

LEADERSHIP BRIEFINGS

Taking your leadership skills to the next level

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Leadership Tips

Steal this leadership wisdom and celebrate your own success. Business Management Daily surveyed leaders on their successes over the past year. These are reasons to celebrate, and many of these relate to real challenges facing leaders today (see article at right). If you have a triumph to share, email ttaffera@businessmanagementdaily.com.

- "I inherited a very stressed and fractured team. I was able to bring them together, reduce their stress and make them more cohesive. They are functioning at a much higher level and expressing greater satisfaction as a result."
- "Made a pitch for a new role and it worked!"
- "Started tracking productivity data with a great internal spreadsheet."
- "A successful reorganization of our organizational structure. Keeping everyone in the loop, so rumors do not get started was key. People felt included, had their questions answered, and were overall comfortable with the changes made."
- "We integrated a new software suite of tools for our configuration management data area. We were successful at communication and training across the team."

For more on the survey, including tips from leaders, see page 4.

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Overcoming challenges: Lack of engagement, lack of teamwork and poor communication

We all know employees have embraced fully remote and hybrid workplaces—many going so far as to proclaim they will quit their jobs if this perk isn't part of the package. But a recent Business Management Daily survey of leaders shows the effect this is having on the workplace: Teamwork is suffering and causing a real problem for managers.

Leaders were asked: For the employees and teams that you oversee, what are your biggest challenges? Thirty-six percent cited poor communication. And in the open-ended comments, leaders expressed their challenges.

"It can be difficult to have colleagues share information, be open to each other and understand what others in the team are working on," said one respondent.

When leaders were asked about their biggest challenges in 2023, employee engagement and retention rose to the top of the list at 44%.

Build in structure

We're not going back, so how do we fix the problem? Managers must be more deliberate, purposeful and intentional to create a culture of connection, according to best-selling author and leadership expert Paul Falcone. "It happens automatically at the water cooler or in the breakroom ... but in this new workplace, you have to build structure and arm yourself with questions to ask," he says.

Managers need this roadmap as many don't know how to proceed in these uncharted waters. "When you don't physically see employees, you can't 'read' how they are doing. You listen to them say, 'I'm fine,' when they really aren't," said one respondent.

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That's where building a culture of connection comes in, says Falcone.

Ways to foster connection

- **One-on-one, team meetings and individual development meetings.** These are all crucial in the new workplace. "In survey after survey, CEOs are saying soft skills and emotional intelligence are critical," says Falcone. "We should have been doing this all along, but in this remote environment, it's all exposed."
- **Overcommunicate.** It's impossible to overcommunicate, say many leadership experts, Falcone included. "When there is a gap, people make assumptions," he says. "The assumptions are typically off. It's not easy to do all these meetings, but that's the trade-off."
- **Find the balance.** Managers must ensure that staff members find the balance that works for them, and they'll only know by asking. It's not a one-

Continued on page 3

When should I give negative feedback?



by Kevin Eikenberry

There is plenty of discussion about negative feedback, and why not? While we have all gotten plenty of it, it isn't often very effective, so leaders and coaches always look for ways to improve in this area. While there is plenty of good advice about how to do it, there's far less conversation about *when* to give negative feedback. In many ways, when is as important as how.

Keep the goal in mind

Remember that the goal should be for the receiver to accept and apply the feedback. In the case of negative comments, the person must first hear about/be aware of something they did wrong or could do better, and understand it. They will only accept and apply feedback if they hear and understand it.

That means if we want negative feedback to be accepted and applied by the other person, we must start with them, not the situation or the specific comments.

A quick example

That makes sense, but it isn't how it often goes. Imagine this situation ...

You are a parent, and one of your children does something wrong. Let's say they broke something. You are angry, so you give them some "feedback." You tell them they need to be more careful; you tell them you are disappointed; you tell them [insert your own messages]. And because you are

angry, you might give that feedback in a raised voice and with angry body language.

How successfully will those comments be received? Could they have been relayed more effectively?

