

EP 98 - Cody Hall: A Leader's Model to Building A Remote Work Culture

Mitch Simon: Welcome to another episode of Team Anywhere where CEOs, leaders, and experts at building teams,

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: companies,

Mitch Simon: organizations,

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: and amazing cultures share how to lead from anywhere in the world. I'm your co-host on the East Coast Ginny Bianco-Mathis.

Mitch Simon: And I'm your co-host on the West Coast, Mitch Simon. And we invite you to join us to Team Anywhere.

How do you create the most effective touchpoints to bring out the best of your virtual employees? On today's podcast, we speak to entrepreneur, Cody Hall, CEO and founder of Octiva Healthcare. Cody shares with us, how to make your meetings engaging and interesting, how to build the closeness of leaders to the teams and how owning your mistakes builds the camaraderie you need to Team Anywhere.

Hello and welcome to another episode of Team Anywhere. I'm your co-host Mitch Simon on the West Coast and on the East Coast, we have an incredible co-host, Dr. Virginia Bianco-Mathis. How are you today, Ginny?

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: I am good.

Mitch Simon: Now, today we have Cody Hall, Founder and CEO of Octiva Healthcare which addresses the long and heartfelt complexity of a patient's transition from the hospital back to their community. He has unique background from serving in the Marine Corps to technology to healthcare. Today we'll dig into how he successfully runs a startup with employees throughout the globe. So how you doing today, Cody?

Cody Hall: Doing well, happy to be here.

Mitch Simon: All right. Great. And Cody is in the state of Nevada, our neighbor to the northeast. And my first question is what has surprised you the most over the last two years?

Cody Hall: That's funny.

Mitch Simon: I didn't send questions to Cody. So everything is all made up. This is all off the cuff. No rehearsal. Let's go.

Cody Hall: You know what? This may not be anything about the company, but it's how much time you spend with your family that you don't normally spend that much time with. So, you're used to Monday through Friday waking up—I was in LA at the time, hour and a half, two-hour commute. Add two hours to Monday in the beginning and the end.

So, you spent so much time at your home with other people who aren't the people you work with, it's your family. So, that was the most surprising thing. How much time you had to spend with your family? I don't think anyone was prepared for that.

Mitch Simon: So, are you seeing it a good thing or a bad thing, Cody?

Cody Hall: However you want digest it.

Mitch Simon: Okay. Alright. Surprised at how much time you spend with your family. Okay, great. So, let's just start with this question. Just give us a little bit about Octiva healthcare, where are your employees?

Cody Hall: Yeah. So, Octiva healthcare was an organization stood up in the beginning of the pandemic as a Virtual Telehealth Organization. We have employees in the Philippines, Mexico city, California, both North and South, Nevada, Texas, Missouri, Georgia, New Jersey, New York, Florida. I believe that's all.

Mitch Simon: Wow. So that's four countries, the United States, Mexico, the Philippines and Texas. That is incredible.

So, that's pretty dispersed whereas a lot of the companies we're talking to have employees, you know, throughout the United States.

Cody Hall: Correct.

Mitch Simon: So, let's get straight into culture, you know, a lot of people say culture is just done best in person or can culture also be done equally and solidly virtually?

Cody Hall: Yeah, I think that's a dice that everyone was rolling in the beginning of the pandemic. I was a big supporter of virtual employees even before the pandemic, a hybrid model of sorts. And I always thought that we have to see people, humans, you know, we're pack style and we like being around other folks.

But, I say in the wake of the pandemic cultures been able to thrive in virtual organizations, especially like Octiva in ways that I didn't think initially were going to be possible. You know, what we see is like working in an office together, my employees work on a teams group chat together it's a standing group meeting they call the office. And they sit there and they'll sit on video chat, everyone on the phone calls, meeting each other, but they're closer than some of the folks they live with. Just about how much time they spend with someone they've never met in person.

Mitch Simon: I've never heard that before. How do they build that closeness? So, what are you doing, as a CEO to create that closeness with your employees?

Cody Hall: Well, you know what I'm doing versus what my team's doing. I'd definitely say separate things. So, if I were say what I do myself is though our business is very serious at Octiva, I work really hard to make sure people don't take themselves too seriously to include myself. You know, all the formalities that come with being in a workplace, create barriers to generating relationships virtually.

