JUST FOLLOW OUR TRACKS

to being a great leader

Managing People and Teams

incedo

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Who is Incedo?

Master Certified Coach Linda Finkle is the CEO of Incedo Group, a boutique firm that works with businesses to make practical and long lasting changes and solve core business problems. Linda is a catalyst for change, her no-nonsense approach and first-hand experience in running a business is evident in the success of the companies she has helped.

For more than 30 years, Linda has helped many companies in different industries lead changes in employee attitude, communication and company culture. Her advice has prompted even some of the most established executives to re-think their strategies and communicate with their people in more effective ways. Not only has she improved productivity and revenue, she has also enhanced business and staff relationships throughout all levels of an organization. As a result, she has bridged the gap amongst previously incompatible business partners, significantly improved company revenue and employee retention. To say that she can move mountains with her communication and coaching skills is an understatement.

Prior to the success of her coaching company, she built and managed her own executive search firm. Her recruitment agency hired talents for Fortune 500 companies and small to mid-sized business, and was ranked among the top 10 recruiting firms in the country. In spite of her success, she continued to be hands-on with her business, successfully placing candidates that oftentimes lasted well beyond the typical tenure.
Linda is a Master Certified Coach from the International Coach Federation (ICF). She has a degree from the University of Ohio and certification from Coach U. She teaches the University of Miami's esteemed coach training program. Her book, *Finding the Fork in the Road*, hit the bestseller list on Amazon.

Incedo helps you create an environment that keeps your company fresh and on the cutting edge. Whether you are a business owners, a corporate executive or a partner in a business, Incedo helps you identify what holds you back or gets in your way. We find creative solutions to tough problems and support you as you establish strong relationships with colleagues, employees, clients and all other business associations. So whether your challenge is crisis and conflict management, or you feel like you and your organization are running in place, your business is successful but relationships are strained, there is no succession plan, you aren't sure

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if you have the right (or enough) emerging leaders to take you to the next level…Incedo is here to help.

In short we help you build an environment that fosters innovative thinking, strong communication and trust. Companies use Incedo because we do a great job! We have a strong suite of programs that touch on organizational development, strategic planning, sales and customer service, and leadership development. Our presentations rock, at least that's what attendees tell us. We are not afraid to bring humor into the executive office and workshop room. Is this all talk? Our follow-up studies indicate that people remember what we had to say months later.

Linda Finkle has an easy-going, take-no-prisoners style about her. Her clients know that while they will have fun, they will be doing solid work. You can count on Linda's willingness to cut to the chase and her no nonsense but fun way of being to move you and your company from ordinary to extraordinary. At Incedo we believe coaching is an art form, to be enjoyed and inspire both the client and the coach. We want to work with your company to help achieve your business goals and do it in a way that is effective and edgy.

Located in the Washington, DC area we've done extensive work with clients across North America, and also in Europe and Asia. We invite you to join us, enjoy the journey, and be inspired throughout the process.

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Introduction

Leadership isn't a title or a place on the organizational chart. Leadership is the ability to motivate a group of people toward a common goal. We at Incedo Group believe so strongly in this topic that we have dedicated an entire ebook—in fact, three ebooks—to this subject. This is the second one, and the focus in this ebook is on managing people and teams. Each of the books can be read in any order, as each highlights different aspects of leadership.

The articles and Top 10 lists contained in this ebook address the issue of managing people and teams, and offer tools and ideas to improve your effectiveness as a leader in these areas. Our goal at Incedo is to help you gain confidence in yourself as a leader, while understanding that you will make mistakes. And your mistakes, just like your successes, offer learning pportunities. Managing people and teams successfully doesn't just happen because you are in the role of leader. It takes time, patience, work, and a deep willingness to consider new ways of looking at things.

All great leaders have one characteristic in common: They believe that learning is a never-ending quest, and that there is something to learn from every experience they have and from every person they come in contact with. Like other resources, this ebook is intended to open your mind and provide answers to the questions you have on managing people and teams. The goal is to help make your job easier. That will happen when you spend less time dealing with performance issues or conflicts. The end result is you will have more time to spend determining where you want to go and how to get there.

Leaders who have vision and the ability to set strategy are often revered by senior leadership and boards. Certainly these are valuable skills for any leader to have or acquire. But the guts of what makes an organization work successfully are its people. A leader who is able to move people toward a common goal and successfully navigate the murky waters that often exist in companies is part magician and part Pied Piper. They believe that nothing is more important to the success of an organization than having the right people. These leaders clearly understand that having the right people is only the first step. Mentoring, coaching, guiding, training and developing the people…all this and more is necessary to gain top performance and productivity from each person who works for the organization.

Each person who works for a company brings their own unique gifts and talents. Managing those gifts and abilities so that the company gets the most from each person is a challenge for anyone. You're working with many personalities, diverse skill sets, different needs and values, unique experiences, and more. It's easy to understand how leaders think the adage about herding cats applies. Then you add into the mix the necessity for all of these personalities to work effectively as a team in order to complete projects successfully and on time, it's a recipe for disaster were it not for the superior skills of the leader. This leader knows how to add just the right touch and when; when to back off; when to run interference; when to be a hard-ass, and when to cajole.

In his book *Leading with the Heart,* Coach K of Duke University says coaching isn't just about tip-toeing through the tulips and holding hands. It's about saying, "Why aren't you in class and what the hell are you doing?" His success has been built on his principles that leadership is having the right touch, whether that's providing guidance, steering people in the right direction and yes, at times being tough, firm and even rigid if the situation calls for it.

Managing teams requires the leader to understand that with each new person who joins the team, the dynamics will change. The same is true when a member leaves the team. Monitoring these changes and responding appropriately is the mark of a good leader. Anticipating these changes and taking actions before the challenges present themselves is the mark of a great leader. Great leaders anticipate. They will, when necessary, play defense, but their preferred style is to play offence, working to eliminate problems before they occur.

It's not enough to hold the title of leader or a place on the organizational chart. Leaders who move their company to greatness do so by hiring the right people and stewarding each person and the teams appropriately. They do this through nurturing, determination and patience. Perhaps most importantly, they have a deep caring for other human beings and want the best for each and every person they lead.

We at Incedo Group firmly believe that all great leaders understand this and more. They build high-trust relationships and model the behaviors they want to see in others. They earn respect from those around them each and every day by demonstrating the qualities others admire and want to emulate. It isn't easy to manage people or teams. You may at times meet with lots of resistance and have to push through it. Other times you'll find yourself surprised at how easily everyone jumped on board. The constant is that each experience is an opportunity for you to learn about human nature and improve your skills.

Enjoy the ride as sometimes you'll be hanging on for dear life. The pages that follow offer insights and ideas on how to anticipate the challenges, navigate through the storms, and become all you can be.

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One

Coaching Employees: Dividing Your Time Between Coaching, Managing and Leading

Everyone knows that coaching employees is necessary for their own growth and the success of your company. And of course you should manage them and lead them as well. Or should you? Is there a difference between coaching employees, managing employees and leading employees? In my opinion, yes, though the lines are often blurred. One of my mentors defined coaching as a matter of reteaching, reminding, re-whatevering people of things they already know or should have been paying greater attention to earlier in life. The other part of coaching is awakening people to what they were never previously taught, the 2 and 2 they never were shown add up to 4. It's a perfect definition in my opinion. Managing is a 'here's how you do it' function, and leading is a 'there's the goal; how you get there is up to you/us' function. Subtle difference for sure and the terms are often used interchangeably. While both managing and leading could include coaching, coaching does not include managing or leading.

