

Working on your leadership

Executive summary

How much of your working week is consciously applied to leading your team? In being a leader what are the behaviours you should exhibit?

This article will challenge you to think about what more you as a leader can do to bring out the best in your team.

Discussion

Working owners in professional service firms usually fall into leadership roles by default. Perhaps they started the business or maybe accepted an offer of partnership. They got there by various means – usually technical or financial but occasionally rainmaking. Seldom is this progression due to natural ability to lead and inspire a team.

So if you are in a leadership role, have team members reporting to you and responsibility for training/appointing/promoting/firing, it's time for you to reflect upon your leadership style. What are the characteristics appropriate to your firm and the people who work in it?

Let's first consider what constitutes desirable behaviour from your team members. Naturally there is room for differences of opinion but you may find broad agreement with the following –

- Friendly - how much nicer it is to come to work and enjoy one another's company!
- Client-centric - a team which is focused on great client outcomes and prepared to go the extra mile to achieve this
- Aspirational - team members who are keen to learn, develop new skills and find better ways. Employees willing to train others to do their job in order that they themselves may progress up the ladder.
- Diligent - get the work done to specifications, within agreed timeframes and on budget.
- Resourceful - able to complete assignments notwithstanding difficulties encountered; finding better ways to get tasks done

So, if your team exhibits these characteristics as a matter of course, then congratulations! It is highly likely that your clients will be delighted and you have a stellar bottom line.

And yet these characteristics don't occur by themselves. Indeed, they are not commonplace. It is likely you will have worked in organisations which are anything but this ideal situation. Almost certainly, such firms do not perform as well.



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Let's now look at the role that leadership has to play in creating optimal team characteristics. Again, there is room to debate but here is a starting list.

- Clear, engaging communication. Making everyone aware of what the vision, goals and strategies are. Further, ensuring that each person on the team knows how his/her efforts will help to achieve the objectives set.
- Supporting and empowering. Nurturing team members in various ways. Training them, guiding them and even allowing them to stumble, all within the context of an overall development program.
- Challenging the status quo. Helping the team reach new levels of performance in terms of utilising technology, improving work turnaround times and rolling out new services.
- Role model for life in and outside the office. This is about being a leader who displays consistent behaviour, lives by a clear set of values and enjoys a fulfilling personal life outside of work.
- Enthusiastic. No one will give their all for a grouch. Equally your team will lift when you are committed to the task at hand and passionate about great outcomes.

By all means construct your own list of leadership behaviour as appropriate to your firm and your team members.

But now, here are some real challenges to consider –

- How do you rate your current leadership against the leadership behaviours you consider important?
- What steps are you consciously taking to improve your leadership?
- Or is your firm simply drifting on without any clear direction from you?

In a future article these questions will be explored in more detail. For now, it's worth considering how much time each week you currently invest in leading and whether what you are doing will bring out the best in your team.