Meeting organization goals is a top priority for leaders today. These goals include increasing business efficiency, creating competitive advantage, improving internal customer satisfaction, controlling costs and leveraging intellectual assets. The first question asked is “How” can this be accomplished. Many organizations have struggled with this answer and very few have found an answer that is successful.

For those organizations that have been successful, it all started from the bottom up, developing a strong team to develop and implement a solution that will meet the organizations goals. These unique, highly productive teams are now commonly referred to as “High Performance Teams” and are essential for meeting critical organization goals.

Therefore, building high performance teams is a top priority for many leaders. The benefits and value produced by these teams are very clear and being viewed as essential tools in their business strategy.

High Performance Teams produce the following benefits.

1. Increased productivity
2. Improved customer service
3. Ability to do more with less
4. Increased innovation
5. Ability to quickly adapt to change
6. Ability to solve difficult, critical problems

Team Essentials – The Ingredients

So where do we begin? Like a great chef making the perfect soufflé, we must follow a recipe that will deliver the best possible outcome. This recipe includes the ingredients, preparation and the process for making the perfect soufflé. If you forget an ingredient, add too much, eliminate
preparation steps, or change the process you will not end up with the results you are expecting. For leaders, this translates into ineffective teams that can not meet critical business goals.

For today, let’s look at the ingredients necessary for building a high performance team.

**Trust**

Trust in your team, their trust in you and the trust between the team members is the core ingredient that holds everything together. You develop trust by setting guidelines for team behavior and decision making, where the people have certain freedoms to make decisions, take risks and speak their minds. They will also have certain obligations to always speak the truth, work with other teams, be accountable for decisions and actions and to learn from their mistakes.

Leaders who have rules and policies for everything create an environment of bureaucracy and stifle team performance. The environment is orderly and structured, but leaves little room for team members to use their own judgment, take ownership or be motivated to complete tasks quickly. On the other hand, leaders who have no guidelines for the team run the risk of leading a team in chaos. Neither of these work.

Implementing guidelines where people are trusted, promotes an environment where team members will give their best, produce more and with improved quality.

**Vision**

High performance teams share and support a “Vision” of what the team will accomplish. Team members are highly focused on meeting their goals and objectives. Leaders work with the team to develop a vision that brings real meaning to the work that is being performed. The vision defines the future state and is clear, defined and concrete. The team needs a winning, inspirational vision that will motivate them to go above and beyond when the effort is required. Let's look at a few great vision statements: Rid the world of AIDS, Triple the productivity of every manufacturing plant, or Increase customer satisfaction to 100%.

**Optimism**

The next key ingredient is “Optimism”. High performance team members have dreams for achievement. These dreams are fueled by the leaders optimism. It is true that team members will flourish when they have hope and they will give up when they don’t. High performing team members thrive on accomplishment and recognition they get when working through difficult problems and persevering. This perseverance requires optimism.

The responsibility of a leader in an optimistic environment is to be realistic and optimistic at the same time. Realism is important because it acknowledges the facts of the situation no matter how unpleasant they are. An optimistic environment dictates that given the facts of the situation, the team will continue to work toward their goals. When teams lose optimism, it is the responsibility of the leader to coach the team to get them back on track. Together the team acknowledges the situation and begins to generate ideas for solving the current problem.
Enjoyment

A leader must make the environment enjoyable to work in. Team members perform at their peak when they enjoy what they do and with whom they do it with. Enjoyment doesn’t mean you play cards all day long. Real enjoyment comes when the leader and team are deeply involved in working a critical problem and they persevere together as a complete unit.

The leader sets the tone for the team. Setting the tone for an enjoyable work environment is accomplished by showing that you enjoy your job, that you like the people you work with and that you appreciate their hard work. Thank team members for working through the weekend. Let them take a long lunch if they worked 12 hours the previous day. Praise them for new ideas. Never blame team members for mistakes, laugh and learn from the mistakes. Keep the team focused on winning instead of failing.

Empowerment

High performance team members are self directed. When empowered to accomplish a goal, these team members take ownership of their responsibilities and are committed to succeed. Leaders of high performance teams work to focus the “Team” on “What” needs to be achieved. The “What” is defined as the vision, goals, objectives and milestones for the team. The “How” work is to be accomplished must remain the sole responsibility of the team. When leaders start telling teams how the work is to be done, the team becomes de-motivated and performance drops dramatically.

Opportunity

The final ingredient for a high performance team is developing an environment where team members can grow. Top performers need to learn new skills and be permitted to develop and implement new ideas to work at their peak. Creating an environment where team members can experience different roles, cross train, work with diverse teams and learn new specialties will develop team members who are more self assured, who listen, and are more open to new ideas. This strategy of continuous learning will keep the team energized and motivated to perform at the highest levels.

A Final Word

As a leader, you have the power to influence the people and performance of the team. If you truly believe in creating an environment where Trust, Vision, Optimism, Enjoyment, Empowerment and Opportunity are encouraged, then you will build a solid, sustainable and high performing team.
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