How do you know whether you should be coaching, managing or leading employees? First, it will depend on the role and responsibility level of the employee. The more senior their position the more likely you are to coach or lead rather than manage. Junior folks need more direction till they develop the requisite skills. It also depends on the issue that occurred or skills that need developing. For example, how to communicate more effectively is best handled through coaching. Teaching someone to create a business plan is a management function. But recognize that in the lifetime of any employee you will be dividing your time between coaching, managing and leading.

Coaching employees is the most difficult as it requires time, patience, practice and dedication from both parties. You may even find that you have to coach employees on your not managing them. This means getting them to think for themselves, to take risks, to recognize what needs doing and figure out how to do it. You want to lead rather than manage them, and that happens through coaching.

I bet by now you're totally confused. What I want you to take from this article is that effective coaching allows you to spend more time leading rather than managing. With time being a commodity we can't create more of, think how much you'll save if you lead more and manage less.

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Two

Coaching Employees: Actions Come from the Way We Think

When we are coaching employees, we want to help them develop new skills, change behavior or see things from a different perspective. However, nothing will change until you teach them how to change their thinking. Actions come from the way we think, not the other way around. Thus there is no way for someone to change behavior or develop new skills until they change the way they think.

I've written a couple of posts on *coaching employees*, and they all have the same premise…to change behavior you have teach people to change the way they think.

Let's say I have an employee named Sally. If I believe that I have tried everything to get Sally to improve her **productivity**, then one of a couple of "what's next" scenarios exists. Either I simply ignore Sally and assume there is nothing else I can do anyhow, so why bother. Or I might be condescending in my conversation with her…"Sally, we keep having this same conversation; why can't you seem to get it?" Of course, there are other possible scenarios but I wanted to make a point. Now if I change my thinking about Sally, believe that she has the possibility of improving and I might simply not have yet found the key, then the way I interact with her will be different. Of course, there are no guarantees that Sally will miraculously improve, but one thing is true: Until I change how I think, I will continue to have the same interactions (or lack of) with her and nothing will change.

Coaching employees requires you to change your thinking and teach them to change their thinking as well, in order to produce different results. Remember: Actions come from the way we think, not the other way around. Until we *change* our thinking or those we coach change their thinking, we should not expect different outcomes.

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Three

Manager Coaching is Like Creating a Fine Wine

Cultivating a good manager takes finesse and experience. In fact, it is like creating a fine wine. You harvest the grapes. You distill to increase the concentration and purity, and then it must age in order to reach its peak performance. The same can be said for manager coaching. Innate leadership qualities must be present in order to cultivate a successful manager. If any of those ingredients is missing or is skewed in relation to the other, the combination can be reckless and create undesirable consequences down the road.

Like creating fine wines, creating top-notch managers takes time. Fine wines require constant oversight, testing and adjusting to produce the results wanted. Not so different with developing managers. Manager coaching requires oversight without micro- managing. It requires testing knowledge, skill and how they handle situations. Helping them understand what's working or not, and to make the necessary adjustments. And yes, like fine wines, it requires TLC. You must care deeply about the person and their success. Without these ingredients—oversight, testing, adjusting and love—you lessen your chances of creating great managers. Why take the risk when you have viable options?

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Four

Top 10 Secrets to Effective Employee Management

1) **Communicate, communicate, communicate**
   There is no such thing as too much communication contrary to what your employees may feel. Managers who explain and reinforce their expectations create an efficient workplace.

2) **Define your leadership role**
   Be a leader not a friend. You must stand out from the crowd and be the leader of the pack. Doing so will give your employees clear direction about who is in charge.
   You need not ditch old friends nor become aloof. Rather you simply must save play time for after work hours.

3) **Compromise is the best policy**
   Say "no" when you need to and "yes" when you can. If you can comply with an employee's request without too much trouble, then do so. If, however, the employee makes an unreasonable request, do not give in. After all, you have a company to run and more than one employee to manage.

4) **Set parameters for exceptions to the rules**
   Set and keep strict rules around added benefits you offer. While you want your employees to have benefits you also want to avoid the expectation or demand for more. You inevitably will have to make exceptions to policies. The key is to minimize the number of times that you break your own rules and to avoid advertising when you do.

5) **Create a community not a factory**
   Offer occasional perks that employees do not expect. Most employees readily will participate in events such as holiday parties or birthday celebrations. Even the occasional catered lunch for no reason goes a long way in boosting morale and building a work family.

6) **Think strong, be strong**
Leniency can backfire so do not be a pushover. When fielding employee requests stick to established policies and procedures. Similarly, maintain a professional atmosphere in the physical workspace. Do not permit your employees to goof off or take advantage of perks and benefits.

7) **Promptly address problems**
Quickly deal with troublesome employees because bad work ethic can be contagious. Do not give other employees a reason to slack off. Put your foot down on disruptive behavior. Your employees will respect your authority and appreciate you restoring order.

8) **Give your employees the chance to shine**
Place employees in a position to succeed by giving them manageable tasks and doable deadlines. Employees will be more likely to give you more when doing so results in a success. Offer incentives for employees to rise to the occasion. Provide some form of a bonus when employees surpass your expectations.

9) **Wear your leader hat but loosen your tie**
Be firm but courteous. You must earn your employee's respect. Employees need solid leadership but will appreciate a warm smile. Bottom line: stuff the stuffiness, and give a grin!

10) **Clarity**
Set clear goals for each employee and stick to those goals. Employees appreciate having defined objectives and take comfort in knowing what managers expect of them. Moreover, employees will be less likely to waste precious work hours when they have set tasks to complete.

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Five

Manager Coaching: Critical for Succession Planning

Manager coaching is critical for succession planning. Let me be clear here. Manager coaching isn't something you think about but never get around to. It isn't something that happens by osmosis. If you want to build an organization that is grooming people for managerial and key leadership roles, you must spend the time on coaching your up-and-coming stars and managers. And you must build it into your plans, practice it continually and know what areas of development are needed by each individual.

The challenge for most executives is time. We never have enough of it and manager coaching takes time. It also takes practice, patience and commitment on the part of you and the person you are coaching. You can't expect to instruct someone once on a skill, behavior or way you want them to think and assume you've coached them and now they've gotten it. Maybe you'll be lucky and they did, but in my experience it takes repeated coaching for someone to understand what you want/mean and adjust accordingly. This is often where the coaching hits a snag. Coaching employees is not a one-time thing or a sometimes thing; it has to happen repeatedly and regularly when the opportunities present themselves. You have to be on the lookout for coaching opportunities.

I want to make the distinction between coaching and corrective behavior opportunities. Coaching is developmental. It begins with the premise that nothing is wrong or needs fixing and the work is in taking someone's skills to the next level. Corrective behavior assumes something needs resolving, changing or fixing. The conversations are about how you want them to think, act or behave differently than they are now. You want them to improve a skill or alter the way they are doing something because you aren't happy with the results as they are now. Don't confuse these conversations; they are separate and distinct.

To achieve long-term success, every organization needs to be grooming their people to step into new roles and take on new responsibilities. Manager coaching is a critical component of this process. You may have first-rate leaders now, but if you aren't building depth and bench strength under them, sooner or later you'll have a team of old players and no one ready to take their place. As you consider what your organization most needs in the coming months and years to sustain growth and revenue, include manager coaching in your plan.

