



LEADERSHIP ACUMEN Issue 9

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Are Your Staff as Committed to Results as You?

Introduction:

Have you ever wondered if your employees are as committed to achieving the goals and results set for this year as you are? You come in early, work late, and put in high intensity days to achieve corporate goals. Yet, as you observe the work ethic of your employees, you wonder if they share the same commitment to success.

If you are like most senior leaders, this is a common scenario. What you do next and how you handle yourself can make a huge difference in your effectiveness as a leader.

Energize the System:

Let's be frank. Today's business environment is very challenging. The demand for achieving results – whether you are leading a business, a government department, or a not-for-profit organization – is intense. As a senior leader, the Board plus other senior leaders and the larger community, rely on you to achieve the results outlined in the plan no matter what the changing conditions around you. This requires sustained intensity as well as creativity and adaptability as you move forward.

However, chances are you can't achieve all the results by yourself. That's why you are a senior leader of a larger group of people, resources and often external suppliers/partners. A significant expectation from everyone in the system/network that you lead is that you will 'energize' all the elements. This includes motivation, clarity of priorities, roles and context, mobilization of resources required, and reduction or elimination of barriers.

Some leaders energize their system through fear. Others energize the system by directing everything – telling people what to do. Still others essentially start little fires of motivation across the system, and then fan the flames of empowerment and creativity – releasing the natural energies throughout.

Fear certainly gets peoples' attention. And as everyone has experienced, stimulates the 'fight & flight' response: narrowing of focus, heightened attentiveness, and increased strength/effort. Unfortunately, the fear approach is short lived. Human beings can not physically or emotionally sustain this kind energy. Leaders who rely on fear to achieve results often create cycles: fear – back off – more fear – back off - etc. Companies forced to repeatedly downsize and cut operations as a result of a significant loss of business (i.e. airlines, high tech firms, under-funded social agencies) have been dealing with this reality for some time now. These continuous fear-based energy cycles have now resulted in an exhausted, weary, and almost hope-less workforce. In addition to results risks, real side-effects such as safety issues are potential risks too. These are dangerous circumstances for leaders trying to achieve results for the longer term.

Leaders who try to **direct everything** in today's environment must rely on the transference of their own personal energy to the others in the network. Perhaps we adopt this style because of our own anxieties or pressures from above, and/or we feel we can't trust others to make decisions or react the way we would. So, we remove this risk and uncertainty by resorting to a very directive and delegating style. (Delegating would be preferable to directing, though often we witness poorly enunciated delegation leading to confusion and assumptions.)

While this approach is less draining/ de-motivating to employees than the fear-based approach, it is incredibly draining to you as the leader. Employees and suppliers wait to be told what to do, then do what they are told. Over time, their sense of responsibility, self-motivation and initiative-taking can atrophy. This requires more time, attention, and energy from the leader. While initially fast and efficient to get started and see results, the network's sustainability and ingenuity becomes almost entirely reliant on the leader. As your own energy and creativity depletes, so does the capacity of the network to achieve results. The leader risks burn-out and replacement.

Many organizations facing turn-around challenges, new business unit start-ups, mergers, or cases where the Boards are demanding strong personal and short-cycle accountabilities from senior leaders, often default into this style. While they might talk the talk of 'empowerment' or 'team', they actually walk something less effective.

A better way to energize a network is to release the stored or natural energies contained within. Of course, we see this in nature, in our bio-systems. And sometimes less obvious, we fail to recognize that our organizations are bio-systems too. So, why not use the processes of **empowerment and inner motivation** to get people enthused by the challenge(s) and their personal abilities to make a difference?