I do not need to imagine this story because, as a parent, I did something like this far more often than I would like to admit—it wasn't adequate by nearly any measure. I might have been correct and justified, but the feedback wasn't effective, and I ran the risk of damaging my relationship with my child.

While common, that isn't the best approach. Here are some ideas on how we can improve in this area as a parent, spouse, teammate or leader.

Think about the recipient

Focus less on what went wrong or needs to be corrected and more on the person you need to give feedback to. Ask yourself these questions:

- Do they realize the error or that they could have done something differently/better?
- Are they upset, embarrassed or otherwise not yet ready to receive the feedback?
- Do they have time to hear it now?
- How and when can you deliver this in a way that they will best understand and accept it?

When we stop to think about the receiver, we'll make better decisions about when and how to give any

negative feedback.

Think about yourself

Let's look back at the story above. As the giver, you were angry (I know I was). When we are upset, are we likely to give feedback in a clear, measured and balanced way? In other words, are we ready to effectively give that negative feedback? Not so much.

So here are some questions for you to ask about yourself before these difficult conversations.

- Am I emotionally ready to give the feedback now?
- Do I have time to do it effectively?
- Does it even have to be done right now?
- What are they doing well—do they need to hear that too?

Key takeaways

To crystallize what we have just talked about, consider this advice when giving negative feedback:

- Proceed when you are ready and able to give it successfully, and they are willing and able to receive it successfully.
- Refrain from giving it in the moment unless it creates an immediate safety concern. While feedback needs to be timely, that doesn't usually mean bestowing it immediately.

When you apply this advice, chances are the negative feedback you give will be far more effective and will improve your relationship and the trust between you and the receiver.

What more could you ask for?



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Kevin is the Chief Potential Officer of The Kevin Eikenberry Group, a leadership and learning consulting company that has been helping organizations, teams and individuals reach their potential since 1993, and the co-founder of The Remote Leadership Institute, formed in 2014. Kevin's specialties include leadership, remote/hybrid work, teams and teamwork, organizational culture, facilitating change, organizational learning and more. He is the bestselling author of several books including Remarkable Leadership: Unleashing Your Leadership Potential One Skill at a Time, and he hosts The Remarkable Leadership Podcast.

Hire high performers by utilizing motivation-based interviewing

Ninety percent of those who hire have never been trained at interviewing. That fact makes it crucial for leaders to ensure their managers and anyone involved in the hiring process know how to ferret out a high performer. Carol Quinn, best-selling author and creator of motivation-based interviewing (MBI), knows how to help leaders and managers through this process.

“We have an epidemic problem of overrating the job candidate. The problem is your interview questions,” says Quinn. “MBI is about shifting the current and hiring more high performers. It’s about, as an interviewer, being confident about your hires.”

Quinn explains human behavior when overcoming obstacles and how that all relates to interviewing. When you come up with an idea, sometimes the first try results in failure. If you keep going, you devise a solution and overcome that obstacle. But here’s the key: Low performers think it’s the presence of obstacles that stops them. But it’s the high performers who knock them to the ground.

MBI overview

To find those high performers, consider the MBI method.

- MBI is a method for assessing skill, attitude and passion.
- It takes no extra time and can be used to fill any job opening.
- MBI uses properly and consistently phrased skill assessment questions to gather skill and attitude information and assess predominant responses.

- MBI uses five simple questions to assess a candidate’s passion, considered the most powerful natural self-motivator. The idea is to hire someone whose passion matches the job duties.

MBI questions

MBI questions have three parts and are formed using the acronym O-SAE (oh say, can you see if you have a high performer).

Questions have three rules that must always be followed:

O-S: Obstacle-Situation. Tell me about a specific time when you (customize back half).

A: Action taken. Tell me about the action you took.

E: What were the results?

Quinn stresses that MBI questions are skill-specific, and used correctly, they gather information regarding attitude and skill. “The high performer can go into the try-and-fail details. The low performer can’t because they didn’t go through those steps,” she says.

Leader takeaways

The key for interviewers is getting used to saying, “Tell me about a specific time when ...”

If you are a leader or manager, start learning more about MBI and employ it immediately. But the more significant goal is ensuring your hiring managers know how to implement the method.

