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leadership instalments

Values Underpin Performance

By Dan Gaynor

THERE IS AN IMPORTANT QUESTION THAT SITS AT THE VERY HEART of every leader's work: it is the question of who stays and who goes. No leader can build a lasting high performance team without confronting it. While there are many factors that are important to determining the answer, none is more important than values.

Values rest under everything we do - under the performance of every member of a team - employees and leaders alike. All performance is a reflection of values. Trying to draw a great performance from someone with problem values is a recipe for frustration. And values don't just affect individual performance they also affect team performance. Values elevate or damage teams more than any other single factor. For this reason every leader must be the keeper of values for the team. Why? Because leaders have the authority to enforce them - to hire and fire people. Every effective leader appreciates the need to use his or her authority to remove people who are demonstrating the wrong values.

I choose one of my favorite targets to illustrate: employees who are divisive. It is uncommon, to say the least, to find a team of any size without some people who are divisive. These are the people in every organization who pull against leaders and colleagues - the people who are always sowing dissension throughout the ranks. Just recently I was working with a client who told me about someone who fit this description. This individual openly criticizes the company's leaders and their plans with others - employees, contractors and even customers. I asked the question I ask most often: Have you spoken to him about it? He had not.

Every great and lasting team is unified and no leader can build a unified team without removing divisive people. On strong unified teams people are encouraged to contribute to decisions and they disagree from time to time - this is normal - but once a decision is made they accept it and pull together, they do not work against the company, colleagues or leaders. While this sounds obvious, divisive behavior is commonly ignored or tolerated, I think because so many

leaders can so easily avoid what they see as uncomfortable conversations. Here as in other examples, the leader's role is to educate and then enforce. The leader should describe the problem behavior, its consequences, and call for a change. You can pardon a relapse once with a second warning, however if the employee does not heed this it is time for a dismissal. Divisive people perform poorly and they affect the performance of others if the leader does not act. You cannot build an enduring and satisfying team with these people in the ranks.

Divisive behavior is just one of many examples. Others include: laziness, sloppiness, arrogance, dishonesty, deceitfulness, slander and even gossip. I'm sure with a brief reflection, you could add to the list. It is important to understand that these transgressions are not innocent, they affect the experience every member of the team has at work. Left unchecked they create a lot of damage.

Just as all leaders must correct values problems, you must also reward and encourage the right values. The leader's example is paramount. You must meet the bar you set for others. Get the values right and both job satisfaction and high performance will follow.

Discussion Questions:

1. **Which values problems frustrate you most at work?**
2. **Which positive values do you want most for your team?**
3. **When was the last time you confronted a values issue with an employee?**
4.

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Dan Gaynor can be contacted at:
tel 403.880.1780
email dan@gaynorconsulting.com