

Fuel the Ambition of Great Leadership





In Our View...

Creating a high trust, high performance culture demands that every employee know with absolute certainty they can rely on every other person around them – at all levels. It means everyone must be committed to performing at a high level and to helping their peers do the same. It requires leaders to lead with trust and to follow through on promises. Leaders must communicate honestly and frequently. They must help employees see the meaning behind their work and that they matter on a personal level. They must create a safe environment for people to speak up and be themselves.

Conversely, a lack of focus, poor accountability, unclear roles, poor communication and tolerating poor results slowly kills both performance and progress. While leaders can easily adjust the business levers of process and profit, optimizing the people lever is much harder, even though it provides the most beneficial results long term.

When we become unsure, we operate from our survival brain. This isn't a thinking brain, but one that acts subconsciously based on patterns, habits and biases. It leads us to make decisions based on fear and a limited perspective on what's available to us. In a workplace environment, when people operate from the survival brain, they pay lip service to new initiatives, become uncooperative, distrustful and waste time working on the wrong tasks. Our brain likes to feel safe because that is when it operates at a more resourceful level. This requires leaders to create an environment in which employees feel able to express their opinions, share ideas and information, and be accountable and excited about the future. It's where they trust that they are safe to be themselves.

Unfortunately, as leaders, we often inadvertently send employees into the part of their brain that produces suboptimal performance. There are some common challenges that silently degrade trust and performance which we have shared on the following pages.

Avoid the Perils of Foggy Focus

In today's fast moving environment, leaders often see "being busy" as a sign of success and a hallmark of leadership. Unfortunately, we aren't effective when we are really busy. Prioritizing our time to work on the areas with the biggest impact is crucial, whether that's our products, our people or our customers.

If we easily get sidetracked by the most demanding drama, we spread ourselves too thinly and perform tasks at an average level, and that has two major impacts.



It Affect Strategy

Leaders that lurch from one crisis to another, immersed in the day-to-day, are at risk of making strategy decisions that are ineffectual and sometimes just plain wrong. The danger is that employees feel neglected and are more likely to provide filtered information for fear of overwhelming you. Being able to course correct and make reality based decisions is difficult when you're not aware of what is going on in the marketplace, or even with your own employees.

Employees Start to Distrust their Leader

They complain that the leader doesn't listen to them in meetings or take action on their suggestions. Some employees may even feel that their boss is too disorganized to find the time to help them, which reflects poorly on their perception of the leader's capability.

One of the distinguishing features of successful leaders is their laser-like focus when enacting their strategies and empowering those around them. They do this by being completely present at meetings, asking questions that enhance their employees' abilities to do and think more, delegating low-value tasks and ensuring they work on activities of the highest priority. They don't waste time being perfect. They understand perfectionism kills action and momentum.

Beware the Cost of Lack of Clarity

Communication in business is really about reducing anxiety and ambiguity. When communication is vague, and assumes people are mind readers, employees become fearful. Leaders that excel at communication spend a lot of time thinking about what they believe is truly important for their organization. Clarity plus action equals speed.

According to Christine Comaford, author of *Smart Tribes*, leaders must be clear in their:

Words

Communication is often misunderstood because of too many assumptions, such as what people know, how work should be done, or even a discussion that never actually took place. Explicit requests must be given to people so they know what is required and are able to stay in a positive and resourceful brain state.

Vision, Mission and Values

In today's rapidly changing world, employees look to their leaders to show them the way forward. They are drowning in information, but are crying out for wisdom. They want leaders who have a vision, can paint a vivid picture of the future and can help them see how to get there. Vision involves people and encourages commitment. When employees don't understand how strategy relates to them personally it becomes meaningless and they struggle to commit.

Intentions and Energy

One of the most powerful human drives is to live in alignment with who we believe we are and who we want to be. When our words and actions don't match, it creates an integrity gap. The bigger the discrepancy, the more likely you might act in ways that go against what you're trying to achieve. People need to be able to read you, and see consistency in your behaviours, in order to feel comfortable around you. Being congruent makes it much easier to influence others to do the right thing. It's common for leaders to overrate the ways in which their employees or customers see them, and the dangerous fallout is that employees will subconsciously distrust their intentions.



Demand Accountability Always



The essence of trust in a workplace environment is that everyone is able to rely on each other to make good on their promises. Leaders can depend upon their subordinates, marketing can rely on manufacturing, and so on.

Research by Harvard Business Review reported that only 9% of managers feel they can rely on cross-functional colleagues all of the time, and only 50% say they can rely on them most of the time. Managers also say they are three times more likely to miss performance commitments because of insufficient support from other units than because of their own team's failure to deliver.

To engender a culture of accountability, leaders need to role model this important competency by honouring all requests and promises. This can be difficult, of course, because it takes time, commitment and discipline. More importantly, leaders (and organizations) must demand accountability by putting in processes in areas where poor performance can no longer be tolerated.