“Great hires get turned away as they aren’t recognized as great hires,” says Quinn. “And low performers slip through.”

Overcoming leaders’ challenges

Continued from page 1

size-fits-all solution. “That’s where the emotional intelligence comes in,” says Falcone.

What happens if leaders ignore this advice? Falcone warns that employees who feel the disconnect, even if they love

the company and the independence, may leave.

“You can’t make them feel like they are floating out there or have been forgotten,” says Falcone. “They may look to find that connection somewhere else.”

Leadership films for a lazy day



The Insider

A family man with two kids and a wife holds a secret that will ruin the operations of the tobacco industry, “Big Tobacco.” This movie shows how much bravery and courage it takes to do the right thing, especially when dealing with big corporations, and how it is always worth it in the end.

Sully

Tom Hanks stars as hero pilot Chesley Sullenberger, who successfully glided his plane along the Hudson River after a malfunction—saving all 155 passengers on board—in this inspiring tale of leadership.

Lincoln

With the Civil War in full swing, President Abraham Lincoln must use his political skill to end the war and permanently abolish slavery through the passing of the 13th Amendment. The lesson? **Bring a sense of urgency to the important.** If it’s important to do tomorrow, it’s important to do today.

Norma Rae

The true-life story of Crystal Lee Sutton, a worker at a North Carolina textile factory who fomented the organization of a union. Sutton was fired, but the plant was ultimately organized. Of particular note was Sutton’s mute communication, holding up a simple placard that stated UNION. Sally Field won an Oscar for her performance.

RGB

Biopic of the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the trailblazing litigator and, from 1993, associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court and only the second woman to sit on the high court. *RGB* includes her education, her days at Harvard and Columbia, and her influence on the Supreme Court for the last 25 years.

Gandhi

An epic film, *Gandhi* is the life story of Mohandas K. Gandhi, from his humiliation in South Africa in 1893 to his assassination in New Delhi in 1948. The very personification of authenticity and humility in leadership, Gandhi, to this day, remains the world’s greatest apostle of non-violent political protest.

Leaders share their best tips

What's one resource, tip or trick you use to make your job easier? That's the question Business Management Daily asked leaders in a recent survey. It was heartening to see that some of the answers are positive solutions to some of the challenges leaders face (see article on page 1). If you have a tip to share, email ttaffera@businessmanagementdaily.com.

- “Networking with people who have skills I don’t.”
- “I make my expectations and instructions very clear.”
- “Set aside two hours a week for training staff.”
- “I have two that I use regularly. 1. Use rules in Outlook to manage my inbox and keep only the high-priority emails right in front of me. 2. Time-box a couple of times a day to read my emails and respond to them.”
- “Having a learning mindset with the understanding that things will go wrong, so it’s more about learning/improving rather than being overly confident.”
- “Succession planning. Training number twos.”
- “Taking breaks between tasks. It helps me reset my mind to tackle the next project.”
- “Communicate with staff and customers. This prevents issues and surprises and keeps all on the same page.”
- “Be empathetic and compassionate to gain people’s trust and buy-in.”
- “Logging off when I get home. I get it that no one at my workplace does this, but not doing it is how I burned out at my last job.”
- “Continuing education.”
- “Getting to know the strengths of each team member.”
- “Addressing challenges head-on and do not delay in taking action. Once done, move on to the next task.”
- “I helped my team use SMART techniques to set their targets and manage their work accordingly. I make them accountable for their own outcome.”
- “Communicate often and stay on message.”

Back to Basics

Stop taking high performers for granted



by Karl Ahlrichs

An occasional “reboot” is healthy. The craft of leadership benefits from going back to the basics regularly,

and communication is the best place to start—it’s the foundation upon which you build relationships, trust and teamwork. Strong communication skills enable you to share visions and goals while listening to the needs and concerns of your team. It is worthy of practicing, adjusting and improving daily.

Here are two simple tactics that will improve your staff engagement and slow the “quiet quitting” of your team.

