

Creating an Environment for Your Team to Strive

Two things every leader needs to do is listen and observe. Utilizing these skills, you can create an environment in which your team can work at its best, open lines of communication with team members, and motivate them to do better work.

Success as a leader depends on your ability to enable your team to reach objectives and to motivate them to win. Sooner or later you'll find yourself working with an individual or a team who isn't interested and appears to have lost motivation. You can take advantage of this situation by tapping into each individual's personal drivers and working together toward a common vision. To do this, you'll need to create an environment that fosters optimal motivation, listen to your employees, and observe their environment.

A few days ago, I was trying to motivate my 10-month-old to crawl toward me. He refused all of my attempts to convince him, giving me an uninterested look and turning his head away every time I waved and talked to him. Earlier that week, a friend at work suggested holding him in the crawling position and giving him a little push. "He will eventually get it," my friend said. "And he will take off like a wild rabbit." That

attempt also failed miserably.

But my wife knew better. She observed that the slippery floor made it hard for him to get a grip. And because he had just learned how to push things, she thought a toy would be a good source of motivation. To overcome these obstacles, she got him a rubber carpet and captured his attention



with a toy push car that had bells and lights. She knew that would help him get moving; it certainly did. The little guy took off like a bulldozer.

The simple explanation isn't that I wasn't trying hard enough to motivate him, but rather I wasn't listening and observing. I thought I had to push my son to do what I wanted him to do instead of tapping into what would really motivate him. I didn't look into removing obstacles and creating an environment where he could feel comfortable.

Not surprisingly, two critical abilities any leader should possess are listening and observing. Having an open and frank conversation with your team members will allow you to tune into what drives and motivates each individual, their goals, and aspirations. Use this opportunity to communicate to your team how the organization and its goals can help them reach their own. This simple exercise builds trust and opens the door for feedback and coaching that would otherwise be impossible to share. After more than 17 years of managing teams, I continue to marvel at the level of engagement and accountability that comes from people who feel a sense of purpose and personal commitment toward the organization's goals.

As a leader, you need to create an environment in your organiza-

tion that lets your team strive and reach their goals. For instance, you can create an environment where mentoring and coaching opportunities are available, where roles are challenging, and where people are empowered to influence improvements and change. The main point is to observe the obstacles and seek opportunities to help the team overcome them.

This “striving” environment goes beyond creating organizational processes. It includes improving personal well-being and team dynamics. For instance, you can nurture a culture of respect and diversity where individuals feel valued and included. You can also carefully and mindfully manage crises, both business and personal. Don’t miss out on offering these opportunities to your teams. Strive to create space that allows them to be a part of corporate or external initiatives that offer mentoring or coaching.

During my time at Procter & Gamble, I have admired the managers’ strong emphasis to win on everyday moments that can inspire employees, appropriately called “Employee Moments of Truth.” Managers see these moments as opportunities to increase capability and performance that ultimately enable people to work at their peak. I will never forget when a former manager, Clark Sandquist, offered me a “moment” during a family crisis: “Focus your attention on the birth of your baby, Esteban. Your job will be here when you get back,” he said. Those words took the world off my shoulders and inspired me as an important moment of truth.

A Good Example

One of the best managers I’ve worked with at Procter & Gamble was managing a small team of SAP experts out of San José, Costa Rica. As part of a two-year expat assignment, Bill Hulme had a tough crowd: Half of his newly appointed team had lost interest, and the other half lacked the direction and coaching to do things right—a losing team by many standards. He quickly started working on each individual’s personal motivation and setting clear directions and expectations. He helped his new team learn to overcome barriers that were sources of frustration, such as business understanding and system knowledge. He made sincere efforts to connect with his team members on a personal level and created a fun, engaging environment where people felt valued. His efforts led to immediate improvement, as ex-

pected, but the long-term results were even more amazing. Every member of his team remains in the company 10 years later, and virtually all of them have been promoted. Hulme is still adored and admired by his team.

It’s hard work to listen and connect with your team while striving to create an environment in which each member can succeed. It takes time, keen awareness, and dedication. It’s often tempting to cut corners and push people to do things, but that won’t work in the long run. Motivation is a leadership skill that you can use to move virtually anything and anyone. It gives you a unique opportunity to help people enjoy what they do and reach their dreams. Wouldn’t you want to work for someone who listens and helps you? **SF**

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