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Six

Coaching Employees to Think Bigger

Lately, many of my clients have asked me if it is possible, through coaching employees, to get them to think bigger. It's an interesting question that of course requires exploration around what *bigger* means to them. While the specifics may vary, what I hear most frequently is that these leaders want their employees to think beyond their own area of responsibility or role and/or beyond the problem that is presented. Can we get our employees to understand that what they do affects others in the company so when they are implementing a process or fixing a problem they need to consider the impact on other people? Can coaching employees help them learn to ask more questions, not simply do whatever is asked of them? Is it part of our DNA to think about the what ifs, why, what else could it be, how else could we solve this, who else is affected, what other questions should I ask…or is a skill that can be learned?

Well, I have the answer to this question: a definite 'depends.' Certainly there are some people who just seem to think the way we would want them to think. Is this nature or nurture? I suspect it's some of both. An example: Both my adult daughters have this skill. They grew up with two parents who were both entrepreneurs, and from their early teen years they worked for one or both of us. They learned how we wanted them to think. Maybe they both have some natural tendencies to think globally and strategically, to think about the repercussions of their actions, and I also suspect they learned something from a tender age by working for their dad and me.

The question is, though, once you have adults on your team, can they be taught to think strategically, think beyond what they are doing and the effect it has on others, and learn to not simply fix a problem that is presented? The skill I believe you can teach people is to ask more questions. Most of us simply accept what we hear or what we are told to do. If a customer makes a request, our natural inclination is to respond to that specific request and give them what they asked for, or tell them it's not possible and offer another alternative. What if instead we queried them about what they are trying to accomplish or what they need specifically? Often what people ask for is what they think they need or want. If, through coaching employees, we teach them to ask more questions, they are likely to determine that the customer's need can be met differently than the customer or employee thought.

The same holds true with thinking beyond their specific role. Employees who stop and ask questions—what is the effect of what I am doing on others on my team, on the company, the customer, etc.—may come up with a different approach. Coaching employees to think bigger starts with teaching them to simply ask more questions of themselves and others. It doesn't mean that you can teach everyone to think bigger; however, learning to ask more questions rather than accept what they hear or think is a useful skill for everyone.

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Seven

Leadership Relationships: Learning to Manage Up

Why do companies spend so much of their resources on teaching leaders how to manage the people who work for them, but little if any on teaching them to manage up, which is fundamental in leadership relationships? How does one manage up? I can't adequately address that in a few hundred words or even a few paragraphs. There isn't a one-size-fits-all solution either.

Managing up means understanding the strengths and weaknesses of your manager and how you can work around them most effectively. It's learning how they communicate, their hot buttons, what motivates them, what keeps them awake at night and much more. This post isn't about poor leadership or discussing how few truly effective mangers there are in companies. The point I want to make is that even if you have the best manager ever, there are still times you have to manage up.

However, we ignore this skill as part of leadership relationships and focus our attention on managing those who work for us. If we took the time to teach people in our companies that leadership relationships include learning how to manage up, one inevitable outcome would be more trust. Yes, there are many other positives that would ensue besides trust. Trust, however, is the cornerstone to everything else that happens right in a company. I don't want to get off-track as this isn't a post on trust; it's about learning to manage up. This week think about how effectively you are managing up in your leadership relationships.

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Eight

Five Danger Signs That Your Might Be Losing an Employee

Admittedly, this type of title might lend itself to a David Letterman skit. However, for those that must effectively deal with this situation; the topic is hardly humorous. The fact of the matter remains that time and money have been invested in a new hire for your organization. **The last thing you want to do is lose your new hire over what could be an avoidable situation.**

Warning signs may present themselves in a variety of ways ranging from subtle nuances to classic case symptoms. The following are some of the classic symptoms that managers should consider when observing and evaluating their employees:

1. **Loss of Energy** accompanies the employee who seems to have "lost his or her spark." "Spark" is that unquantifiable characteristic that we best describe when it no longer exists. That certain something the employee conveyed during the interview that you knew your organization needed. Recognizing this behavior while it exists is important but useless if the appropriate step isn't taken in a timely fashion. Perhaps this issue can be resolved. If not, at least you will be making decisions and aligning expectations appropriately.

2. Suddenly receiving unsolicited feedback from others can tip off the manager of potential issues if **clients or colleagues make comments about the employee**. This feedback can come in many different formats, from a comment by a client that "Jim hasn't been responsive about returning phone calls" or clients or colleagues complaining about Jim's rude or disrespectful behavior. Maybe the employee is putting on a good game face for you, and you didn't notice; it doesn't matter. When others voice comments regarding the employee's performance, it is time to take action. You may just save what could be a rising star.

3. One of the most obvious issues is **when work performance and or productivity decreases**; it affects everyone in the office. Not only will others have to absorb the influx of work, but the decrease in production will definitely affect the accounts receivable and budgetary accounts. Furthermore, this decline in output and performance quality is definitely personnel issues that must be addressed quickly. Allocation of labor is carefully budgeted item and sudden variances can cause accounting issues as well. Look for signs that the employee is losing interest, motivation, or is not working up to par. For example, is the employee's attention to detail also suffering? Are the mistakes costly? What about frequent requests for time off? By carefully observing your staff, these types of issues should be kept in check.

4. **Voicing complaints regularly to the manager or others** is one of the most common signs of an employee contemplating leaving. An increasing in the number of complaints an employee voices is a solid indicator of dissatisfaction. Satisfied employees may be dissatisfied with a particular element of the job or company, but they are able to analyze whether the issue can be rectified or if it is even justifiable. An employee who genuinely feels satisfied with their work environment can manage blips of dissatisfaction effectively either by escalating the issue or moving on. Satisfied employees place themselves in a position of power by adopting this tactic. Dissatisfied employees, however, often are quick to assume a victim mentality, which causes them to view every aspect of their work environment through a cracked lens. Often this is the beginning of the end for these employees.

5. **When major life changes occur**, the goal should not be to prevent the change, but to learn to adapt effectively. Perhaps an employee gets married, has children, divorces or has chronic health issues. Major life events in any one of these categories share one commonality, and that is change. While major life events can be a healthy and needed element in the employee's life, it can be disastrous if the employer isn't prepared. Discussing life changes with the employee allows the employer and the employee to consider any possible changes in job responsibilities or if allowing flexibility will be beneficial to both parties. If spending time with family becomes the main priority in the employee's life, instead of moving up the corporate ladder, then the risk of losing him or her increases. The best course of action in this particular situation is to be informed and prepared.

When you see the dangers signs, take action. Good organizational leadership includes understanding that the satisfaction of your employees is essential to healthy teamwork, initiative and productivity. Treating employees with the same care you've taken in hiring them only makes sense. **Identifying the signs of dissatisfaction and taking action to address them brings substantial rewards to the company – both in terms of economic health and the growth of human potential.** It's the path to happy employees and profitability for your company.

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Nine

Business Leadership Skill: The Flip Side of Micromanagement

I am so sick of hearing about the evils of micromanagement. Constantly we hear about the ubiquitous micromanager who is interfering with their people's ability to successfully fulfill their job requirements, while generating unnecessary stress for the employees. Employees believe that their managers are micromanaging simply because they are control freaks, won't recognize any thought process but their own and feel required to command every step the employees takes.