So, where no one bumps into the CEO, 'cause maybe they're hiding in their office, or always traveling. I'm always dropping the line to random folks, via teams, seeing how they're doing, asking how their families are. And we meet biweekly as a team and oftentimes reintroducing to each other. Sometimes it's a coffee chat.

Sometimes it's a happy hour where we have wine together. And then we meet together, of course, with just general quarterly events, as things are always changing in healthcare and our business to keep everyone updated. So, we have a higher level of transparency, a lower level of divides between different levels of employment. So, open communication around.

Mitch Simon: And, how many employees do you have?

Cody Hall: So, straight W2 employees we have 15, but we have a lot of contractors. So, we have nurses, physicians, providers, so it just kind of spans out from there.

Mitch Simon: Wow. 'Cause most CEOs would say, you know what, Cody, I don't have time to pop in my reports. I got a business to run.

Cody Hall: I don't have time.

Mitch Simon: But you do it anyways.

Cody Hall: Oh, you have to. I don't have a lot of time for all the things I need to do. I have a list of to-dos that just doesn't ever seem to go away. And so, I find myself during the daytime doing everything that everyone else needs of me.

And then the nights and the morning time, my time doing the things that I need to do. My weekend mornings. But a lot of that is, it's a necessity. I have all these really key employees throughout the organization who I don't bump into during the everyday traffic of operations. But they need to know that I think about them frequently.

If they weren't there, I would know it. And so, I need to make sure that they are recognized so that they stay there.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yeah, that's a wonderful mindset to have. I must say you're the first leader we've spoken to that holds meetings with their key folks twice a week. And then on top of that, you have one-on-ones and then you have your casual.

Cody Hall: Yeah. I'm an anti meeting person. And so the thing is, I'm an anti non-necessity meeting. And so, I hate meetings that should have been emails. And so, I used to have a CEO at another former startup that he walk out of meetings. And he is like, this shouldn't have ever been planned and he just get and walk out. I don't leave the meetings. That's rude. However, I will interject and so—

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yeah.

Cody Hall: But we have those just because we all need to align. And oftentimes with so many things, not being in the same office or being able to walk next door out to the cubicle rack, we can miss things. And so there's so many communications going left and right through the virtual world that if we're not

meeting and having at least touchpoints to share out what everyone's doing, we'll all end up on different parts of the map.

Mitch Simon: Do you have some best practices in having virtual meetings that you wouldn't walk out of? What are you doing such that your meetings are valuable?

Cody Hall: So, people just need to know in the leaders organization, when they set meetings, they have an idea of what is it that we're seeking to accomplish, desired outcomes, whether it's coming with a problem and a solution. No one comes to meet with just a problem because I refer that as complaining.

I have other ways of expressing it as well, but you come out with a problem with no solution, we can't really help each other. So, they come with an objective, come with an, I dealt in state and then we walk away with task and objectives for those who attended. And the same thing with not liking unnecessary meetings is not liking unnecessary attendees.

I will not invite people. And I don't support it around the organization. Having people in a meeting just to have people in a meeting it's like adding everyone to an email, just in case they wanna know the information. And now you have 10 recipients.

Mitch Simon: That's great.

Cody Hall: It burns out communication. That's one thing that's tough about the virtual world is over communicating is toxic.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yeah.

Mitch Simon: Yeah.

Cody Hall: A lot of it is having specifying the desired outcomes of the meeting which most people don't take time to do.

Mitch Simon: What do people get wrong in building culture? What do they overemphasize that shouldn't be emphasized?

Cody Hall: I've experienced this with other startups and sometimes I feel about it at Octiva was we do overemphasize the in person component. I believe that when I look at every position I've held throughout my life there are a solid amount, I'd say 50% that never needed to be in person.

But some occasional touchpoints would've been nice. I think that we emphasize in person because it's what we know. It's the normalcy we wanna be in person. We wanna have those conversations. We wanna see that human in that room with us. And because it's different now in the virtual world, we don't see a video chat as an actual legitimacy in regards to interaction.

