

MEMORANDUM

Date: August 14, 2015
To: Phillip A. Washington, Chief Executive Officer
CC: Stephanie Wiggins, Deputy Chief Executive Officer,
[Future Director of the] Office of Extraordinary Innovation, and
Nalini Ahuja, Executive Director, Finance and Budget
From: Luke H. Klipp, Transportation Planner III
Re: Rappin' as a Team

Executive Summary

Does Metro function as a single *team*? No, and it ought to.

Los Angeles is changing rapidly, with housing demand and supply increasing in the city center and more and more people seeking transportation alternatives to the automobile. Metro is uniquely positioned to sustain and further propel this transformation.

Key to this effort is your vision's objective to achieve a work environment where all employees have a genuine and elevated sense of pride in themselves and what they do. The following memo offers four recommendations, the first three of which are directed internally toward a cultural transformation to develop the team within Metro and the last of which is directed toward Metro's interface with our customers.

Recommendations include:

- (1) Implement a new employee team member orientation program, which includes tours of numerous Metro facilities and a familiarization with *all* Metro departments and functions;
- (2) Engage Metro team members beyond their work responsibilities with the intent to incorporate a greater understanding of each person's experiences into their daily work life;
- (3) Firmly establish creativity as an agency goal, both in how it applies to new projects as well as how it applies to Metro team member policies; and,
- (4) Focus on the customer experience, which is Metro's most important opportunity to increase transit use and ridership.

The intent of this memo is to initiate a team-oriented dialogue that is lacking from Metro, that is needed now more than ever, and that you, as Metro's new CEO, are uniquely poised to implement at this critical moment.

Introduction

With almost 1.4 million boardings per day across hundreds of bus and rail lines, Metro serves a region that is the heart of the world's entertainment industry and host to a large manufacturing and STEM economy. Los Angeles is home to people from over 100 countries who speak over 200 languages and is visited every year by over 5 million people from all over the world. Metro employs people from all walks of life, who have served this agency anywhere from 40 days to 40 years, and who perform varied tasks from truing train wheels and changing bus tires, to making presentations to diverse communities around transit and land use development, to negotiating loan borrowing terms with multi-national banks. In effect, Metro is its own municipality, with an annual budget the size of most large California cities, all while it is currently undertaking the largest public works construction program in the nation.

What Metro is not, however, is a single, cohesive team. Unless required by the scope of a particular project or task, Metro team members even just at One Gateway have little reason to talk to people on the other side of the floor, let alone on different floors, let alone at different Metro locations throughout the region. Rail division team members rarely speak to those at the bus divisions, and bus and train operators moving about One Gateway are as unfamiliar to Metro HQ as any of the Metro HQ-based team members would be at any of the divisions.

This siloing stifles innovation, leads to duplication, and generates mistrust. Where innovation does occur, it rarely circulates and cultivates throughout the agency. Where efficiencies occur, they are difficult to replicate and institutionalize. And where trust occurs, it is far more likely the result of personal connections than it is due to agency norms or expectations.

Regional Context

Right now, young adults are shifting their transportation preferences away from cars, and empty nesting baby boomers are leaving their suburban homes for smaller central city dwellings. Transit in Los Angeles has never been a more important component to the region's growth and success. Two of the APTA's megatrends relate to changing demographics, and those trends are plainly evident in Los Angeles. Downtown LA, with its wealth of transit services in a central core, has absorbed one-fifth of the region's new housing over the past decade and is continuing that trend. Mayor Garcetti's new Sustainability "pLAN" calls for tens of thousands of new residences to be built within close proximity to transit services, which is in addition to the Metro Board's own directives to create mixed-use developments with ample affordable housing on Metro joint development properties. Further, the City of Los Angeles just approved a new "Mobility Plan 2035," which calls for more complete streets, with one goal being to support increased transit ridership. Metro is uniquely positioned to seize this momentum and to sustain and further propel this transformation in the LA region.