I'd like to present a different view of this business leadership skill: the flip side of micromanagement. Employees see the micromanager as someone who monitors every single step and avoids delegation. While true in some cases, more often this actually turns out to be an issue of trust. In this case, trust refers to the belief that employees will not get the job done or done well. I often hear from leaders that they don't know when a task has been completed or whether there are problems along the way, so they have to keep asking about the status. Their instinctive solution to not knowing is to micromanage. I say this is an old definition for the business leadership skill of management and accountability.

Trust comes when people follow through on what they say they're going to do. Employees build trust when they consistently demonstrate to their managers that they will handle things and communicate back that the task is complete or that there's a problem. To be given authority and responsibility for tasks without input on 'how', to be given the end goal rather than the action steps, to be treated as someone your manager can count on, you need to demonstrate that you can be depended on to communicate and follow through effectively.

Every leader would be thrilled to give responsibility and never have to think about it again if they were sure it was being handled effectively.

Micromanagement? Nah, just good business leadership skills. What can you do to build trust and experience the flip side of micromanagement?

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Ten

The Good The Bad and The Ugly of Workplace Friendships

Workplace friendships may seem like an ideal arrangement at first blush. But once the honeymoon phase ends, a whole different picture may emerge. Whether the image appears rosy or bleak depends entirely upon those involved in the friendship. Unfortunately, situations can sour long before individuals realize they should not have befriended a colleague. When workplace friends turn enemies, a company loses far more than camaraderie. A broken friendship can reduce productivity, cause infighting, and spread discontentment. This is not to say that you should never befriend anyone in the workplace. After all, you spend eight hours a day, five days a week with the same people. The key is to know where to draw the line.

Workplace friendships among co-workers can have a positive impact on morale and productivity. Friends help each other navigate the ups and downs of the job, offering the support necessary to motivate an employee to progress through the drudgery. Friends help each other sort through personal problems, which can prevent personal issues from interfering with production. Friends even promote a positive work experience by ensuring that laughter and companionship occasionally invade the workplace. These upsides to workplace friendships make for happier and more productive employees, who in turn, want to work hard, put their best foot forward, and generate excellent output. Positive interpersonal relationships produce cohesive teams conducive to productivity.

The same factors that unite employees also can tear them apart. Problems emerge when friendships go awry, and the consequences can be severe for both the friendship and the company. Broken friendships often lead to infighting, bickering, and tattling, which divert attention away from the job and towards resolving employee disputes.

Distracted and disgruntled employees produce poor quality work and generate less output. Unfortunately, bad attitudes are contagious and tend to have a negative domino effect on employee morale. While these setbacks may not prove catastrophic to the company, they nonetheless take time and energy away from the daily operational and business functions.

On a small scale, broken friendships can destroy teams that need the stability of solid interpersonal relationships to function effectively. When tension continues to build, it is only a matter of time before the water boils over. At boiling point, your increasingly frustrated and unfocused employees may miss crucial deadlines, overlook important tasks, or even alienate clients. Instead accomplishing the tasks at hand, team leaders will have to spend time addressing interpersonal issues.

On a large scale, the lack of trust among employees may impede the long and short range goals of the organization. A company faced with widespread distrust and resentment among employees can either deal with the issue or retain all new staff. The later option rarely, if ever, will be feasible. Consequently, companies will be forced to put aside certain goals to address problems in the workforce. This indeed is a catastrophic setback.

When individuals work closely together, some level of friendship and intimacy inevitably will emerge. Trouble lies not in the formation of relationships but in the failure to set clear boundaries around relationships. Obvious prohibited relationships include any sort of romantic involvement between co-workers or between managers and employees. Destroyed friendships pose a challenge but destroyed romances create roadblocks nearly impossible to overcome. Similarly, managers should avoid friendships with their employees because this situation tends to cause jealousy and resentment among the non-friend employees. No amount of fact presentation or persuasion will convince the non-friend employees that they were appropriately passed over for a promotion.

Companies can set limits on workplace relationships by avoiding situations that promote trouble. Managers who focus on building strong teams through workplace activities hold the key to success. These managers make teambuilding work-related so that employees develop a closeness founded on the common desire to promote the team's mission. Managers who foster teamwork through happy hours and other such social events fail to promote the business goals of the team. Instead these managers have opened the door for relationships to develop outside of the workplace.

Employees need freedom to associate and build workplace friendships. Companies must encourage team building by offering activities and gatherings during work hours to prevent excessive mingling during non-work hours. Offer employees plenty of work-related chances to get to know one another. You will find yourself with a happy and productive staff that unites over their shared business tasks. Most importantly, by encouraging employees to spend time together at work, you silently discourage your staff from friendships that are not work-related.

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Eleven

How to Manage Workplace Friendships: A Business Management Skill Not Taught

Dozens of business management skills are taught in universities, workshops and training programs. Hundreds of books have been written on the subject. What I haven't been able to find is the critical business management skill of how to manage workplace friendships.

Of course we want employees to get along and work well together. What happens, however, when workplace friendships interfere with work? Maybe you have two employees who are best buddies. They have a falling out and are bickering all the time or complaining to you about each other. What happens when one employee gets promoted over their friend? Or if you have performance problems with an employee who is close friends with your star performer? How do you handle a friendship that turns romantic? There are countless examples of workplace friendships and how they affect the workplace.

Why don't we teach leaders the business management skill of how to deal with these situations? Whether you subscribe or not, I'd love your thoughts on how to manage workplace friendships. I'd also be interested in your insights on why this isn't seen as an important business management skill to teach.

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Twelve

Consensus-building: A Business Leadership Skill?

Isn't one of the business leadership skills most people think is important is consensus building? What does consensus mean? I think too often it refers to people being in agreement and the leader taking the time to get 'everyone on the same page' so we can have consensus. What if we redefined consensus as something different than gaining agreement? Consensus does not mean everyone has to agree. It can mean understanding. It seems to me that the proverbial 'gaining consensus' is simply a way for no one to be accountable or responsible. "I didn't make the decision, the group did." If we redefined consensus as simply understanding, understanding of the issues or data points, then having agreement wouldn't be necessary.

When consensus is defined as agreement, it allows leaders to justify their fear of making a decision under the guise of consensus. When leaders are confident in their decision- making abilities, energy is placed on taking action, rather than protecting oneself. Consensus-building as a business leadership skill? Bah! Humbug! Call me negative, or cranky or pessimistic or short-sighted. But to me if we spent more time making decisions instead of building consensus, more would get done in companies today.

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Thirteen

8 Reasons Why Using Assessments Can Boost Your Hiring Success

Of all your corporate assets, employees are the most valuable. Your employees are what differentiate your company from your competitors'. If you are first to market with a new idea, whether yours is the cheapest or most expensive, what keeps customers and clients coming back is how they feel about your company…and that's about the service they receive, which always comes back to the people.

Peter Drucker says, "Executives should spend more time on managing people and making people decisions than on anything else. No decisions are so long-lasting in their consequence or so difficult to unmake."

The secret begins with learning how to identify the right people during the interview process, not just those who can perform well today but those who have potential, who fit your corporate culture and have the personal attributes you desire. Assessments, performance tools, developmental tools —whatever they are called — were created for just these reasons. They confirm your instincts, provide quantifiable results and help employees understand themselves and how others perceive them, with the desired outcome being improved performance and service to your customers. The benefits of using these assessments can't be overlooked.

1. Common language

A significant benefit of assessments is they provide common language to be used when discussing people. We assume that when we use words such as *good attitude*, *bright*, *fast learner*, and *good communication skills* that everyone's definition of these words is the same. Not true! Agreement on definition of terms is critical when hiring, especially if multiple people are involved in the hiring process. And it's vital in performance reviews.

