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Leading-by-example approach can prevent the full leveraging of the talented teams

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Entrepreneurs and business leaders tend to wear many hats. On any given day, they could have to perform the roles of CFO, marketing director and salesperson — all before lunch.

Entrepreneurs tend to believe that they need to be the leader at everything to have successful outcomes on all projects, especially strategic initiatives. However, this leading-by-example approach can prevent the full leveraging of the talented teams in their organization. This situation causes two main problems.

- The leadership group takes on too much and cannot make the necessary step-changes that the organization needs.
- Younger leaders do not get the opportunity to learn proper team management skills.

The first step toward fixing this issue is for leaders to realize they can't do everything themselves. Then the challenge becomes getting the most successful outcome from your team's performance. Here are three strategies for improving team performance in your organization.

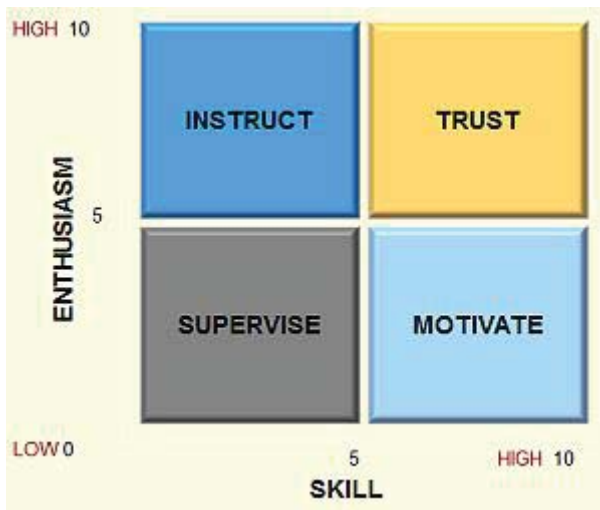
Coaching

Not everyone shares the same skill sets and motivations, so it is important to understand how to coach individuals. Using the grid below, assemble team members based on their level of enthusiasm and skill level to identify a customized coaching plan.

While you may believe that everyone will do exactly what you expect of them, that usually does not happen, and having that expectation can lead to all parties feeling frustrated and unaccomplished. Individuals with high skill levels and low motivation do not need more training, they need to be motivated. The opposite applies for those with

low skill levels who are highly enthusiastic. Are they being closely instructed to harness their enthusiasm, or are they bouncing from project to project with high energy, not actually learning?

Challenge employees to develop a specific coaching plan for one of their subordinates. Taking this to the next level, challenge them to plot their entire team and department to see if they have too many people in one quadrant. Also, just because someone lands in the Trust quadrant does not mean you should leave that person alone. While you should not micromanage that person, there is an opportunity to have him or her lead a significant project or help coach others.



Teamwork

Also consider how members of the team interact with each other. The team psychology goes through four distinct phases, which are crucial for effective performance and successful outcomes. You must understand that conflict is normal, and there is opportunity and peril at every stage.

The four elements:

1. Forming — the honeymoon period
2. Storming — the power struggle
3. Norming — working through the frustrations
4. Performing — settled into high performance mode

Almost all groups go through these stages, and understanding them is a critical part of becoming successful in a team or leadership environment. If your team is not getting through one of the phases, then intervention is needed to get them through. This might include flushing out the key issue no one wants to deal with, or removing or adding a team member.

Asking why

Well-functioning teams at the performing stage in the evolution are generally unsuccessful in solving an issue facing their organization. This stems from treating only the symptoms of the problem rather than the root cause.

When a team is beginning to tackle an issue, it is valuable to ask a series of “why” questions, typically five times until the root cause of a problem is identified. For example, if sales are declining and the sales team is faced with the question, “Why are our sales droppings?” they may find that the salespeople do not know how to sell. When asked “why?” again, they may reply, “They have not been trained properly.”

Typically, short-sighted leaders will then order a sales training initiative to be implemented immediately for all sales personnel, which can be an expensive and time-consuming process.

However, if they took the next step and asked, “Why haven’t our salespeople been trained properly?” and the answer was, “They don’t stay long enough to be trained,” then the questions continue. “Why don’t they stay long enough to be trained?” They find better jobs. “Why do they look for better jobs?” We don’t challenge them enough.

By going through the series of why questions (sometime it might take seven or eight questions), your are able to narrow down to the root cause of the issue, improving the team’s chances of success as it is actually tacking the true problem.

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