I think we have to change the way we focus on that. I believe meetings and huddles, events that are virtual can be seen as cultural construction. Now, I do believe, and I believe I told you this earlier before is, Innovation is best in person. So, we do meet once a year. I just believe that overemphasizing Monday through Friday 8 to 5 because that builds strong culture. I think that's often where people go wrong.

Mitch Simon: Right. So, demanding people in the office 8 to 5 because it's building culture that's wrong. There must be things that you're doing 'cause your company's very successful. And I think you've had other companies before that, which have been very successful.

What are some components that you utilized to create that culture? You've mentioned a few of them on the podcast already. What are some other components that we would want to take back to our companies that would help us build culture in the virtual world?

Cody Hall: Yeah. So what we do at our organizations, we'd like to push down to the lowest level and I think empowering the leaders to build and communicate with their team, frequent touchpoints, is a strong way to have that relationship.

It's something that I have to say that wasn't even forced at Octiva I didn't give a directive. You must speak to your employees once a week. It just took place. And as a result of those managers, those directors, having relationships, you can see the closeness between all the employees and all the leaders and other aspects of different organizations, where there aren't frequent touchpoints.

Maybe it was biweekly you'll have them touch. You never know what your employee's doing. You don't know what's going on in their life, what challenges they're facing. And I think that's one thing that we saw during the pandemic that really rang true in my perception of social circumstances was me working from home was different than other people.

And so, you know, I was very fortunate to have plenty of room to lock people out and to go to a different house and get away from being the next to the

person I wanna be [inaudible] to, but not everyone had that option. And so, understanding what your employees are facing by having those freaking touchpoints, it built a camaraderie by understanding and meeting everyone at their different levels.

Mitch Simon: Was there, a way that you encouraged people to dive deeper to know each other, or do you think you just hired the right people who had that? I'm just wondering.

Cody Hall: No, once again, nothing I did. I find great people. That's something I've always done well is hire the right people, from my leader of operations to the directors, we just have the right ladies. And I say ladies, that most part, because 99% of my company is female. So, I'm not marginalizing any of the males on my team. Well, they exist out there but my leaders are females and I just hired the right ones and they've done really well. And I've said this on a previous podcast.

We have a lot of mothers at our organization and all of my leaders are moms. Moms have a way of wrangling in their herd, right?

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Mm-hmmmm-hmm

Cody Hall: And they do it really well.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Your folks, when you're interviewing them, they know right up front you're a virtual organization?

Cody Hall: Correct.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Right. So there's some self-selection there?

Cody Hall: Correct.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Towards the positive?

Cody Hall: Yes.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: That's why they wanna work with you. And of course, what you shared about mothers makes sense also. In their minds, they can create a home environment of working.

Cody Hall: Correct.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: But I do love your point. Don't make assumptions about that. Each home office is different, right?

Cody Hall: Yeah.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Whereas, remember everybody, the days where you walk into the company and everyone's cube is exactly the same.

Cody Hall: Yeah.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Boy, that has to really influence how I come to work.

Cody Hall: Yeah. We bring everything to work now because work is where we live. And so whether, you know me, I sit here and my dog barks, right?

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yeah.

Cody Hall: I'm gonna put you in the back room and you're making too much noise from me, right? You're walking too hard on the floors. I can hear your paws. But I have little curly haired babies running around on everyone of my meetings. And I have mothers of five. I have mothers who have kids in home who are graduates. There's just so many little things where we have meetings at periods and times where our East Coast folks are picking up their kids from school. They're in the carpool lane. And where we work has forever changed and it's no longer in the cube. Sometimes it's in the carpool lane.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: I have a question for you Cody. So, when you have these touchpoints, these meetings, what do you talk about?

Cody Hall: Yeah, well, we're always video. And so, unless there's [inaudible] circumstance where someone's joining and either video's not working or they're driving and sitting in a carpool in their own headphones. But we always make sure that we have a topic 'cause we don't just meet to meet. Most of the time we're doing company updates.

We do have team members adding all the time. So there's always an introduction. We, you know, talk about new contracts, future integrations. So, we're always touching on key business points. But there's always a third of the conversation that's held out for rabbit holes and going off into left field because we do all the time.

