons lined up in order to convince somebody to enroll in your vision. That's your job as a leader. (By the way, if I were talking to them I'd give them a different message.) In talking to you, I want to say it's your responsibility. Assume it's 100 percent your responsibility.

Then I would call for the question. Once you've done all that work, once you've explained the vision, once you've explained all the reasons why, once you've enrolled them in the process of owning it, then I would just flat out ask them, "Can you align with this vision?" I ask them. I wait. There are many times I did that with my own executive team at Thomas Nelson where I went around the table on whatever initiative it was we were taking on and just said, "Look, okay guys. Can you align with this? I'm not asking if you're in *agreement* with it. I'm asking can you *align* with it?"

By the way, just a footnote here. There are things you can align with that you don't agree with. There are many times I could say to my teammates, "I don't agree with the direction the boss is going." Obviously we're not talking about a moral issue. "I don't agree necessarily with the strategic or tactical decision he is making, but I'm in full alignment with him. I am supporting him 100 percent."

I would ask people if they could align with it and give it some time. The shift of loyalty from the team to a team leader just takes time. Ultimately if they can't make that shift (and this is art not science), you may need to replace them. I had to do that at Thomas Nelson with a couple of people who just for whatever reason could not shift their loyalty. I felt like I did a good job in trying to explain what it was we were trying to create, what the new environment called for, what we were trying to accomplish as a team, and they just couldn't get on board. So I had to ask them to leave. Sometimes unfortunately as leaders that's part of our job to do that.

The next question comes from Steven Robles.

**Steven Robles:** Hello, my name is Steven Robles, and I'm calling from Lakeland, Florida. My personal website is [stevenrobles.com](http://stevenrobles.com). My question is regarding team alignment that you had posted asking for questions for your upcoming podcast. I work for the media team at a large church, and I truly believe

the leadership and those above me are doing things the correct way, have great vision, and are easy to follow.

My question is the peers on my team do not hook up with the vision as I believe they could be and are maybe a little disgruntled. I'd like to know if there's anything I can do? Is there something I can be responsible for amidst my team to help create that alignment or unity, or is that completely up to leadership? How do I deal with that disconnect? I appreciate any help, and I love what you do. Thank you.

**Michael Hyatt:** Steven, that's an awesome question. I want to speak to you as a team member, not as a team leader because I spoke to the team leaders earlier. I said, "It's 100 percent your responsibility." I want to say to you as a team member, "It's 100 percent your responsibility." Now we know it's not really 100 percent your responsibility, but there is a lot you can do to influence team alignment. There is a lot also you can do to destroy team alignment.

One of the most important things you can do is verbalize your alignment. Don't just let people wonder whether you're committed, whether you're aligned. Go ahead and verbalize it. Just say, "I'm committed to that." Again just to use my own example, there were situations where when I was working for Sam Moore, I didn't agree with a specific, strategic direction or a tactical decision he was making. That was fine. I didn't have to agree with everything, but I was in alignment with it. I verbalized that to my colleagues.

One of the things I think also you can do is be loyal. By that I mean refuse to gossip. I've been in organizations (you've probably been in them, too) where people are always talking in a negative way about the boss. I think they do it because it's a cheap way to get connection with other people. You kind of complain about it, and the other guy says, "Yeah, I know. I don't really like him either," or, "I don't agree with this." It's just kind of a cheap, easy, artificial way to connect. It's never effective, and it never moves the organization forward.

So I would say be loyal. There were times in my past when somebody was talking about the boss in a negative way, and I just changed the subject or I excused myself because I knew it wasn't productive. Plus, here is a key thing. If you're leading at any level, if you engage in that kind of behavior, do you know what you're doing? You're training your people to be disloyal. It happens in organizations all over the world because people will replicate the behavior you exhibit.

This is why culture gets created by the behavior of leaders. Whatever they do, whatever they affirm, whatever they value gets replicated through the organization. If you're gossiping about your supervisor or you're gossiping about your colleagues, you're actually training the people who work for you to do the very same thing. Don't be guilty of it. Be authentic. Again, alignment doesn't require agreement, but it does require commitment.

The last question comes from Nathan Martin. Nathan?

**Nathan Martin:** This is Nathan Martin from [soundwisdom.com](http://soundwisdom.com) in Pennsylvania. My question is what do you do to foster teamwork among a team that is largely made up of virtual workers who are spread out geographically? Thanks, Mike.