2. Hiring the Right Candidate
So much depends on your hiring the right candidate. Yet how often have you hired someone you thought was 'perfect' only to wonder three months later what you were thinking? The primary reason we assess people in the selection process is to increase the probability of hiring the best candidates – people with the skills to perform well. Assessments measure skills, abilities, personal attributes such as work preferences, motivation, personality, and other qualities that will assist you with understanding 'who' they are, not just 'what' experience they have. These qualities are known as KSI (Key Success Indicators). The first step to ensuring you make the right hire is understanding who this person is (KSI). Who will always be much more important than what skills or experience they have. While experience is important, you can teach skills; you can't teach attitude.

3. Reducing or eliminating bad hires
What are the costs associated with making a bad hire? The American Management Association estimates that the cost is 1.5 times an employee's annual salary. How are these costs calculated? There are the obvious ones, such as advertising and recruiting, administrative or management costs associated with the interview process, travel or relocation, training of the new employee and overtime you pay or consultants you use to cover the workload. There are less-obvious costs – lower performance until the new hire gets up to speed, lost business or opportunities, impact on morale, and so forth. As the complexity of the job increases, the cost of a bad hire also increases.

4. Performance issues identified quickly
Beyond hiring successfully, the most difficult challenge for any manager is terminating employees. The idea of starting the process again is daunting, and if we missed the mark this time how can we be assured we will be more successful next time? In Jim Collins' book *Good to Great*, he talks about getting the right people on the bus. Getting the wrong people off the bus is equally important to move your company from good to great. Assessments can help us manage more effectively, and thus more quickly identify performance issues. Quickly identifying these issues allows us to ascertain if it's a training issue or if we simply have the wrong person. While you may not want to think about terminating and starting all over, knowing performance is not a training issue helps you make the decision with facts, not emotions.

5. Reducing turnover
Key Success Indicators (KSI) are particularly important in reducing turnover.
Employees are more satisfied, perform better, and advance further when their skills and personal characteristics match the job requirements and the corporate culture.
Employee satisfaction reduces turnover. Turnover is costly to an organization in real dollars because it impacts the company's competitive advantage and thus growth.

6. Improved performance
Assessments can provide you with information on how to train, manage and motivate new hires, improving your chances of attaining high performance quickly. Additionally they provide insights on how to improve the performance of new hires by understanding their preferred work style, their motivations, and their personal and behavioral characteristics. Assessments are used to help current employees understand their performance, how others perceive them and how their behavior impacts their ability to perform (think 360-degree assessments). This promotes open communication around performance, reinforces organizational values, and provides insights to the employee for personal development and improved performance.

7. Improved team dynamics
How often do you think you have the 'right' people but there is constant dissent, arguing and frustration between team members or departments? Using assessments can improve the communication and reduce this friction between individuals, teams and departments. Misunderstandings trigger conflicts, and this always relates to communication. Imbedded in the communication dilemma are judgment and assumptions about other team members. Assessments can help teams/departments understand each other, and the obvious outcome is improved communication.

8. Reduced management time/intervention
Leaders spend too much time resolving conflicts or issues that should never have occurred, and too much time doing damage control because their staff doesn't see the big picture and consequently gets mired down in the details. Huge amounts of time are wasted discussing performance issues, handling the backlash from these issues, or in conversation with disgruntled employees or clients. While assessments aren't the solution to these challenges, they can significantly reduce management time resolving them. Better hires lead to better performance. Terminating poor performers quickly reduces friction and complaints from staff and customers. Improved communication leads to positive team dynamics. All of these mean the leaders spend less time and energy on these issues, allowing them to focus on strategic initiatives.

Assessments are not a quick fix, instant solution or panacea guaranteeing 100% successful hiring. They are a tool, one of many that you will use in the hiring, training and performance evaluation process. Used along with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, an awareness of your corporate culture, an understanding of the personal attributes of your current staff, and your instincts, they can improve your hiring success. With successful hiring comes improved performance, reduced turnover, increased customer satisfaction and decreased conflict amongst staff — with the inevitable outcome of more money in your pocket and fewer headaches and energy drains for you.

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Fourteen

6 Tips to Stop Treating Symptoms as the Problem

In business and in life we often treat symptoms as if they were the problem. And we wonder why the problem continues to recur. Let's examine this from a medical perspective. A patient comes to the doctor complaining about headaches. A headache could be a symptom of a dental problem, stress, weight, blood pressure, medication reactions, migraine issues and a host of other possibilities. Telling a patient to take 2 aspirin may treat the symptom, at least in the short term, but it does not address the root problem. The headache will likely recur. This is why the physician should go through an extensive diagnostic process to determine the underlying problem. We should take a lesson from medicine and their diagnostic processes before determining the appropriate treatment for the patient.

Below are my 6 tips to stop treating symptoms as if they were the problem.

1. Don't be quick to make an assumption.
It's easy to look at behavior, actions or an outcome and jump to a conclusion about what the problem is. If an employee is perpetually late, you might assume it's an attitude issue. Or if there is excessive turnover in one department, you might jump to the conclusion you have a management issue. Maybe you look at someone who is overweight and believe they don't care about their appearance. All of these conclusions may, in fact, be correct; however, you don't know that, yet. Before you make an assumption, pause. Then read tip #2 before taking any action or forming an opinion.

2. Identifying symptoms versus problem.
Learn how to distinguish between symptoms and problems. Understand that many symptoms might appear as if they are the problem. It's easy to think we know the answer and rush to judgment. This can be a costly mistake. What might tell you that you are dealing with a symptom rather than a problem? If the behavior, actions or outcomes have occurred before and/or have been ongoing, they might be symptoms.

For example, if projects are consistently delayed, that may indicate a symptom of poor leadership, misaligned expectations, insufficient resources, unrealistic timelines, or any number of other factors. A project's being delayed is NOT the problem; it's simply a symptom of the underlying real problem. Perhaps you have high turnover in your company. You assume you are hiring the wrong people, and perhaps you are. But be careful not to rush to this conclusion

and make adjustments on whom you hire going forward. High turnover could be a symptom of culture clashes, poor leadership, ill- defined expectations, inadequate onboarding or training, excessive work load, etc. You'll have to dig deep to determine the root cause of the turnover. And sometimes there may be multiple factors causing the problem. Don't stop and look at behavior, attitude, actions or outcomes and take for granted that you've found the problem. When you perceive an issue or problem, ask yourself if what you are observing is the problem or if it only appears to be the problem. What might be 'causing' the outcome you are witnessing?

3. Ask lots of questions to identify the core problem, not the symptom.
To diagnose the problem the physician asks lots of questions. This is a great example to follow. Too often we ask one or two questions and assume we now know the issue. Sometimes we ask loaded questions that give us the answer we have already determined we want or think we know. Let's go back to the above example of projects habitually being late. You might ask: "what is causing projects to consistently be delayed." Here's some more questions. 'Are the deadlines we set realistic based on our current resources?' "Do we have the right people on this project, do they have the skills we need?" "Is there anything I can do/provide that would assist with getting projects in on time?" "To meet the deadlines do we need to adjust the scope of the project?" You get the idea. Just keep asking questions so you can identify what's the root problem.

