

LEADERSHIP

There is no getting away from the fact that leadership really is critical to the success of any business

While each business and situation is different, requiring different approaches, there are some fundamentals that can be found imbedded within the behaviours of all good leaders.

Effective leadership and the creation of effective teams are based on great communication. Great communication does not need to be extensive, but it does need to be regular and it also needs to be clear. So if you are short of time, it is about regular, high quality touch points with your staff rather than a marathon effort every three months. Furthermore as part of these communications you need to clearly articulate and mirror in your own behaviours the vision and values of the organisation.

Another foundation of effective leadership is the need for flexibility. A good leader will always adjust their leadership style to meet the needs of the industry, the business, the team and perhaps the most importantly the individual they are dealing with at the time. While directive leadership may be suitable when dealing with an inexperienced and disengaged staff member, it will be seen as overkill and 'micro-managing' if used with an experienced and engaged one. You have to be prepared to adjust your style to meet the needs of each specific situation.

Company Z

Company Z was struggling to deal with a poorly performing team and an unimpressive bottom line. While the GM was a charismatic individual, there were relationship issues between her and the team.

Once of the first things to action was getting the GM to sit a 360° leadership behaviour profile, whereby she assessed her own leadership behaviours in comparison to how her team rated her. The gap between self and team perception was significant and came as a bit of a shock to our gregarious GM. As you might imagine, she initially reacted defensively, however, to her credit, she quickly saw this as an opportunity to improve relations within the team and the performance of the business overall.

Using the report generated from the 360° assessment as the basis, we then created an action plan and identified the priority areas she needed to work on in developing her effectiveness as a leader. This involved setting specific homework tasks that required her to challenge the weak areas in her approach to leadership.

Six months later the 360° assessment was repeated and we conducted a gap analysis of the results. Pleasingly, the GM now displayed much greater self-awareness, so her self-score aligned much more closely to the team score she received. Furthermore, her efforts to improve had seen a strong upward trend in the scores given by the team as well.

Now it should not come as a surprise to anyone that also around this time, the overall performance of the business had started to improve significantly, with monthly targets not just being regularly met for the first time, but also exceeded! There really is little wonder that top CEOs can command such hefty remuneration in the world's largest businesses in terms of the impact they can have on performance.

However, it is important not to look at things in isolation and to recognise that along with leadership coaching, the company also needed to set up a robust platform for the management of all HR issues. This included communicating the business vision and values to the team, as well as putting in place structures that encouraged both employee engagement and improved performance.

Company Y

Company Y had the express desire to enhance the leadership capability of their newly appointed General Manager who was stepping into a void created by the current owner taking a step back. The new GM was an existing employee. While the GM showed excellent analytical ability and was a friendly person, he did have a history of rubbing people up the wrong way and being overly directive in his approach to dealing with subordinates. There were some real concerns from some individual within the team that the new appointment might result in micro-management and conflict.

However, these predications were well and truly avoided by providing the new GM with regular leadership coaching. This not only helped him understand his own tendencies in terms of leadership style but also the style preferred by his individual team members and the need to use different leadership styles within different situations. As part of this coaching we also covered more general topics such as managing performance, emotional intelligence and dealing with conflict.

The GM proved to be an outstanding student and really took on board the coaching material and immediately started to model excellent leadership behaviours within the workplace.

Pretty quickly the team relaxed, realising that the GM was not going to be their worst nightmare and that there were actually some real benefits to having him in the position. He approached business decisions and dealt with people in a very logical and considered manner and while he had to make some tough decisions they were always in the businesses best interest and this was recognised by all involved. This particular GM is rapidly becoming a poster child for the concept that leaders are made, not just born.

Company X

Leadership within Company X is a slightly different scenario to that of Company Y or Z above. This was not a case of fixing issues that had already emerged or developing the skills of a newly appointed leader but to develop the leadership skills of an individual showing the potential to step up into a leadership position.

The impetus for this was the fact that succession planning revealed the current GM's timeframe for retirement. While this was not in the near future, the industry that Company X operates within means that

someone would be unlikely to walk in off the street and have the skills required for the role.

The employee in question (let's call him Murray) was performing very effectively within his role, however he did appear to be cruising a little and while he appeared to easily have many of the capabilities of taking over the GM role, there were some question marks over his ability to "lead" the team.

The decision was then made to offer leadership development to Murray, to help him grow and also to assess his leadership capability. The process involved Murray undertaking a Team Member 360° profile assessment that assessed his leadership potential as perceived by himself and the team he worked alongside. As with the GM of Company Z this involved setting an action plan with Murray identifying areas he particularly needed to work on developing. Following on from this, Murray is now receiving monthly coaching from both the current GM and mentor from the Board to help him develop well-rounded leadership capability.

Just how much Murray develops his leadership capability is really up to him at this point in time and his willingness to change. However, Company X can be confident that by engaging Murray in this process they are doing the right thing by both the company in terms of finding out the capability of a highly talented individual and by Murray in terms of developing him to their best ability.

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