This includes:

- Evaluating every project (what was good/bad and what can be improved)
- Providing each individual with clear goals and clear rewards/consequences
- Tracking results/deadlines/accountabilities weekly
- Articulating clear action steps at the end of meetings

Truly Connect & Communicate



Technology changes and disruption have led to a revolution in how we interact. Leaders who can build rapport and influence not only bring their best self to work, but also multiply the talents of their team members. They put them into a smart brain state.

Yet, how we currently engage in relationships is still quite unevolved. We disconnect, we disengage, we distance ourselves. When we get insanely busy, we tend to lock ourselves away (just when we need people to help us), or we see our colleagues as rivals. Many of us still default into an “I’m right – you’re wrong” mentality, or constantly compare ourselves to others, creating distrust and disrespect. It’s time for us to shift how we relate to each other and how we work together. We need to learn how to open up conversations, to discover where we are philosophically aligned and what’s important to us, so we can collaborate at a higher level.

If you are leading, you are managing a series of relationships. When a leader puts the interests and well-being of their employees above their own, they become a trusted leader, one who is followed in a heartbeat, during bad and good times. Real power comes not from knowledge, but from networks. Working with others enables you to get more done than you are able to do alone (no matter how brilliant you are).

Individuals differ in their propensity to trust others. Sophisticated managers understand that people are different and take the time to understand how to build trust with each individual. This ensures they respect and empower each employee, thereby reducing challenging behaviours and low engagement. It also improves connection and psychological safety which, in turn, reduces fear.

A better, deeper understanding of trust, and the trust framework, enables leaders to more efficiently and strategically build trust with those around them. It allows them to assist others in getting the results and experiences they want, and ensures they are operating in a more sophisticated and optimal brain state.

Banish Lacklustre, Inconsistent Results



It's not uncommon to find teams or departments that have been underperforming for years, and others working hard to pick up the slack while begrudgingly coming to terms with their feelings of discouragement. If there is one thing that causes distrust in an organization, however, it is the practice of allowing employees to continue working, even though their performance is dragging others down. Often, in the end, the leader becomes the scapegoat because they haven't done anything to remove the offender.

In this environment, you'll find that people aren't working at their full capacity and are often a bit bored and disengaged. Most likely, both their confidence and their ability to see their own potential have been crushed. Yet, introducing the concept of being a high performing team can be unsettling and even scary.

To improve performance, leaders need to increase certainty by focusing team members on the outcomes they want to produce. This moves everyone into a more resourceful and positive brain state. As results start to be achieved, team members become more confident in their abilities. It triggers the reward centre of the brain, where people become more eager to achieve and can start to see a more positive future. It creates a virtuous cycle of goal-kicking.

Business growth requires a level of energy and intention that can cause burn out and exhaustion. Leaders must ensure they manage their own energy, and that of their team members, in order to create sustainable results. In addition, they must stay positive and create an enthusiastic belief in their team when results fail to surpass expectations.

Decide with Speed & Conviction

Legends abound about leaders who always seem to know exactly how to steer their companies to great success. However, high-performing leaders do not necessarily stand out for making great decisions all the time, rather, they stand out for being more decisive. They make decisions earlier, faster, and with greater conviction. They do so consistently, even amid ambiguity and in unfamiliar domains.

Good leaders realize that a wrong decision may be better than no decision at all. Research has shown that people described as “decisive” were twelve times more likely to be high-performing leaders. Interestingly, the executives with the highest IQ scores, those who relish intellectual complexity, sometimes struggle the most with decisiveness. While the quality of their decisions is often good, because of their pursuit of the perfect answer, they can take too long to make choices or set clear priorities - and their teams pay a high price. These smart but slow decision makers become bottlenecks, and their teams either grow frustrated (which can lead to the attrition of valuable talent) or become overcautious themselves, stalling the entire enterprise.



Decisive leaders recognize that they can't wait for perfect information, but they do work actively to solicit multiple points of view, and often poll a relatively small, carefully cultivated “kitchen cabinet” of trusted advisers who can be counted on for unvarnished opinions and sound judgment. Successful leaders also know when not to decide - they are able to pause briefly to consider whether a decision should actually be made lower down in the organization, or if delaying it a week or a month would allow important information to emerge without causing irreparable harm.

Engage for Impact

Once leaders set a clear course for the business, they must get buy-in among their employees and other stakeholders. We have found that strong performers balance keen insight into the priorities of others with an unrelenting focus on delivering business results. They start by developing an astute understanding of their stakeholders' needs and motivations, and then get people on board by driving for performance and aligning them around the goal of value creation.

Leaders who engage stakeholders do not invest their energy into being liked or protecting their teams from painful decisions. In fact, those behaviors are more commonly seen in lower-performing leaders. The skilled leaders gain the support of their colleagues by instilling confidence in their ability to lead the team to success, even if that means making uncomfortable or unpopular moves. These leaders do not shy away from conflict in the pursuit of business goals, in fact, in our analysis, two-thirds of the leaders who excelled at engagement were rated as strong in conflict management. The ability to handle clashing viewpoints also seems to help candidates advance. When we analyzed leaders who'd made it to the top significantly faster than average, one of the qualities that stood out was their willingness to engage in conflict.

