A Primer: Working with John Wilson

Introduction

Hi. I'm excited to work with you. Thank you for taking the time to read this primer on working with me. Nothing here is set in stone, but it should give you a sense of how I collaborate, communicate, and why.

My Management Style

Collaboration. My goal as a manager is to support you in making the best decisions. I am here to make sure you know the business goals and how we drive strategy. I am not here to tell you exactly how to do your job. That means I we discuss the broad business problems, and then you chart the course. If we need to tag-team aspects of the project, I am happy to roll up my sleeves. If you disagree about the direction we're heading, tell me. Otherwise, you make the calls.

Managing sprints/projects. All other things being equal, I like to follow an agile framework. Let's try to break projects down into small tasks that we can complete over two week cycles. For more waterfall style projects, loop me into the process. CC me on emails or drop me slacks/chats on where we are, especially once projects near their end. I find that's usually when things slow down and you might need a "closer" to finalize everything.

Documentation. I don't just like documentation - I crave it. You are expected to produce companion documents for every project or story you complete. For example, a dashboard should have instructions. An analysis should have steps to reproduce. You can comment in code, write out a document or slides with screenshots - I don't care, but do something that lives outside of your inbox. This is especially critical in a remote-work setting.

Data

Self-Service. Self-service analytics is the goal. In our roles we must create tools or processes which enable the folks closest to the customer or the decision with information. At the same time, make sure the user can get to answers in a few clicks. If you show too much data, you can lose the message. Make it as simple as possible but no simpler.

Keep tidy. If you share a spreadsheet for analysis, put it in the "tidy" format: one observation per row and one variable per column. Read Tidy Data by Hadley Wickham for guidance.

Pet-peeves. I admit it - I am uptight about some aspects of data analysis. Obscure names of projects for example, are a pet-peeve. Use a descriptive and consistent naming convention. My other religion is about date formatting. Whenever possible, use ISO 8601 (YYYY-MM-DD), the only globally used format.

Working with Partners

Strategy. Try to think about how numbers will be perceived if presented above and below our ranks. One point of view shown to an executive may end up rubbing a field leader the

wrong way. Similarly, the field does not know corporate strategy. Bridge that gap.

Customer focus. No matter what, always do right by the customer. Consumer experience must be the top priority. Even if you disagree, listen to them whether they are internal or external. Do whatever it takes to make sure they feel heard.

Be consultative. Be supportive with partners. Use your manners. I will personally avoid conflict when I can, perhaps to a fault. If a teammate or partner seems impolite or unprepared, then just postpone the discussion. Otherwise, have confidence in yourself – you are the expert.

Meetings

Your Time. I aim to meet routinely for any kind of frank and open discussion. Most importantly, 1:1s are your time. Take them in any direction you want. All I ask is that we keep our sprint/project tracking tools up to date. Early on in our work together, I would like to get together for a discussion about your career goals and aspirations. If I have fallen short on meeting your needs for learning and development, tell me. Finally, I always like to know what's going on personally with people so I can see the whole picture. If you don't feel comfortable with that, no problem at all. Just tell me what I can do to help.

Team Meetings and Sprint Reviews. Team meetings are great for getting feedback on projects. Take this time to think out loud on how to approach a problem or even boast about something you're proud of. I also like to get together with our broader departmental teammates every quarter, so try to bring some material to share and ideas for new projects in the future. Use these opportunities to practice for sprint reviews and customer demos.

Staying on Track. Let's not develop a reputation for lackluster meetings. Before you call one, write an agenda or at least a few talking points. I like to start calls with a personal anecdote or update before diving into an agenda. In my view these tend to improve morale and teamwork in general. Remember that meeting minutes are counted in person-time. Two minutes in a meeting of four people counts as eight minutes of work. Please try to be on time. Finally, as the adage goes, there is fortune in the follow-up. Take notes during the meeting and send out a summary afterwards if you can.

Feedback. Listen, we're all here to better ourselves and the company together. If you have some feedback for me, please share, and I will try to do the same. Feedback is a gift.

I hope this primer was helpful. Now let's build something great.

Sincerely,

JOHN WILSON