Unfortunately, **empowering leadership** requires an up-front investment of time and energy before the results are obvious. This is the risk that often turns even the most well-meaning leader back to one of the other styles during times of intense challenge. However, if you can fight through these risks and indeed make the effort to: clarify goals, discuss/examine the directions and values of the organization, help members of the team to self-define roles, inter-connections, accountabilities and reflect on the experience they can draw upon to exert good judgment or adapt processes in the leader's absence, then a whole collection of little fires get ignited. With the leader's continued coaching, re-framing of context and priorities, and ongoing encouragement, the network's overall energy grows, its capacity for innovation and adaptability multiplies, and its performance is much more sustainable – at even higher levels. This also leaves some time and energy with the leader to step out of the tactical and become more strategic.

This kind of leadership is also appropriate in situations of crumbling market share, depressed share-price, turn around, growth/expansion, or start-up situations.

Empowerment vs. Delegation vs. Directing:

| | EMPOWERMENT | DELEGATION | DIRECTING |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Control | Self-control Self-directed employees | Shared leader- 'EE Self control of 'EE within parameters of task established by manager | Leader-centric Employee works through check-list of actions/activities from leader |
| Employee's Engagement | Heart | Mind | External threats/ promises |
| Guideposts | Org. Vision Clearly enunciated goals and measures Values/Principles Personal standards of excellence and contribution | Task Definition: - Financial - Quality - Deadline - Std. practices | Action Checklists; - Items done - Timelines met - Frequency of activities - Minimum stds. |

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Success Measures | Advancement toward corporate/ community goals Attainment of objectives Good judgment exerted by employees | Tasks achieved Personal abilities expressed within acceptable parameters | Completed actions Minimum compliance issues |
| Potential/ Sustainability | Unlimited | Limited by Leader's ability to delegate effectively/ regularly Limited by Leader's energy level | Narrowed by lists Minimum compliance does not ensure sustainability |

Why Not Ask Your People?

So, you are still wondering about your staff's commitment level. Why not ask them?!

Most employees come to work each day wanting to do a good job and make a difference. Sometimes however, when corporate goals are not clear, and what is expected of each employee is not well defined, they lose motivation, creativity and energy. Fear for their job or failure to please the boss can also immobilize them at the very time you need all their energy.

Asking the question is not without its risks. They may actually tell you things you weren't expecting, including pointing to lack of clarity, mixed messages, or that you're actually 'directing' while talking about team and empowerment.

Be courageous! If you are honestly trying to do the best for the organization and your people, they will likely be quite forgiving, and indeed welcoming of the opportunity to chat. You may have some of your flaws pointed out too. But don't worry; you can work on fixing them together! An open, honest dialogue, with good listening and avoidance of defensiveness, and with a focus on the Vision, Values and clear objectives for performance will work wonders to energize the network! This is the first step towards a more empowering and sustainable delivery of results too.

Be sure to talk about the importance of the things your team is working on in the bigger picture of the organization's overall goals, and review each person's role within the team. Don't forget to celebrate the successes and innovations along the way, and to recognize both individual and team effort. These 'little things' can be BIG motivators, and they can go a long way towards ensuring your organization achieves your results! Chances are that your staff really wants to be committed and engaged in important and meaningful work. As a senior leader, it is up to you to unleash their energy, creativity, and good judgment to help attain those results.

Lead on!

Exploring The Web!

This month, the connections take you to sites with more perspectives on performance, directing, delegating and empowerment. Add some 'grist' for your leadership mill...

<http://prepareinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/e-leadershipcultorculture.pdf>

Leadership Cults and Cultures

<http://ceres.ca.gov/tcsf/pathways/chapter12.html#leaders>

The Impact of Narcissism on Leadership & Sustainability, by Bruce Gregory.

<http://managementthroughleadership.com/Articles/delegation.htm>
The Challenge of Leadership Effectiveness: Delegation

http://brookmanville.com/publications/Company_of_Citizens_HBR.pdf
Beyond Empowerment: Building a Company of Citizens – Brook Manville, Harvard Business Review

<http://ezinearticles.com/?Delegation-Versus-Empowerment&id=2029131>
Delegation vs. Empowerment. Ezine @rticles

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