THE ALIGNMENT YOU LIVE

...alignment is not something you switch on at work and abandon everywhere else

A CONVERSATION WITH CAVELLE JOSEPH-ST OMER · BY GISELLE HUDSON · 2026

Alignment is not a leadership skill. It is about how you live.

For Cavelle Joseph-St Omer, alignment is not something you switch on at work and abandon everywhere else. It governs how she chooses what deserves her time, how she leads, how she makes decisions, how she treats people and how she determines whether her work has been worthwhile.

When I asked Cavelle about the issues that matter to her, she did not reach for a broad answer designed to accommodate every worthy cause. She was clear. People development. Women and girls. Gender issues. Education. Culture and the arts.

She has seen how unfair a patriarchal system can be, particularly to women, and she understands that her position gives her a view of how power operates, how people are perceived and how difficult it can be for others to navigate spaces that were never designed with them in mind. Supporting women and girls is therefore deeply personal. So is her commitment to young people and human capital development.

It also explains why HR was a natural fit.

"In my line of work, I have the ability to positively make a difference in somebody else's life," she told me.

There are many things Cavelle could support, and she makes no attempt to suggest that she feels equally connected to all of them. She knows what she cares about and what she does not. That clarity matters because alignment requires discernment. We cannot direct our time, energy and influence coherently if everything is treated as equally important.

Cavelle's compass extends beyond her professional interests. She loves culture, the arts and Carnival, and she protects the season as a necessary space in her life. Her calendar reflects what matters to her because, in her understanding, balance cannot remain an idea. It must be visible in the choices you make about your time.

ALIGNMENT BEGINS WITH THE INDIVIDUAL

When I asked what alignment meant to her as a leader, she began with the individual.

She spoke about core values, purpose and understanding why she was born. She described feeling connected to the universe and turning to nature when

she needs answers. For Cavelle, her work cannot be separated from that larger understanding of who she is and why she is here.

> *"I have to understand my reason for existence and align my life's work to my purpose for being born."*

This is where her understanding of organizational alignment begins. We often discuss alignment as though it belongs to strategic planning: mission, vision, values, systems, processes, people and resources moving towards a shared goal. Cavelle understands all of that. She also understands that organizations do not become aligned because those elements appear in a plan.

People must be able to see how the purpose of the organization connects to the department in which they work, the decisions they make and the responsibilities they carry each day. Without that understanding, employees are being asked to support a direction they cannot clearly see.

The effects appear everywhere. Resources are assigned to priorities that do not support the larger goal. Bottlenecks multiply. Conflict increases. Employees struggle to understand the value of their work or how it contributes to the whole. Engagement falls because people cannot locate themselves within the organization's purpose.

Personal values also enter the equation. An employee who discovers that the organization's conduct violates something fundamental to them cannot be expected to remain fully engaged simply because the company has articulated an attractive vision.

For Cavelle, this is where individual alignment and organizational alignment meet. People need to understand what the organization stands for, see those values demonstrated and recognize how their own contribution fits into the picture. When that happens, the results become tangible in productivity, customer experience, morale, belonging and financial performance.

Even Cavelle's description of personal success returns to the same point. The outcome may not always be financial. Sometimes it is being able to sleep well because you know you made a difference in someone's life. Sometimes it is being exhausted at the end of the day and still feeling fulfilled by what the effort produced.

REBUILDING HRMATT

That understanding shaped her leadership of the Human Resource Management Association of Trinidad and Tobago.

When Cavelle assumed the presidency during the pandemic, HRMATT was facing financial difficulty, historically low membership and considerable disengagement. Becoming president had not been part of her plan. She had been encouraged repeatedly to put herself forward and submitted her nomination on the final day.

Once she entered the role, however, she had a clear sense of what the organization needed to become. She had experienced HRMATT as a member and understood what she had wanted from the association. The question was how to convert that understanding into a strategy capable of moving the organization forward.

The work began with the data.

Membership was low. People were disengaged. The association's offerings did not reflect the different needs within the profession. Entry-level practitioners, experienced HR leaders, consultants and other members at different stages of their careers could not all be served in the same way.

The membership had to be segmented so HRMATT could understand what different groups needed and create relevant opportunities for them to learn, contribute and participate. The association also had to reposition itself within the wider business community if it wanted HR to be recognized as a strategic partner.

That required a different level of engagement with business leaders, policymakers, chambers and the C-suite. It required HRMATT to use its data, increase its visibility and demonstrate the role the profession could play in business decision-making.

The change was noticeable. The organization developed a vibrancy that could be felt even by people outside its membership. New programmes, conversations and opportunities widened participation. HRMATT entered spaces where it could influence decisions and nominate professionals to serve on committees and boards. Other business associations began replicating some of what it was doing.

What appears from the outside as a successful organizational turnaround can easily be reduced to a list of initiatives. Cavelle's account revealed the less visible part of the work: restoring trust among people who had been disappointed by the organization, sustaining volunteers through rejection and resistance, and remaining committed to a vision while others were still responding to their previous experience of HRMATT.

"You have to have grit," she said, because rebuilding an organization's reputation means receiving frustration that was created before you arrived. People do not separate the new leader from the institution's history simply because the leadership has changed. Trust has to be earned again.

THE DISCOMFORT OF VISIBILITY

Cavelle is deservedly proud of what HRMATT has achieved, although pride does not come easily to her. She admitted that she struggles with compliments and has difficulty hearing people speak about her accomplishments. This goes back to childhood, when she could receive a trophy and hide it rather than invite attention.

Her leadership roles have forced her to become more visible. She has had to learn how to tell the story of the work without making the story entirely about herself.

Even now, she is more comfortable congratulating the people involved and inviting others into the space than listing what she personally accomplished.