But Metro has its work cut out for it. Simply taking the bus across town or hopping on a train quickly reveals significant deficiencies needing to be addressed if Metro is to serve an increasing share of the region's growing market of potential riders. Most glaring of all these deficiencies: Passenger experience, which includes things such as stations, buses, wayfinding, and safety. The Metro experience is subpar for a system seeking to encourage tens of thousands more people to give the bus and/or train a try.

The Metro Team

So, what is Metro to do? With limited financial means to dramatically change the agency's work and an organizational siloing that is the natural result of a dispersed and disparate company, what is the most fundamental action that Metro can take? *Become a single, cohesive team.* Or, put into the language of your overall Vision for Metro: *Achieve a work environment where all employees have a genuine and elevated sense of pride in themselves and what they do.* This will necessitate an innovative transformation that starts with some basic, fundamental changes.

Metro need not look far to find examples of corporate team culture whose underlying tenets could, if implemented here, transform this agency. The private sector offers examples in places such as Southwest Airlines, Zappos, and Google, where a focus of each is a creative approach to staff cohesion, teamwork, and professional development. The private sector is innovating rapidly to attract a workforce that is more collaborative, diverse, and progressive than any previous generation. If Metro hopes to establish itself on an equal footing with these innovators, it needs to learn from them, build on its strengths, and transform. In short, Metro must cultivate its greatest resource: ***the Metro team.***

Recommendations

Following are three recommendations centered on Metro providing employees with a genuine and elevated sense of pride in themselves and what they do, through a focus on teamwork and leading to outcomes of increased productivity, and reduced turnover, with an intended outcome of improved customer experiences. Additionally, a fourth recommendation focuses directly on ways that Metro can improve the customer experience.

1) Implement a new employee team member orientation program

Currently:

Metro's current orientation program is a 4-hour session that involves a discussion of agency policies and procedures coupled with logistical items, such as signing up for health insurance. This should be considered as the absolute bare minimum that Metro can do for its new team members. Doing this bare minimum leaves many people completely unfamiliar with some of the most fundamental elements of Metro's numerous activities and responsibilities. Providing only the bare minimum in the new team member orientation is one early source of miscommunications across departments, misunderstandings about resource allocations, and distrust between and siloing among Metro's various functions.

Proposed:

Provide a minimum full week's orientation for all new team members that includes the following:

- (a) Riding a Metro bus and a Metro train;
- (b) Touring one bus division and one rail division, including both Transportation and Maintenance;
- (c) Observing AM roll-out at a bus and a rail division;
- (d) Touring the Central Maintenance Facility;
- (e) Visiting One Gateway, complete with presentations from all departments based there;
- (f) Visiting one of Metro's rail lines currently under construction;
- (g) Receiving a seminar on agency norms, expectations, and culture; and,
- (h) Reviewing and agreeing to agency policies and procedures and other logistical items.

Additional components could include touring:

- (a) The non-revenue vehicle Division 4;
- (b) The revenue collections facility at Division 2;
- (c) The Rail Maintenance of Way facility;
- (d) A completed joint development project; and,
- (e) The Bus and Rail Operations Command centers (BOC/ROC).

Metro has the resources and ability to - with little additional cost - physically move large groups of people, provide meals, and engage departments in this effort. The payoff would be a broader understanding and increased awareness of the team among all new Metro team members, from bus maintenance to planning and development, from payroll to rail maintenance of way. While this comprehensive new team member orientation program would require more staff time at the start of team members' tenure at Metro, it would also establish a new baseline for agency understanding and intra-agency cooperation that would be significantly improved upon the baseline provided through the current orientation program.

