

A Good Team Needs a Good Leader

If you want to have successful teams in your organization, make sure you have successful leaders. What do I mean by this you ask? The way a team is led will have a major impact on the success or otherwise of the team. In fact when I asked team members from within a large financial institution what they wanted from a team leader they identified the following values they would like their leader to hold.

- Trust
- A commitment to their staff as well as the task
- The willingness to support and serve the team
- Inspirational leadership, combined with energy, enthusiasm and appropriate expertise
- The guts to take responsibility rather than pass the buck
- The glue to make the team come together and operate as a team
- A willingness to have fun!

I'll explain each of these in more detail.

Trust

Team members want to trust and be trusted. Team members felt it was important to be able to trust their team leader to actually do what they said they were going to do. Of course this works both ways, team members also want to be trusted to uphold their part of the bargain and deliver the goods when asked to do so. Trust is the outcome of kept promises and is something that is earned not bought or obtained easily. Trust was the number one issue raised by team members.

A Commitment to Their Staff As Well As the Task

Following on from the issue of trust most team members were more concerned about relationships within the team before they were concerned about the tasks the team was responsible for. Feeling valued and part of the team is an important component and allowed the team member to contribute as a valued individual.

A switched on team leader will spend time supporting their staff and build a commitment to the team through this support. The team leader must never lose sight of the task, but must also never lose sight of the value of the individuals within the team.

The Willingness to Support and Serve the Team

Team members want strong leadership, people who are willing to lead from the front, take responsibility and make the right decisions. Having said that, the overwhelming response to my survey in the financial institution was also that staff want a leader who is willing to lead from behind. By this I mean a leader who serves the team members, to enable them to get their job done and achieve within the constraints of the organisation.

This can sometimes be a delicate balancing act between getting the job done and catering to the needs of the individuals within the team. A leader who supports their staff by allocating appropriate resources or cutting red tape to achieve an outcome is highly valued by the team. This may at times be at odds with the organisational culture but again brings forward positive results in terms of productivity and loyalty.

Inspirational Leadership, Combined With Energy, Enthusiasm and Appropriate Expertise

Team members want to be inspired and have a leader who takes them to the next level. They want to be motivated and work with a leader who has energy for the task and the team. They want to work with a leader who can do this and has the appropriate knowledge about the task at hand to lead the team to where they want to go.

People recognise that not every leader has all the answers, but they want to know the leader is real and can draw on the knowledge and experience of the other people around them in the team.

The Guts to Take Responsibility Rather Than Pass The Buck

Teams and leaders are often put under a lot of pressure to achieve or perform in organisations. Team members want a leader who will take responsibility and work to quickly fix problems if and when they arise. This process must be one where the team grows as a result of the leader's actions. This means the leader may have to admit the issue was their fault or a result of their actions.

This is not about finding a scape goat, it is simply about taking responsibility. Team members value leaders who are willing to admit they made a mistake and support them through the fallout from that mistake.

The Glue to Make the Team Come Together and Operate as a Team

A group of workers becomes a team when there is a synergy between the members of the group. Team members want to feel part of that group and be welcomed by the leader and others in the group as an equal member of the team. The team leader may have to experiment with different styles of leadership to bring the team together. Recognising the strengths and weaknesses of team members, establishing accountability and clear roles are important steps in creating this synergy among team members.

A good team leader will recognise the need to adapt his or her style to fit the needs of the group.

A Willingness to Have Fun

Finally, the team members I surveyed unanimously wanted to have fun at work. Comments abounded about the best team leader was the one who made coming to work fun and working never seemed like a chore because it was so enjoyable. Fun is compulsory in successful teams!

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