**Michael Hyatt:** Wow, that's a great one too. That's largely my situation today, where I have everybody who is on my team right now. It's very much a virtual team. My virtual assistant Tricia lives in another city. One of my managers lives in Denver. One of them lives here, but we're not in the same office building. So I get this. I'm in the same situation today.

What I would say is the same principles apply; you just have to work a little harder. You can't treat those people who are virtual as second-class citizens, like they're not also a part of the team. So you have to work doubly hard to fold them in and to look for opportunities to connect with them, whether it's with Skype or conference calls or bringing them in for face-to-face meetings.

All of that is critically important, and don't underestimate it. It's that first discipline which is the one of contact. You have to create an environment where you have frequent contact with them if you're going to keep them aligned and working with you, not against you.

So that's about all the time we have for questions. I do have a couple of announcements I want to make. First of all, the *Platform* book, my new book, is officially a bestseller. I am so pleased. It hit all the major bestseller lists last week including Amazon Top Overall books at #4. It was the Amazon Top Marketing book at #1.

It hit the *New York Times* list at #12 on the Hardcover Advice list, and then it hit the *USA Today* Best-Selling Books at #92, which by the way is a really hard list to hit because it's an amalgamation of everything. It has fiction, nonfiction, and children's. It's everything undifferentiated, so there are a lot of times in my past as a publisher where we had authors hit the *New York Times* list but didn't hit the *USA Today* list because again it's just one big list.

*Platform* also was on the *Wall Street Journal* Hardcover Business Best-Selling books at #5, so I couldn't be happier. I'm extremely grateful. A special shout out to the *Platform* launch team, a group of 100 people who signed on as volunteers to help get the word out.

To celebrate, I have another special offer I want to make to you. If you buy the book before the end of the day on Tuesday, June 12, which is a week from when this podcast goes live, you're going to get three free bonuses worth \$110.97. So this isn't the same offer I made previously. It's not quite as big of an offer quite frankly, but I think it's still compelling.

Here is what you get: Three bonuses worth \$110.97, including bonus number one, *all four digital editions of the book*. So if you buy the physical book, you get the Kindle, the Nook, the iPad, and a PDF. Bonus number two is the *unabridged audio of the book*. So if you like to consume books the way I do, which is listening to them when I'm running, this is a great way to do this. You can download these audio files, put them on your iPhone, your iPod, your iWhatever and listen to them.

Bonus number three is a 45-minute video called "Why Now is the Best Time Ever to Be an Author." Even if you've never thought about writing a book before, I don't know of a better way to build a platform than to write a book. It will do wonders for your business or for your ministry. I explain why in that 45-minute video.

So if you want to take advantage of this offer, again it is going to expire on Tuesday, June 12. You can go to [MichaelHyatt.com/podcastoffer](http://MichaelHyatt.com/podcastoffer). There will not be a link in the show notes because this is an exclusive link to my podcast listeners. So I'm not making this available to just my blog readers. This is available only to my podcast listeners and only frankly if you've made it this far in the podcast. So go to [MichaelHyatt.com/podcastoffer](http://MichaelHyatt.com/podcastoffer).

My upcoming speaking... I'm going to be at BlogWorld. In fact, if you're listening to this today on Wednesday when I released it, I'm going to be at BlogWorld on Thursday morning, June 7. I'll be speaking on *Platform: Get Noticed in a Noisy World*. I know that's a big surprise. I'm going to be talking about *Platform* in relationship to my new podcast and what I've been learning and kind of learning how to build a platform from the ground up as though it were the first time.

Then I'm going to be speaking on June 14 at the International Shelby Conference in Memphis, Tennessee for those who use the Shelby Software, then the American Christian Fiction Writers Conference on September 21 in Dallas, and a lot of private events, different banking events, and corporate events that aren't open to the public in between. If you're interested in having me speak to your event, go to [MichaelHyatt.com/speaking](http://MichaelHyatt.com/speaking).

Well, that's about it for this episode of *This Is Your Life*. I'd be grateful if you'd rate my podcast on iTunes. That helps tremendously with keeping my podcast visible so people who have never heard of it can discover it. If you'd like to comment on this episode, please go to [MichaelHyatt.com/015](http://MichaelHyatt.com/015). Go to the show notes for this episode and scroll down to the comments section. I'd love to hear from you.

Until next time, remember: Your life is a gift. Now go make it count!