2) Engage Metro team members beyond their work responsibilities

Currently:

Metro's labor agreements and institutional goals are focused on completion of work tasks, and, generally, Metro team members are proverbial cogs in the wheel ensuring that buses run on time and construction projects are completed on schedule. However, Metro team members are human beings, with complex and interesting lives beyond and inclusive of the work that they perform at Metro, and with interests that extend beyond daily work responsibilities. The members of the Metro team are also its greatest asset, serving as ambassadors in the community and making sure that Metro provides excellence in service and support.

Proposed:

There are a few simple, concrete things that Metro can do to begin to establish a new baseline for employee engagement and appreciation:

(a) Recognize staff birthdays

This recognition can be accomplished by listing names of team members' birthdays in the CEO's weekly newsletter, providing monthly birthday cakes at Divisions, and/or sharing stories of employees whose birthday it is via MyMetro, among other possible means. Birthdays are a celebration *outside* the workplace, and recreating even just a fraction of that experience for the Metro team *inside* the workplace would make it clearer that we are all part of a team.

(b) Acknowledge staff accomplishments outside the office

This could include Metro's formal recognition of things such as the birth (or other major milestone) of a loved one, a significant accomplishment in a non-work-related pursuit, or the receipt of a special award. At over 9,600-strong, the Metro team has many stories to tell, and sharing those stories more openly makes for a more supportive working environment.

(c) Support employee resource groups

Metro is fortunate to have employee resource groups like MEPA, AAEA, Out@Metro, and others. *[In full disclosure, I am the co-founder of Out@Metro and a steering committee member of MEPA, so I make this recommendation with a close understanding of these groups and the acknowledgement to Metro leadership that I might appear self-serving in this recommendation.]* These groups exist because people are social by nature and seek to connect around common bonds beyond just work responsibilities and department silos. Rather than stifle or remain disinterested in these efforts, Metro should encourage groups like these and others that could come about as a result of increased institutional support.

(d) Revamp the annual review process

Children's Hospital Los Angeles solicits feedback not only from managers but also from peers as part of each team member's annual review. Since everyone knows that they will be on both ends of this process, they treat it with the deference that it deserves. Metro could benefit from a similar process, which broadens the focus of a team member's responsibilities to being more than just to his or her manager in order to include more members of the team, including peers.

(e) Institute monthly/bi-monthly check-ins

At a minimum, all managers should check-in once every month or two with each of their reports, not just once annually. This *should not* be a meeting simply about upcoming tasks and responsibilities. This *should* be a regular meeting to discuss what's working well, what could work better, and how the manager can continue to best support his/her report's ongoing professional development.

3) Firmly establish creativity as an agency goal

Currently:

As you recently stated at the August 4 All Hands meeting, creativity is an important part of your vision for Metro. Creativity has not been an explicit goal of Metro until now, however, and the result is apparent in an organization that, while blessed with a creative design studio that is the envy of transit agencies across the country, has done little to encourage creativity among the rest of its team members.

Proposed:

Here are some ideas for ways to begin to infuse creativity into the ongoing day-to-day operations of Metro:

(a) Request all new project and program requests to state in detail how they will incorporate creativity

This could include a section on all new project and program request forms that requires a description of all elements of creativity that a department intends to incorporate into the proposed new project or program.

(b) Focus on creativity as it relates to team member recruitment/hiring/personnel policies

Currently, Metro's approach to team member recruitment, hiring, and personnel policies is standard large government bureaucracy. There are numerous good reasons for this, but it also unintentionally stifles creativity in numerous ways. For instance, the largest document that must be signed prior to starting work at Metro is the agency's tattoo policy. In a city where tattoos are as common as ear piercings, this policy - and the process of a new team member telling their employer where all of their tattoos exist - sends a clear message that Metro expects everyone to look and act the same and is not interested in people who might look or be "different." Certainly, there are legitimate reasons for requiring visible tattoos to be masked, or all male team members to wear ties, or for ear piercings to be no larger than a certain size, but the message sent by these policies, particularly in a region as diverse as Los Angeles, is that Metro only wants a certain type of employee and is disinterested in variety and/or creativity.

