Creating Dynamic Leadership

In order to create a dynamic high performance team culture, leaders need to develop authentic relationships where healthy debate is encouraged.
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Introduction

Going back 20-30 years in the workplace employers valued loyalty. Employees demonstrated loyalty through tenure and were rewarded, and often promoted, based on the length of time they had worked for an organisation. Today - with offshoring, outsourcing, automating and optimisation - loyalty is no longer achieved in the same way. In fact, if you are in the same role or organisation for too long it could be detrimental to your career - you could be viewed as ‘dead-wood’.

Loyalty, in the past, was something that employees could strive to achieve, it gave them a sense of belonging and made them feel secure in their employment. So take tenure away and what are you left with? I still see long-standing employees disappointed when an organisation is unable to reciprocate their loyalty of service and their role is made redundant.

“Loyalty may not be dead, but is just playing out differently in the workplace” ~ Phyllis Korkki

Most employees now understand that:

- Rewards are based on performance;
- Promotions are based on suitability; and,
- Job security is no longer a realistic expectation.

If organisations are going to survive in the future, they need to replace the ‘void’ that loyalty has left with something that makes staff feel valued and appreciated. This begins with the ‘soft skills’ that many managers pay lip service. There are still too many managers who believe that creating a supportive, interpersonal and collaborative culture for their teams is secondary to delivering profits and increasing productivity.
The big challenges that prevent dynamic teams

The three major challenges that are standing in the way of leaders building dynamic teams are:

1. *People don’t like being told what to do*…yet many managers continue to find this an acceptable way to run their business. Perhaps because this was how they were treated earlier in their career and is the only way they know how to manage a team.

Or perhaps they are worried that no one can do the job as well as they can and micro-manager their staff to retain control.

Whatever the reason, treating everyone who works for you the same, according to Michael Theriault, is “off the rack” management. He believes in the need to customise your management approach to suit the individual.

2. *Managers are constantly balancing* the need to push their staff to deliver more and more with reducing staff absenteeism associated with ‘burnout’. One article suggests that absenteeism is caused by a variety of factors including:

   - **Burnout, stress and low morale** - Heavy workloads, stressful meetings/presentations and feelings of being unappreciated can cause employees to avoid going into work.
   - **Disengagement** - Employees who are not committed to their jobs, coworkers and/or the company are more likely to miss work simply because they have no motivation to go.

It is a real problem with absenteeism costing Australian companies millions of dollars each year in lost productivity and wages. And, if not managed, can lead to an increase in employees falling ill with the pressure of extra duties and responsibilities to fill in for absent employees.
It can become a cycle that is hard to break and result in long-term impacts on the culture of a team.

3. People don’t feel valued...which ties into the earlier point around loyalty. They want to know the work they do is making a difference to someone, somewhere. For some, they want to feel like they’re contributing: that they’re using their wisdom and knowledge to improve the way things are done; that someone thinks they’re capable of more. In the absence of feeling valued people can disengage and stay; or move onto something more fulfilling.

“You don’t build a business – you build people – and then people build the business.”

~ Zig Ziglar
The value of Relationships, Respect & Results

In the book “The Power of Small”, Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval talk about how “our smallest actions and gestures often have an outsized impact on our biggest goals”. They believe it’s often the baby steps that put us on the path to delivering a true competitive advantage.

The below model demonstrates how effective a team is in delivering sustainable results incrementally over time when the focus of their leader is around the three R’s...Relationships, Respect & Results!

Managers that focus on achieving results, at any cost, are only likely to succeed in short bursts. They devote a lot of time and energy in making sure employees understand what is expected and often become frustrated with inconsistent results. This can lead to a command and control management style and be seen as intimidating to their team which further impacts the consistency of their results.
“When we “cut the small talk” with others, we drive a wedge between human interactions. Small talk is the social lubricant that brings people together, regardless of their differences. And we can profit from the experience in surprising ways”.

~ Bernardo Carducci

Results focused managers are likened to wearing running shoes without socks. They’re quicker to put on and get moving, and work well in the short term, but over a longer period they end up giving you blisters and making your feet smell. In general, they have an ‘Erratic Leadership Style’ and become exhausted over time.

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<tr>
<th>Behaviours</th>
<th>Leadership Style</th>
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It’s fair to say that some leaders struggle when trying to strike the right balance between building relationships and getting down to business as explained in an article on culture. It’s also fair to say that the leaders who succeed longer term are those that persist in getting it right!
They see work as a place where an individual comes to perform an activity and is paid accordingly. They don’t believe work is a place where friends are made and will often refrain from finding out too much about their team for fear of crossing the imaginary “manager/friend” line.