And we're not on a strict, like here X-Y-Z, where we need to hit on this meeting. And we go in there the most part, I'll say my piece, the leadership will say the piece and then it's conversation. And sometimes it's about kids. We keep trying to tally how many kids represent the entire organization like [inaudible].

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: That's great.

Cody Hall: We have a four kids to one employee ratio right now.

Mitch Simon: Wow.

Cody Hall: So, it's always changing. That's one of our task every meeting as well.

Mitch Simon: Do you have set goals on raising the kids for employee ratios?

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Oh, that's funny.

Cody Hall: We're talking about a replacement rate. This is a future Octiva Nurse.

Mitch Simon: That is true. I do not know if anyone else has a kid to employee ratio and four to one is, you know, that's gonna be hard to compete with actually.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: That builds your culture, right? That's now part of your culture and they can talk about that. And when they talk about working for this company, they're sharing that piece.

Cody Hall: Yeah.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: And it's funny. And it's heartwarming.

Cody Hall: We have currently, I believe five expecting mothers across all of our contractors and employees. And you know, I have a friend of mine right now. Who's expecting who works for employer and is incredibly worried and nervous about how to explain to them they're pregnant.

And it fundamentally bothers me that you have this person raising this human inside of them. And they have to then worry about telling their employer that they're pregnant. Like, I just don't understand it at all. And the thing is, even if

it's, you know, California's great, laws protect the mothers, however other states don't have that.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Mm-hmm

Cody Hall: And it's really difficult to see that someone has to struggle about when they should tell someone, lie about them gaining weight it's so ridiculous. We're increasing the ratio and you know, the thing is, it's not easy, right? It's not easy when someone is going out on maternity leave. But the thing is. life is life. And so we're accepting a person as an employee, as a team member, and we're accepting so much that goes along with everything they have as a part of Octiva. Not just, you know, when they're clocked in.

Mitch Simon: Yeah. Wow. So, this is you know, it's great is, you're finding that moms have the natural, you know, empathy, communication skills, and corralling skills. And you actually promote hiring people with those attributes. And obviously I've never been a mom, but it's just gotta be this incredible feeling of love and acceptance that it's gonna be not just that I don't know if to hide it, but that is accepted. And you must be, you know, really attracting some of the best talent out there.

Cody Hall: We're great leaders.

Mitch Simon: Yeah. How do you help the moms, who are, you know, five children, right? So, I need to get my eight hours in today and things are gonna come up. So, how did that work in terms of leadership and directing these moms so that they do feel comfortable with the challenges of being a mom for 1, 2, 3 or 4 kids.

Cody Hall: Yeah. So, we're not always perfect. But we have our nurses who have a shift who actually support our triage operations and our case manage operations. They're a little bit more rigid in when they need to be available when they need their calls. But you know, there are 24 hours in a day, 160 hours in a week and we're covering all those.

Mitch Simon: Yeah.

Cody Hall: We probably have something they can support. We also have our leaders. They have different responsibilities, but the key objective for them is they know what we need to accomplish and they will accomplish it at the time we need to accomplish that.

Whether that's them, taking time away to go pick up a child, go take someone who's sick or daycare being canceled and they have a busy house. It happens. But they know what we need to, achieve as an organization. And so, I don't need to stand over them and say, hey, once it taken place, they know it exists.

And oftentimes far less often I have to ever remind them because they know because of our open communication, where we're heading as an organization, what objectives are under the horizon.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Well, you just said Cody actually triggered something. How many times I have coached leaders, managers over the past years. They have this employee and they wanna know how to better manage this employee because they go about their work differently, right?

Cody Hall: Yeah.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Look at that concentration, all that energy. Whereas be clear on what is you need and when you need it and then let it go.

Cody Hall: Yeah.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Right. And then there will be people who will survive under that. There will be others who maybe can't, right?

Cody Hall: Yeah.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: And they will then have to self-select elsewhere. They almost want the rigidity and they won't survive here. That's what I love it, being female and being a mother, I can't help, but keep going back to this mother thing, 'cause we know what it's like to have 3, 5 children and somehow still get something done.

Mitch Simon: It's extreme talent.