4. Consider these factors to determine if symptom or problem.

- How often has this occurred?
- Do you notice any patterns as to when it occurs? (Someone is late every Wednesday, an employee always complains about workload before a holiday…)
- Have you observed this occurring in other areas of the company? Or in other areas of your life?
- Are there similar situations occurring that you might tie to the same problem? (Customers are slow paying and you have a new accounting system.)
- Has this occurred previously and then seemed to go away and now is surfacing again?
- It continues to reoccur again and again or never really gets resolved or goes away.
- It doesn't make sense to you. (You've hired a recruiter to help with hiring yet hiring continues to be a challenge).
- Your solution to the problem doesn't solve the problem. (An employee seems unmotivated so we offer them some carrot to improve their motivation. Yet they continue to seem unmotivated)

5. Act like Columbo, be curious don't take things at face value.
Do you remember the television series with the detective Columbo? Columbo was always curious. Not only did he ask a million questions of his suspects, he didn't take their responses at face value. He was famous for leaving and a second later popping his head back in and saying "just one more thing" or "there's something I don't understand." Follow Columbo's example of being curious about everything. He used to write things in his notebook and come back to them at a later time. You can adopt the same behavior. Write down whatever you think is the problem, set it aside and come back to it later. Taking a fresh look at it is likely to give you a different perspective.

6. Use communication as your tool, not as a barrier.
Use communication as your tool to uncover the problem. Whether you are asking questions, clarifying expectations, listening to responses, being curious or using any other communication skills it will be the key to help you reveal the root problem. Communication can also be a barrier to exposing the problem if we use it as a weapon. Making assumptions, forming judgments, asking rhetorical questions or any other poor communication technique will only limit or interfere with the discovery process. Stellar communication will be a key asset in helping you uncover the problem.

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Fifteen

Effective Leadership Skills: Managing by MBO's

Management of companies believe that effective leadership skills include being able to evaluate staff based on individual MBOs (Management By Objectives). And evaluating staff by MBOs is the secret to a well run company. Yet they are surprised when team-related problems occur. If staff is evaluated on their own performance without including how they contributed to the company, teams with competing goals will always be in conflict.

Now I don't want you to think I don't believe in MBOs. Truth is, I'm a big believer in performance metrics and goals and all that stuff. In fact, I believe effective leadership skills training and evaluation should include metrics; otherwise, how can we effectively measure someone's performance? However, I believe that every group of MBOs for individual contributors or management needs to include team-related goals as well. Think about this for a second: Do you believe that an individual can be a star performer without contributing to the team–their own or the company at large? I'll bet some of you will argue that a superstar contributes simply because of their individual performance. After all, if they do their job well, doesn't the team/company benefit? Yes and no.

Organizations are often made up of multiple teams that have to work together, or individuals who have to work within a team. Just because a salesperson is meeting their goals does not mean they aren't competing against their teammates or having challenges with other departments. I think you get the point. If we want to decide that effective leadership skills mean managing by MBOs, at least include a metric for contribution to the team. Otherwise, accept that teams with competing goals will always be in conflict.

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Sixteen

Employees' Performance and Realizing Potential

Companies that do not consistently assess employee performance will not be adept at realizing potential in their employees. The by-product of this will be underachieving employees, high turnover and/or lack of company growth. Assessing employees' performance is more than the annual cursory performance review. It's about observing employees and watching for opportunities where they have performed well or need development. It includes sharing with them what you observed in specific terms, not just 'good job' or 'you need to improve your presentation skills.'

But I get ahead of myself. Every company needs to have employees who can grow into other positions or take on increased areas of responsibility. Without this a company stagnates or is left with having to constantly hire new talent from the outside. Both are costly considerations. What this means is that leaders must know what these roles will need (specific technical skills, communication, creativity, fearlessness, etc., etc.) so that they are able to assess if the employee has the potential. They must consistently be observing staff to determine if they have what it takes to grow into new roles. And they must mentor the employees who appear to be likely candidates.

If you are not consistently assessing employees' performance day-to-day you will miss seeing their potential and/or miss the opportunity to mentor them. The employee then misses the chance to be all they can be, a missed opportunity for all. Why let this happen when there is an alternative? Does it take time? Yes. Does it take patience? For sure. Will you see positive outcomes as a result? You bet! It's all up to you.

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Seventeen

Evaluating Performance Issues

When performance issues arise, we sometimes blindly decide the reasons for poor performance and act upon the supposed cause. Assumption should never play a role in determining how we'll deal with performance issues. There may be a myriad of reasons for the issues in question, and the best means of correcting the problem is to gain insight on what the true problems or challenges are. In order to determine how to handle the performance issue, you must determine the cause.

1. Hired the wrong person.
We all make poor hiring decisions at times. Pressure to hire, poor interviewing skills, and many other reasons can cause us to hire the wrong person. Sometimes the needs of our company change, and the skills and experience we need today are different than what we needed when we hired the person, and despite additional training they can't seem to step up. Instead of fretting it, accept their limitations and take the necessary steps to terminate.

2. We have the right person in the wrong job.
We may have someone with all the right attributes for our company, but we have them in the wrong job. If we aren't putting the employee's gifts and talents to best use, they won't be able to perform well. Ask yourself whether the position you have the employee in is the best use of their gifts and skills. If not, find another place in the organization where they can be well used, and watch their performance soar.

3. Assuming it's attitude.
Too often we attribute performance problems to attitude: They aren't a team player, they have a bad attitude, they are cranky people… in your opinion, their attitude stinks. Attitude may be the problem, but often what we see as attitudinal issues are really something else. It may be we have them in the wrong position (see #2). Perhaps they need training or they don't understand and are uncomfortable saying so. Before you jump to the conclusion that you have an employee with a bad attitude, take the time to assess what else it might be.

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4. Training is needed.
At times we have an employee who is embarrassed to ask for help or request training. Or this person may not know they need training and/or assistance in order to perform their job adequately. You may experience someone who has a terrific "can-do" attitude, but just isn't able to deliver the goods. Spending quality time mentoring, training, correcting and communicating your expectations will help you to determine the facts. If you maintain regular communication, correction and expectations, you should see improvement almost immediately. A 30-day span should mark a vast improvement if it's a training issue.

5. Is their work substandard or merely not as good as you want?
It's not unusual for us to lump everyone into the same bucket. Before you dismiss them as 'just another poor performer,' take a hard look at their work output and quality. Is their work really substandard, or is it simply not as good as you want? If it needs improvement but is not truly inferior, it may signify a training issue, a misalignment of expectations, or something else. Don't let frustration or the stress of leadership have you jump to a conclusion too quickly.

6. Communication is the problem.
We all want to believe we communicate effectively. Frankly, most of us don't. Our instructions or expectations are loose or unclear. We don't take the time to ensure the other person truly understands what we want, and then we are disappointed with the results and chalk it up to performance issues. Communication problems are the number one reason performance issues exist. More effective communication is not a guarantee that performance issues will be eliminated, but it will help you determine the root cause of the problem.

7. Looking at the symptom and assuming it's the cause.
Performance issues will continue to recur until we identify the root problem. Often we treat the symptom (attendance issues, missing deadlines, conflict with team members…) and wonder why the problem recurs. Until we uncover the root cause we will continue to have performance issues.

8. Leadership is ineffective.
Even rock-star leaders can have an employee that they can't motivate, or their personalities don't mesh. Determine if the issue is leadership style or the leader themselves. Perhaps there is another manager this employee can work for, or someone who can act as a buffer between the manager and employee.

Final Thought:
Performance issues can come up for many reasons. Spend the necessary time to determine the root cause before taking any steps. Most importantly, remove any preconceptions or assumptions from the equation; they will only color your ability to make the best possible decisions.