When tackling contentious issues, leaders who are good at engagement give everyone a voice, but not a vote. They listen and solicit views, but do not default to consensus-driven decision making. Consensus is too slow, and sometimes leaves you settling for the lowest common denominator. It is better to make a habit of having unstructured meetings, with a cross section of the company's high potentials, before making key decisions. The goal of these meetings is to challenge the thinking and present the leader with new perspectives, rather than create the illusion of democracy.



Adapt Proactively



For evidence of how important it is for businesses and leaders to adjust to a rapidly changing environment, we need look no further than the aftermath of Brexit and the recent U.S. presidential election. Leaders who excel at adapting are 6.7 times more likely to succeed, because it is dealing with situations that are not in the playbook that sets a leader apart. The more senior you are, the more likely you are to face situations in which a playbook simply cannot exist. You'd better be ready to adapt.

Most leaders know they have to divide their attention among short, medium, and long-term perspectives, but the adaptable leaders spend significantly more of their time (as much as 50%) thinking about the long term. Long-term focus helps because it makes leaders more likely to pick up on early signals. Highly adaptable leaders regularly plug into broad information flows - they scan wide networks and diverse sources of data, finding relevance in information that may at first seem unrelated to their businesses. As a result, they sense change earlier and make strategic moves to take advantage of it.

Adaptable leaders also recognize that setbacks are an integral part of changing course, and treat their mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow. Leaders who consider setbacks to be failures have a 50% less chance of thriving. Successful leaders unabashedly offer up matter-of-fact accounts of where and why they came up short, and give specific examples of how they tweaked their approach to do better the next time. Aspiring leaders who demonstrate this kind of attitude (what Stanford's Carol Dweck calls a "Growth Mindset") are more likely to make it to the top of the pyramid.

Steps to Take : Actions to Consider

When you ask any well-regarded, successful CEO what has made their career possible, most will tell you outright it was learning from their mistakes, having a wise mentor, and deliberately building up relationships over many years. We believe leadership is all about relationships, and the best insurance any leader can have to ensure his/her success is building a genuine, diverse and highly-connected network.

The same relationship principles apply within an organization, and with the individuals who make up the day-to-day connections that any organization relies upon to deliver its Value Proposition, drive High Performance and build a Winning Culture.

According to Christine Comaford, author of Smart Tribes, leaders must be clear in their:

Convey Genuine Appreciation

Actively project warmth and high energy. It has been observed that people like you when they feel liked by you. Greet them in a way that shows you are genuinely happy to see them. To demonstrate sincere interest in the other person, think about what they know that you don't. What do you actually want to learn from the interaction? Focus on that, so that they can walk away knowing they added value too.

Listen with Intent

The focus you bring to what's being said in real time makes others feel heard. Being a good listener is about two things: (1) Demonstrating that you've heard exactly what was said by the other person; and (2) encouraging them to continue. This breaks down into what's called "back-channeling" - offering short, enthusiastic responses as the other person talks (i.e. "yeah", "mm-hmm", "totally", "I can see that"), and asking follow-up questions that reference the information you were just given.

Be Humble

What you say, and how you say it, can put others at ease and replace nerves with positive energy - even in tough situations. Acknowledging your own fallibility and human imperfection can go a long way toward making yourself relatable. This is especially true if there is a power dynamic in which someone is asking for your advice, attention or help, and you want to put the other person at ease.

Offer Unvarnished Honesty

There are a lot of reasons why people don't share what they truly think in professional situations - they don't want to tarnish relationships or endure an uncomfortable exchange or risk being disliked. Even if you're one of the "Hunted", it's human nature to avoid these experiences. You can differentiate yourself by being as honest as you can. Just remember to root your honesty in what will actually have utility for the other party. This will set a good tone for all future conversations.

Help Others Alter Their Perspectives

If you are the type of leader who helps others change the angle or the way they're thinking about something, you make them feel like they got something special and unexpected. It's key that you're thinking with them, not for them. It's best when the conversation builds on itself.

Be sure to give before thinking about what you get. Always offer something of value before expecting or asking for something in return. A key to this is not focusing on reciprocity, but rather on doing the "right" thing.

Don't Fake It

Faking it until you make it may be common wisdom for finding confidence, but it has some negative by-products. Faking it means bluffing your way through interactions that make you feel insecure or intimidated, and that can lead to bad decision making. If you want to connect with someone to move your goals forward, you need to know exactly why you care about that person, or their company, and you need to know how to articulate it succinctly. Everyone seems to have a story about a relationship that miraculously turned into a breakthrough partnership. This doesn't happen by magic, it happens because your sincerity is clearly powered by diligent preparation.

