

# BRAVE LEADERSHIP: SETTING A NEW COURSE FOR ROXELL PHARMA

## SEMCO STYLE STORIES

Roxell Pharma, a pharmaceutical distribution company from Bolivia, boasts nearly three decades of industry experience. However, despite their longstanding presence, they are grappling with a significant financial challenge. How did Brave Leadership manage to turn the tide in a mere six months, fostering optimism for the future and nurturing an engaged, expanding team?

Towards the end of 2022, Jaime Ocampo Zeballos took over the reins and embraced a brave leadership journey to keep the company afloat. With his team of 13 people, they worked their way towards a self-managed approach without losing any team members along the way. In just half a year, the company recorded its highest monthly sales in over five years. Salaries are being paid on time, supplier invoices paid, and they can even set aside funds to introduce new products.

### Brave leadership

The real turning point for Roxell Pharma started with a brave decision to “Move forward WITH people”, rather than alone as one leader. Starting with small steps, Jaime, as a Certified Semco Style Expert, guided the team in its first steps to becoming a more people-centric organization. This kicked off a journey of discovery where the team pulled together and collectively embraced the existing problems.

## “PEOPLE DEFEND WHAT THEY HELP TO BUILD.”

Despite the huge pressure and critical need for “cost reduction,” they implemented new policies based on trust and busted bureaucracy by getting rid of unnecessary control practices. Along the way, they were transparent with information about the current situation and kept everyone up to date with progress, successes, and failures. Thanks to these transformative actions, the team was inspired to keep pushing forward and break free from old habits.

An early-on example of an unnecessary control was the old clock-in, clock-out system that did not function correctly and only resulted in negativity due to incorrect payments. Instead of replacing it with a new system with higher accuracy and more control, they simply decided to treat adults as adults, communicate the correct working hours, and expect people to be on time and perform to the best of their abilities. Initially, this was met with great resistance by the board, however with Jaime being focused on the financial side, he persisted until they were allowed to experiment with it. The results were undeniable: By sharing information about the process and handing control back to the team, the process improved, payments were not disputed, and the team took ownership of timekeeping and attendance. This not only built trust with the board but also paved the way to further experiment with alternative ways of working.

## “IS IT A SCARY JOURNEY? ABSOLUTELY. AND IT IS NOT A WALK IN THE PARK.”

“Is it a scary journey? Absolutely. And it is not a walk in the park. But seeing the slow movement toward stability made this attempt of brave leadership successful and worth it so far.”

Clear decision-making and action are crucial for effective leadership - demonstrating commitment to implementing necessary changes is key. Jaime acknowledges, that it is not a walk in the park, but seeing the team reaching their goals and creating a more stable environment is worth it.

At first, they stumbled quite a bit, but that’s all part of the journey towards success. Jaime recalls how the urgency to show results caused the team to rush the process. Some decisions were made too quickly and turned out to be unsustainable in the long run. Jaime and the team focused on creating an environment of learning and these early mistakes, helped them move the company in the right direction. This journey fostered a culture where everyone is aligned and committed. By involving more people in the process, they created a workplace where collaboration and dedication became second nature.

### Moving forward with people

Although this kind of transformation leads to a more people-centric organization, Jaime reminds us that the initial steps remain a shock to the system. People inherently fear change and need time to process what is happening. It is important to not rush the process and stay in touch with your team. This involves being aware of their feelings, assessing if they are embracing the change, identifying their concerns, and finding ways to provide support.

## “IT IS A CRITICAL SKILL TO BE ABLE TO LISTEN CAREFULLY TO HOW THE ORGANIZATION RESPONDS TO CHANGE.”

Embracing the decision to “Move forward WITH people” taught the Roxell Pharma team to create a psychologically safe environment where people not only feel appreciated and trusted, but also respected as adults to make decisions. The leadership team embraced this newfound autonomy of individuals and realized that successes and failures go hand in hand. When failures occurred, leaders had to learn how to create psychological safety by addressing the problem and not attacking the person. Most importantly, they had to ensure that there were clear learnings that could be built on for the future.

## “PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE - THERE IS NO STEP-BY-STEP RECIPE.”

“Patience is a virtue - there is no step-by-step recipe. All you can do is remain in touch with your company and listen carefully.”

Jaime encourages leaders to connect with the company’s humanity and personality. Use this authenticity and create an environment where people flourish - the positive effect on the company is almost instant. Leaders are often too focused on achieving the result, realizing benefits, or making targets. Although these things are important, it is as important to often take a pause and ensure that everyone is still on the journey with you. Take the time to discuss the concepts of a people-centric organization and the principles of self-management. The more you discuss it, the more clarity and alignment are created, and people feel that they are part of the journey - it is crucial that they do not just go along with it but have active involvement during the process and at the very least, that their concerns are heard, and their opinions are considered.

## “SELF- MANAGEMENT IS ABOUT ACCEPTING PEOPLE AS THEY ARE.”

“Self-management is about accepting people as they are - there will be problems and even more obstacles.”

As the company stops wasting time on unnecessary controls and inefficient bureaucracies, autonomy consistently enhances, and control is shared. People take more and more ownership as they are not only part of the process - they are the process!

### Celebrating success

During a transition like this, there are many difficult times and tough conversations, but there are also successes. Communicating even the smallest success is crucial for motivation and keeping momentum.

One such success was realized when Jaime took a well-deserved break - putting his trust in the team to carry on with the good foundation laid over the last few months. The team naturally kept the meetings alive, shared the correct information, and took the required actions. When he came back from his vacation, the team proudly shared their results: The best month of performance - ever!

Although cash flow is still fragile, stability has increased significantly. The company increased sales by 9% and went from a consistent loss to an 8% profit realization. Jaime ascribes this to the Semco Style practices of *Treating Adults as Adults* and *Information belongs to everybody* - sharing full financial information with *Unfiltered transparency* and taking the time to *Teach people the numbers* so that they can interpret the information and take the necessary actions.

“We are far from perfect, it’s not about idealizing people but accepting them as humans with dreams, fears, and hopes. By removing all those obsolete control practices and focusing on what is important, we are thriving. It’s way too early to know if we will make it, but we will give it our best!”

All results are not tangible, and you must note the small changes in behavior. The team now operates with higher collaboration and is much more proactive in preventing problems from recurring. Relationships have improved with a greater understanding of problems, sharing information, and understanding each other’s views. Team members have more freedom to speak, and issues are identified much quicker than in the past.

### Looking to the future

With a growing team of nearly 20 people, Roxell Pharma is looking towards a brighter future based on a people-centric culture and work practices. While the financial hurdle remains significant, the openness with which information is shared ensures everyone is well-informed and involved during each step of the journey. This new foundation is only the beginning, and the focus now shifts to enhancing autonomy, trust, and self-management, while further reducing bureaucracies.

## “THE DREAM IS TO BALANCE WELLNESS”

“The dream is to balance wellness: Employees, Providers, Customers, and Community should be in balance with the financial health of the company.”

While they recognize that success isn’t guaranteed, they enjoy facing this challenge as a united front - tackling hurdles, celebrating success, and above all, shaping a workspace where everyone looks forward to going to work every day. With enhanced autonomy and self-management, the team is now part of the solution and plays an integral role in creating a future-proof organization.



Watch the full episode of this Semco Style Stories with Roxell Pharma here!