Wanted to switch it up just a little bit Cody, 'cause you know, our company, I was sharing yesterday my leadership enthusiast, she's Ex-Navy. You are Ex-Marine Corps. I'd love to know what are the principles that you took from the Marine Corps that is having you be successful, running a healthcare company where the 90% of your employees are female. And I know the Marine Corps is not yet has those proportions.

Cody Hall: Yeah.

Mitch Simon: And when you think about healthcare, you think about nurses and love. So, what's the connective tissue there?

Cody Hall: Yeah, I think it's a few things. It's what the Marine Corps wasn't and what they did not do well, as well as what they did do well. I think that it's a mixture of two elements. It's one understanding that perfection is not a reality. The military loves as I did, we have to be perfect in all aspects of it.

And I understand that because there's a degree of the cost of life in some of the operations, right? And so, they operate across all boards to include administrative pieces where there's no margin for error at all. And so, that creates a mentality of you have to be perfect, and if you're not perfect, then you fail.

That mixed with the accountability of owning the actual mistake or the failure. And so, I kind of bridge those in the middle. And I represent it in what I do. So, if I make a mistake in the organization, miscommunication, drop the ball here, you know, I will bring the team together and say, hey, listen, that was my bad.

All right. So let's pause. Let's all get aligned what needs to take place and let's move forward. And I think oftentimes, the military was not about even the recognition of some of those mistakes, where at the other side, when I was with the recon community of the Marine Corp, they were all about owning your mistakes.

Like, listen, don't give us an excuse. Excuses take time, right? What we wanna understand is what can we drive from the opportunity and how can we fix it going forward? And those are the biggest things I take from the recon community, the independent leader. So, they operate on small teams, but they operate independently from one another.

Everyone knows what they need to achieve. And the unit operates as a machine. And so that's how Octiva works. Everyone at every level is hired for the purpose of, I can turn my back to them and I know they're gonna do their job. And there's a degree of self-selection I refer to just the 10% that will end up washing out because maybe they did great interviews, but they don't do well with time management, they'll wash out.

But for the most part, everyone on the team operates in their little sphere, a part of the bigger machine. And that's why I take from the recon community in the Marine Corps, the accountability, understanding, accepting the responsibility of opportunities and things like that.

Mitch Simon: That's great. Well, last question, ' cause you shared with me yesterday. You do get together once a year with your team. So, you're bring together people from all over the country or the world. What are some of the things that you focus on when you do that one-year bringing together of your team?

Cody Hall: Yeah, so we usually do a year in review. Where we're saying, well, what do we do well this year? What are we looking to achieve in the year to come? And what do we have to do in the middle to bridge those two? And that can equal operations. It could be employee power. How many more employees we need? What do we need to change in operations, structure in organization?

Just last year we met and we didn't really focus much on what we're seeking to achieve is how we're gonna modify a team to take a larger volume of patients. And so, it was restructuring shifts and team members and specialties and license utilization.

So, it's really looking at the team and empowering them to say, hey listen, you know what your team's capable of doing? Let's look at the numbers and what do we have to do to get where I want us to go and achieve my objectives of the organization. And so, we bridge those gaps and we also have fun. And so, we try not to spend too much time just going away at the meetings. And so, we use to like, half a day working and half a day going out and doing something together as a team.

Mitch Simon: I think that's really important because you just can't replace the in person part and yes, you can have a wine night together separately, but there's just something amazing about committing to that time together.

Well, this has been great. Really fantastic to speak to you as an entrepreneur. Really connected to the needs of what people need right now in having a virtual existence out there. How can people find you? Or maybe work for your company if that makes sense.

Cody Hall: Yeah. All great questions. You can find me on LinkedIn. linkedin/codhal. You can also find Octiva Healthcare. O-C-T-I-V-A Healthcare on LinkedIn as well. And of course, octivahealthcare.com. So those are all great ways to get in contact with us.

Mitch Simon: Thank you so much, Cody.

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Fabulous. Thank you.

Mitch Simon: Thank you. Fabulous, which is Ginny's favorite word. So—

Ginny Bianco-Mathis: Yes.

Mitch Simon: It means it was fabulous.

And all of our listeners out there, if you love this episode, which we have. Please go out there and share this episode with your friends, your colleagues, your family, and until next time, we'll see you on Team Anywhere.