On the other hand, leaders who focus on developing relationships and respect with their staff may take a little longer to see a big improvement in results (as seen with the blue line in the above diagram). They deliver consistently and without a great amount of effort involved once a strong team culture is established. They take the time to put their socks on before their shoes. They build a solid foundation around ‘trust’ which allows everyone to feel like they’re being heard and understand the bigger picture and how what they need to do to succeed.

These ‘dynamic’ leaders understand that “when you do nothing, you are doing something. You are closing the door to an opportunity.” Every interaction they have should be viewed as a door that has the potential to lead them to a different place” (The Power of Small).
Key elements for creating a dynamic high performance team culture

“The only way on earth to influence the other fellow is to talk about what he wants and show him how to get it.” ~ Dale Carnegie

By focusing first on building Relationships and then gaining Respect we are able to deliver sustainable Results over time!

RELATIONSHIPS FIRST...

When a leader develops authentic relationships with their staff they gain a greater insight into what motivates and what demotivates them. They also become aware of individual values and understand the need to adjust their style to suit the situation.
“Trust is like the air we breathe. When it's present, nobody really notices. But when it's absent, everybody notices.”

~ Warren Buffet

More importantly, when relationships are formed, a level of trust is established which allows individuals to be themselves and experience the benefits of vulnerability.

As this HBR article suggests, “to work out differences and get things done, people in organizations need to work together. To foster this kind of collaboration, managers need to develop personal relationships — and some amount of trust — with potential partners. Without this foundation, negotiations often become adversarial; parties question each other’s motives and neither side truly listens to the other”.

“The bottom-line is that whether you are the president of the United States or a mid-level manager, it’s worthwhile to be strategic and proactive about building relationships.”

THEN RESPECT...

When a leader builds authentic relationships with their staff and holds a level of trust they can then work on gaining the respect of their team. One of the key elements in earning respect is to avoid taking the path of least resistance, particularly if it’s not in the best interest of the teams longer term objectives.

A good leader knows when to challenge a situation and when to let things slide. They don’t fight for the sake of it, they consider both short-term and long-term impacts and make a decision from a strategic perspective (not an
emotional one). A this HBR article puts it...“Let’s be clear—alignment is important. But the purpose of alignment is not harmonious agreement. It is to sustain an organisation’s ability to fight for what really matters, and to pull everyone together again once the fight is resolved”.

Think about some of the leaders you’ve experienced. Do you enjoy working with the one’s who insist on maintaining harmony or those who do what is best for the business?

Another aspect of ‘respect’ is letting everyone be heard. No one respects a leader who only ever gives their opinion and shuts others down the minute they question their decision.

A great leader will have a clear understanding of “what” needs to be achieved and be open to “how” it is achieved. They will let their staff do 80% of the talking when discussing strategy and ask questions to guide them in the right direction. By doing this, staff feel like they’ve been heard and played an active role in the solution.

AND FINALLY RESULTS...

When relationships and respect are achieved it is only then that we should shift the focus to results - and in fact we shouldn’t even need to ‘shift’ our focus - by building solid foundations, the results will deliver themselves. At the ‘results’ stages the focus moves to accountability of both oneself and of others.
A Green Peak Partners Study shows that “conventional wisdom is wrong and that leaders who possess strong soft skills perform better at driving hard results”.
They also found that executives who are good “people managers” (i.e. possess strong core leadership skills), produce better strategic and financial performance as well”.
In other words, soft values drive hard results. Leaders who are self aware, able to hold teams accountable, and who can execute tough decisions in an inspiring -- not abusive -- manner. Also, leaders who encourage rather than snuff out productive conflict and the challenging of ideas - even their own.

Arnold Glasow said, “a good leader takes a little more than his share of the blame, a little less than his share of the credit. A great leader graciously accepts her fair share of the responsibility when things go wrong. This doesn’t mean allowing yourself to become a scapegoat; it does mean claiming your mistakes as your own.”

In order to create a team, that delivers sustainable results, leaders need to spend more time guiding their teams and less time doing the work. In his book, Do Nothing: How to Stop Over Managing and Become a Great Leader, J. Keith Murnighan stresses the importance of delegating tasks to competent staff. He writes, “The key insight here is simple: you will be a more effective leader if, rather than doing the work yourself, you let other people do it. In other words, stop working and start leading.”
Where to from here?

To learn more about how you Create Dynamic Leadership speak with Shelley Flett.

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“You can gain more control over your life by paying closer attention to the little things”

~ Emily Dickinson
About the author

Shelley Flett has over a decade of experience in corporate leadership with exposure to multiple businesses within the finance industry. She is a passionate individual with a keen focus on assisting others to transition from a ‘manager’ - who tells - to a ‘leader’ - who shows.

Shelley strongly believes that soft skills and emotional intelligence will be the key to organisations thriving in the future. She is a Leadership Coach, Trainer, Facilitator, Mentor and Speaker who ignites vision and purpose in those she works with.
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