(c) Explicitly set aside a small percentage of work time for personal and creative pursuits

Zappos assumes that 80% of staff time is devoted to work responsibilities, and the remaining 20% is committed to personal items and employee fellowship activities. This 20% of non-work-related staff time goes to items such as work softball teams, employee resource groups, and other social projects, in addition to employee personal items, like scheduling appointments and handling financial matters. While this 80/20 split might be viewed by some as a reduction in productivity, it really is a values statement that says "we know you have many pursuits and interests, and we want to support you, knowing that your flourishing as a person only makes our organization stronger and your commitment to our organization that much deeper."

4) Focus on the customer experience

Currently:

All of the above recommendations have as a corollary that a happier, more engaged, more creative, and more cohesive team will inherently improve the Metro customer experience. However, the Metro customer experience must also be addressed head-on. Currently, many Metro bus and rail stations lack basic signage indicating even that they are Metro stations (such as Metro's busiest rail station: 7th St/Metro Center), let alone signage that provides clear guidance around connections, real-time travel information, and information regarding local and line destinations. Moreover, the customer experience is generally addressed primarily as a secondary outcome of agency goals.

An example of this lack of customer focus can be observed at Metro at-grade rail stations, where ample signage exists at platform ends and entrances for suicide hotline information, but not a single sign thanks riders for choosing Metro; real-time train arrival televisions often don't function or are missing, and those that do function are often faded or difficult to read; and station-area maps are produced for placement of the same map in several stations (presumably to reduce Metro's costs), making single station-specific information difficult to understand or use. The implied message for customers is that Metro either doesn't understand or isn't concerned with its riders, let alone that it is concerned with ensuring that they have a good experience taking the train or bus.

Furthermore, for a customer experience as singular and as important as Metro's bus rapid transit and rail stations, at least five of ten managing departments have responsibilities for various elements of construction, operations, and maintenance. These departments do not talk to each other about their different responsibilities, and no interdepartmental team has been convened to coordinate and create a single, cohesive vision for one of Metro's primary customer interaction opportunities.

Proposed:

Here are some suggestions to directly address Metro customer experience.

(a) Require Metro transit ridership by executive and senior management

Metro executive and senior management should agree to ride a different rail and/or bus line every 2 weeks as a basic work responsibility. This can be incorporated into team meetings (conduct a meeting while riding the bus/train), performed with other management, or done individually. But it must be done, and it must involve a different line each time, preferably with no repetition of lines within the calendar year, in order to broaden direct awareness and knowledge of Metro's different lines.

(b) Request all new project and program requests to state in detail how they will address the Metro customer experience

Similar to the recommendation regarding creativity, no new Metro project or program should be approved without a clear description and explanation as to how it will improve some element of the Metro customer experience.

(c) Create project-focused and interdepartmental teams around the Metro customer experience

Interdepartmental teams should be created around specific customer interface areas, including rail and bus rapid transit stations, line interconnectivity and transfers, first- and last-mile access, intermodal connectivity, en-route information for both bus and rail, and safety, among others.

(d) Create a useful system map of rapid/frequent bus and rail lines

Recently, the San Francisco Muni overhauled its system map to better indicate line frequency. Metro has two main system maps - (1) the "Go Metro" map of all rail and BRT lines and (2) the all-lines map. Neither of these maps usefully conveys information to riders and both of them typically feature confused readers attempting to decipher where lines might take them, when they operate, and how they can be reached. Metro is moving toward a grid of frequent bus and rail lines, and it should also move toward a map showing rapid and frequent bus and rail services, including key transfer points and graphically-indicated frequency.

Summary

Metro already has the staff, the creative opportunities, and the funding capacity to implement nearly all of the recommendations provided within this memo to support a more cohesive team and an improved customer experience. At a time when Los Angeles continues to see a shift toward and embrace of multi-modal transportation, Metro is uniquely poised to lead this transformation. The time to act is now.