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Eighteen

Motivating Employee Performance through Year-end Bonuses

We are getting to that time of the year when companies are thinking about year-end bonuses for their employees. Companies use these bonuses to reward their employees' performance during the past year. But there is also the unspoken expectation that these bonuses will be a factor in motivating employees' performance next year as well. If you are the individual who receives a large bonus, you likely want to get it next year too. On the other hand, if you are the employee who receives a miserly bonus and it reflectes how the company assessed your performance, then you might consider improving next year.

The question I have is: Do year-end bonuses have any far-reaching effects on motivating employee performance? I say, categorically, no! So many factors affect employee performance, and compensation, bonuses, or other financial perks are just one.

To me, people are inherently motivated or they aren't. I do believe environment can have a negative impact on someone who is, by nature, motivated. But I don't believe you can change performance through a series of perks or withholding those perks. I am a huge fan of bonuses, though they don't necessarily have to be at year's end.

Bonuses are a way of saying thank you for a job well done. Employees who have performed well will appreciate it, and next year they will perform well because that's who they are. The personal satisfaction they receive from a job well done is enough. The bonus is simply icing on the cake. For those employees whose performance is less than stellar, I sincerely doubt whether a year-end bonus of any size will be a factor in motivating employee performance in the upcoming year.

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Nineteen

Top 9 Suggestions for Handling Tough Employees

1) **Your goal is not to punish but to correct the behavior**
   Keep in mind that employees are not children and managers do not run a summer camp. Managers must treat employees as adults, even if employees behave like children. Conflict resolution must revolve around change not punishment. Employees will resent punishment because they will not understand how punishment addresses their unhappiness. Most importantly, punishment does not correct the underlying issues.

2) **Do not fight fire with fire**
   Negativity will not work to address bad behavior because employees look to the manager to be the bigger person. For better or worse, the nature of a management position prohibits a manager from engaging in the same bad behavior as the employee. Furthermore, a manager who behaves poorly will only cause the employee to respond in kind.

3) **Don't be a pushover**
   Let the employee know your expectations and boundaries. Employees need boundaries within which to operate. The absence of boundaries and clear expectations may encourage some employees to take advantage of the system, whether intentionally or not.

4) **Affirm the organization's core beliefs**
   Sometimes an employee simply needs a gentle reminder about the goals of the organization. Employees can and do lose sight of their mission, of their role in the organization, and of the big picture. Give the employee the benefit of a gentle reminder and time for that reminder to sink in and put the employee back on track.

5) **Offer to help the employee if you can**
   Keep in mind that your company hired this person for a reason. Presumably, your company felt that this person was the right candidate for the position. It may be that the position has changed and the employee failed to adapt or vice versa. As a manager, part of your responsibility is to make employees fit the mold of your organization. Do everything in your power to bring that employee up to par.

6) **Do not gang up on the employee**
Managers need not throw their weight around by bringing in the bid dogs to deal with troublesome employees. Employees who already are unhappy will only feel threatened and intimidated amid a group of seeming opponents. Managers must instead sit down with employees alone or have someone else sit in with the employee in lieu of the manager.

7) **Tell the human resources department about the issue and your plans to address it** You may have a natural inclination towards resolving problems without others' involvement. As between employers and employees, this is the wrong approach. Managers must document conflicts and steps they have taken towards resolution. Human resources, the department charged with knowing the law, is in the best position to document everything.

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Twenty

Being Prepared for Good Business Leadership

Last week I found a website on business preparedness launched by the SBA. The website indicates that roughly 40-60 percent of small businesses never reopen their doors following a disaster. They defined *disaster* as long-term power outages, hacker disruption, fire, earthquake or other catastrophes. I'm confident many of you reading this post have disaster recovery plans for your technology and maybe have addressed the other possibilities through insurance options. Congratulations for your good business leadership skills. It made me think, though, that being prepared isn't just about disasters. Yet we often focus our preparedness on dealing with disasters, should they occur, and not on the week-to-week or month-to-month preparedness that would be helpful to the business or our company.

I think good business leadership means being prepared for all eventualities. Here are some examples.

What happens if a key person in your organization leaves? Recently one of my clients had an employee leave who was the only person in her company who performed a certain critical task. In her words, "I feel like it's Hiroshima." She's now hiring a replacement and intends to train three people to handle this role so she's never so vulnerable again.

The same question relates to customers. What if your key customer/client leaves? Do you have enough business with others to weather the situation, or will you find yourself out of business? Consider hiccups that can arise with projects, such as delays, outcomes different than expected, or the project's going totally awry. Even situations such as a family illness or emergencies, staff vacations or illness, and weather can play havoc if you are ill prepared or not prepared at all.

Don't let your focus on disaster recovery interfere with running your company. Good business leadership is being prepared for any eventuality, disasters being just one of them.

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Twenty-One

Is Having a Leadership Mentor Necessary to Get Ahead?

I'm asked this question often by executives I work with. Of course I have an opinion; I have an opinion about most everything. But this question doesn't have a yes/no response. In order to answer it, we first have to determine what *leadership mentor* means. What would this person do for you? Does a mentor guide your career, help you build specific skills, act as a champion for you in the organization, or something else entirely? If you determine you need or want a mentor, is this person your boss or someone different in the organization, or is it someone outside your company? Having someone coach you on specific skills you need to develop is useful, for sure. Finding someone who believes in you and your abilities and acts as your champion is especially helpful in large companies where you are one of many. I believe it was Tom Landry, legendary coach of the Dallas Cowboys, who said, "A coach is someone who tells you what you don't want to hear, who has you see what you don't want to see, so you can be who you have always known you could be." To me, that's what a leadership mentor does. What does *leadership mentor* mean to you?

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Twenty-Two

Leadership Team-Building

Team-building is a hot topic. Organizations invest a lot of resources in team- building, whether the money goes for workshops, consultants or coaches. What I don't often hear about is leadership team-building; i.e., building a solid team at the leadership level. This is an often-overlooked area for building a business or improving the effectiveness or productivity of an organization. Without the key leaders of an organization working well together, the chances of the organization's being wildly successful diminish substantially. You can have individual departments (teams) performing well and those team members working well together, but if the leaders of the organization aren't aligned, don't play well together or, worse yet, have continual infighting, the teams under each of these leaders are not likely to work well together.

Just think how much easier everything would be if your company's leadership team functioned well together. Think about the last couple of meetings you have had with your leadership team. Did they consist of arguing, finger-pointing, lack of accountability, people interrupting each other and no definable actions created? Or was it easy, fun, focused, respectful and at the end there were clear steps and actions defined and commitment from the individuals in the room? I'm betting closer to the former than the latter. Think about if you directed resources toward leadership team- building…building a team of executives, managers, leaders of your organization whose primary goal was oriented toward what was best for the organization, not just them or their teams. What might you be able to achieve as a company?

I recently conducted a workshop on communication for a company with the president and her six key executives. This was honestly one of the most dysfunctional teams I had ever worked with. They interrupted each other, accused each other, focused on what was wrong, not working or not yet complete. They didn't know how to communicate so that their views could be heard and understood. Their meetings consisted of a lot of talk and rhetoric, discussions but limited decisions, and few if any action steps, agreements or goals defined. Yet they were financially successful, customers were knocking at their door and they had very low turnover rate at any position within the company. Surprising? Not really. This is a pretty common phenomenon. Companies can be successful almost in spite of themselves.