There is a tension here that many competent women will recognize. Visibility can feel uncomfortably close to self-promotion, particularly when you have been taught that humility means saying very little about what you have done. Yet leadership carries a responsibility to make the work visible, because the story is also how people understand the direction, recognize what has become possible and see where they might participate.

Cavelle is learning to make room for that visibility while remaining true to herself.

EARLY SIGNS OF MISALIGNMENT

Our conversation then moved to the early signs of misalignment within teams and organizational cultures. Cavelle sees them often: poor communication, declining trust, persistent turnover, absenteeism, increasing grievances, blame, weak accountability, silent meetings and employees who are afraid to speak honestly.

A quiet meeting can be mistaken for agreement. In reality, it may indicate that people have learned there is a cost attached to expressing a different view. The real conversation then happens afterwards, in private exchanges and corridor discussions, because the formal space does not feel safe enough to hold it.

Cavelle has experienced the consequences of speaking up herself. It has not stopped her. She has what she describes as an impulse to help, resolve and become involved when she sees something that needs attention, even when involvement carries a personal cost.

She is equally clear about accountability. When a team she leads is criticized, her first response is not to identify the individual responsible and place that person in the line of fire. She accepts responsibility, returns to the team and works with them to correct what happened.

That approach gives people room to learn from failure. A culture preoccupied with blame teaches employees to conceal mistakes. A leader who accepts accountability while still addressing the problem creates the possibility of learning, correction and better performance.

WHAT LEADERS SAY, WHAT LEADERS DO

One of the clearest signs of misalignment, however, is the distance between what leaders say publicly and how they behave inside their organizations.

Cavelle has watched leaders appear on television and speak convincingly about values they do not practise. They talk about integrity while acting dishonestly. They speak about respect while demeaning employees. Their websites and company profiles describe one organization while employees experience another.

> *"What they're saying on television is not who they are in real life."*

This may be the most important distinction in our entire conversation. Leadership cannot be assessed only through the quality of a person's public language. The real evidence is found in what happens when there is no audience to impress, when an employee disagrees, when a mistake is made, when power could be used without consequence or when a leader has to decide whose interests matter.

Cavelle believes leaders must model the values they claim. If an organization says it values integrity, people should be able to observe integrity in its decisions. If it speaks about honesty, the environment must make honesty possible. If it encourages open communication, employees cannot be ridiculed or punished for speaking.

ROOM TO LEAD, STRUGGLE AND LEARN

The same coherence is present in how she develops people.

Cavelle mentors young professionals and holds regular conversations that help them examine their gifts, interests, previous successes and future aspirations. She encourages them to consider what they should carry forward and what they may need to leave behind. The process also turns her attention back towards her own development because she recognizes how easily she can become absorbed in everyone else's concerns and neglect herself.

Within teams, she observes before forming conclusions. She knows the difference between a single incident and a pattern of behaviour. Once she understands what she is seeing, she meets people individually, provides regular feedback and agrees on actions that can support their development.

Those actions might include formal training, professional support or a development plan. The conversation must lead somewhere. It cannot end with a leader naming a gap and leaving the employee alone to close it.

Her approach to delegation follows the same principle. She gives people room to handle meaningful responsibilities, including room to struggle, and does not intervene at the first sign of difficulty. She watches, allows them to take the work as far as they can and steps in when support becomes necessary. Afterwards, they examine what worked, what did not and what should be done differently next time.

She described giving a younger HRMATT board member responsibility for launching the association's mentorship programme. Cavelle could see some of the areas in which she was struggling, but she resisted taking over. The young woman was allowed to lead the project in her own way, ask for assistance when she needed it and learn from the experience.

For Cavelle, allowing someone to lead means accepting that they may not approach the assignment exactly as she would. Development cannot occur if the leader

retains control of every meaningful decision and gives the other person only the appearance of responsibility.

> *"I cannot say that I do not micromanage if I'm not modelling the behaviour of someone who doesn't micromanage. I can't say one thing and then do something totally different."*

THE ALIGNMENT YOU LIVE

And we return, once again, to alignment.

It is present in the causes Cavelle supports, the work she chooses, the time she protects, the organization she helped rebuild, the people she mentors, the responsibility she accepts and the standard by which she judges leadership.

Her understanding of alignment does not ask whether our values sound admirable. It asks whether someone could identify those values by observing how we live.

That is a far more demanding question because it removes alignment from the safety of mission statements, public interviews and leadership language. It places it inside our decisions, relationships, calendars, conduct and use of power.

For Cavelle Joseph-St Omer, alignment is where the person, the purpose and the practice become recognizable as belonging to the same life.

THREE TAKEAWAYS FROM CAVELLE'S SPOTLIGHT

1 *Alignment must be visible in how you live.*

For Cavelle, values cannot exist only in mission statements, public interviews or leadership language. They must be recognizable in how we make decisions, treat people, accept responsibility and use our influence.

2 *Organizational renewal begins with understanding what has become disconnected.*

Cavelle's transformation of HRMATT began by examining the data, listening to members and recognizing that people at different stages of the profession needed different forms of value and participation. Rebuilding the association required a strategy that reconnected its people, purpose and offerings.

3 *Developing people requires room to lead, struggle and learn.*

Cavelle gives people meaningful responsibility without taking over at the first sign of difficulty. She observes, provides support when it becomes necessary and uses the experience to help them understand what worked, what needs improvement and what they can carry into the next opportunity.



Cavelle Joseph-St Omer

Human resources leader and President of the Human Resource Management Association of Trinidad and Tobago (HRMATT), which she has led from financial difficulty and low membership to renewed relevance with business leaders and policymakers. A mentor to young professionals and an advocate for women and girls, education, and culture and the arts.

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