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My point is this: If you have a company that is successful by your standards, how much more successful could it be if the leaders were a team rather than a group of individual contributors? Can you build a thriving company with a group of individual top-notch players? Yes, and many companies do. But I'm here to suggest that your upside potential will be limited and you as the owner, president or CEO of this company will spend an inordinate amount of time managing these relationships. Next time you have dollars to spend, think about using them for leadership team-building activities. It may be the best decision you make this week.

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Twenty–Three

Leadership Team Building: Barriers to Great Teamwork

We all know the difficulty of building great teams. And most of the focus in books, articles and training seminars is on how to have an effective team. Today I'd like to discuss leadership team building through the lens of what gets in the way of building first-rate teams, the barriers to great teamwork.

Those of you who follow me know I'm big on the role communication has in every aspect of our lives. Communication, or the lack thereof, can make or break a team.

Another barrier is lack of clarity about the team's objective and where each team member's role fits in. If everyone is not crystal clear about what the team is there to accomplish and the role each team member has in meeting that objective, uncertainty will be the norm and chaos the predictable outcome.

Sometimes individuals on a team have to put the needs of the team ahead of their own needs. Those who can't will interfere with building a great team.

Leadership team building means the leader of the team has a huge effect on the success of not only the end results but how the team jells and pulls together for the common good. Poor or ineffective leadership is, after communication, the biggest barrier to building great teams.

And lastly, the wrong people on the team. If you don't have the right players on the team, all the rest doesn't matter. This isn't meant to be an exhaustive list of barriers; it's meant to get you thinking. What do you think are the barriers to building a great team?

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Twenty–Four

Team Leadership Training: Is It Different from Management Training?

Is there a difference between team leadership training and management training? In fact, do we teach team leadership training at all, or is it a subset of management training? Recently the question was asked of me: Is the skill necessary to lead teams successfully different from the skill set of an effective manager? It got me thinking about the skills themselves and whether we have team leadership training that builds those skills. I know there are dozens of training programs on how to manage teams. But I wonder if there is a unique set of skills that are or should be taught in team leadership training that is different from management training. I have my own ideas on this, but would love to hear yours. Send me your thoughts, ideas and insights on two questions. First, is there a different set of skills to be a successful team leader or an effective manager? The second question, is team leadership training different from management training?

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Twenty–Five

Top Five Tips for Building a Close-knit Team

Building a close-knit team is one of the top challenges leaders face. There is no 'one size fits all' answer to how one builds such a team; however, there are some guidelines that will help.

1. Hire right.
Building a close-knit team begins by hiring right in the first place. You have to hire people who a) want to be part of a team, b) don't need to be in the limelight all the time, c) are interested in the greater good of the organization – sometimes that means above and beyond their own needs, and d) have not only the requisite skills to do their job well but the desire to learn from others and see how their piece can be part of the whole.

2. Clearly defined goals.
After hiring right, having clearly defined goals and objectives for the individuals, the company and the team is critical. Often companies have goals for the organization and for the individuals in the company, but miss the mark by not having team goals. It's also important that individuals on the team be evaluated on these goals, just as they are on their individual objectives. These goals can be developed by the team or by leadership, but the team needs to buy into them and agree to them.

3. Frequent communication.
Sounds simple, but open and frequent communication is the cornerstone of successful teams. What often breaks down teams is ineffective communication – people not sharing how they feel, not being forthright about their challenges or problems with other team members, etc. People talk to everyone except the person with whom they are having a challenge. One thing I often recommend is to open team meetings with time for each person to vent and with the focus on constructive ideas, not on accusations this being a time for accusations, express their unhappiness, express their happiness, congratulate other team members, or whatever – a clearing and opportunity for discussion. What isn't addressed becomes buried, but it doesn't go away.

4. Accountability for team members.
Team members holding other team members accountable will go a long way toward building a successful team. For example: If a team member commits to completing a task or getting information by a specific date, the rest of the team needs to hold this person accountable, especially if others on the team need the information to complete their tasks. If team members work toward holding one another accountable rather than management's having to take on this role, the team jells better. They don't want to disappoint each other or be seen as 'the guy no one can count on.'

5. Little things matter.
Take the team to lunch or dinner. Have them develop a friendly competition amongst themselves (could be work-related or something fun like a contest for who makes the most delicious dessert), have them create a name for their team – silly, yes, but silly often works. You want them to do things together and see themselves as a unit, not a bunch of individual contributors who come together periodically.

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Twenty-Six

Corporate Teambuilding: Teamwork at the Top

What makes teams successful? Is corporate teambuilding simply a matter of having fun team-building events or throwing together people who have similar goals? Having effective teams is not an accident or just good luck. So how does one go about having a first-class team, the proverbial 'dream team'?

Teamwork at the top what do I mean by this? I'm not referring to teams made up of executives but top notch teams. To create the top-notch team requires designing the team well. This begins with hiring the 'right' people. I don't want to get into a long discussion on what hiring the right people means, but they should have similar values, work ethic and ways they show up in the world (how they communicate, for instance). Next, the team needs to be clear about its goals and objectives. There is nothing that destroys team cohesiveness and corporate teambuilding quicker than the team members' differing on what they believe are the desired outcomes. This is important for all teams, and it's crucial when you have cross-functional teams. Cross-functional teams have their own agendas and needs. If the team isn't in synch on the objectives, then individual departments will default to what serves each one best, which may be in conflict with what serves the larger group.

Leading is as important to great teamwork as designing the team. Managing the team includes many aspects: providing the right tools, managing through conflict, running interference as necessary, providing guidance and mentoring on questions or issues, and helping the members communicate effectively, to name just a few.

Corporate teambuilding requires thoughtfulness, creativity, time and the knowledge that it doesn't happen by simply throwing people together and hoping for the best. Teamwork at the top means you have to design and then lead to build effective and productive teams.

Conclusion

Thank you for partaking in yet another Incedo Group creation. We hope you enjoyed this learning experience and that you walked away with a glimpse of what it takes to successfully manage people and teams.

As the articles and Top 10 lists illustrate, successful leadership of people and teams demands time and energy and patience. Even the most motivated employees at times need support or a kick in the pants. The most well-oiled teams will occasionally have strife and conflict, and you will need to step in to mediate or get them back on track. Likewise, to build a successful organization you must invest in the people to bring out their best. This investment of time in training and development, mentoring and coaching, guiding and pushing will positively impact your company. You'll see improved performance and productivity, reduced conflict, improved morale and much more. I can't understate the importance of spending time with your people and the teams they are part of.

Leadership has its challenges, for sure. And, like raising children, watching your employees rise to new heights, stretch their wings and grow in ways you couldn't have anticipated is gratifying. You will know you are part of what helped them achieve this success, and they will know it also. Nothing builds trust and loyalty with employees like their knowing you care and have invested in them. Yes, it takes time and other resources, but the rewards to you and the company are enormous. Remember what I said in the Introduction? The greatest asset a company has is not the product or service or price or anything else, it's the people. Investment in this asset is just as important; in fact, in my opinion it's more important than any other investment you make in your organization.

Whether you are considering taking on a new leadership role, promoting someone into one, or simply wanting to improve your skills, you can benefit from the advice and insights contained on the pages of this ebook.

As a final note: This is one in a series of three ebooks on leadership. Each one includes different concepts of leadership. There is no overlap, and the books can be read in any order. Thank you for taking the time to read this Incedo Group compilation. Now go spend some time being the great manager of people and teams you know you can be.

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