1. Identify your high performers

Where to start? First, direct your efforts to the most important people on your team—your high performers. Next, draw a distribution curve and label the segments for each type of performance—low, average and high. If you wish, write the names of your employees in the segments. Then, reflect on where you spend most of your time.

Recognize that it is human nature to focus on problems, which results in you investing much of your time in the low performers as you attempt to change behaviors and improve results. On the surface, this seems to be a good approach, but the flaw is that high performers feel left out and disconnected.

Try a test—ask your fellow leaders where they spend their time. They will most probably point to the low-performer quadrant and start naming names. Then, point to the high performers and ask why they don’t spend time with those people. The answer will be simple: “Them? They don’t need it.”

Simply put, leaders often spend less time with their high performers than in other areas of the workforce. This lack of communication with high performers disrupts the workforce at several levels over time. However, when it works, leaders who intentionally communicate ensure that all team members—especially

high performers—are working towards a common goal, which requires sharing clear expectations with all and providing ongoing feedback and direction.

2. Call to action

The second point is a call for action—intentionally communicating with your high performers. First, identify them, then build a reminder system to keep them in your “front of mind.” Talk to them, listen and include them in important discussions.

Another issue hiding in the weeds of poor communication is poor motivation. Ask your high performers what their motivators are, and you will get an interesting list, including “challenge” and “recognition.” Infrequently will they say “cash.” Those motivators come from having a quality relationship with a leader they trust.

Do you see the dangerous disconnect? It is human nature for leaders to spend time communicating with the low performers while they leave the latter to fend for themselves. Yet, while disconnected, the high performers are more likely to accept another offer or a step in their career that is being ignored in their current position.

When team members feel heard, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated, and remain anchored to you in a churning workforce. On the other hand, a lack of clear communication can lead to misunderstandings, disengagement and conflict, all of which can harm team morale and employee retention. These are crucial to sustainable leadership.

Intentional communication focused on high performers is a crucial skill that enables leaders to effectively convey their vision, direct their team’s work and build positive relationships. It is the foundation upon which you will build a successful organization.

Karl Ahlrichs is a national speaker, virtual facilitator and author. He has decades of strategic HR consulting to all industries, using risk management and organizational development theories to bypass “best practices” and move directly to “next practices.”

How to nurture high-potential employees



by Paul Falcone

High-potential employees, or HIPOs, typically stand out among their peers based on superior performance. They often master their roles and responsibilities early in their tenure and look for additional opportunities to excel. Proactive companies try to make the most of their highest-performing talent, and building a HIPO (AKA fast track) program often makes sense. These provide superstar employees (i.e., those in the top fifth percentile) with greater exposure to different roles, meaningful training assignments and more progressive career paths through several managerial positions across the organization, both to “challenge the superstar” and to retain those with the highest capabilities. For example, General Electric developed the best-known HIPO program, which typically lasted two years and historically included rotational leadership assignments.

Even smaller companies and nonprofits can customize a program around their highest performers. Follow the three guideposts below to structure and customize a program that meets each individual’s needs.

Help with résumé building

Top producers and high-potential employees thrive on building their résumés and LinkedIn profiles. As long as they sense that they’re on a fast track—adding value to the company while garnering new skills and accomplishments that they can bullet on a résumé—they will likely remain in place with high levels of job satisfaction and personal engagement. Employee recognition is key to their growth and professional development, so finding ways to publicly acknowledge their accomplishments is a smart strategy.

Remember that from a leadership perspective, you will always get a greater return on investment when building on people’s strengths rather than trying to manage their shortcomings. As you do at the gym, focus on strength training to build HIPOs’ self-awareness and individual potential.

Fostering an achievement mentality

Focus HIPOs on increasing revenue, decreasing expenses or saving time. You must help them quantify their results in terms of dollars and percentages so they can track their concrete achievements over time. While this should be a part of all employees’ development, it’s particularly significant for HIPOs because they desire to demonstrate progress in their careers and toward their own goals. Overachievers thrive on accomplishment. Building out their technical-specialist and management-focused career tracks tends to work exceptionally well with top performers.

Paying it forward

Partner with HIPOs to create personalized individual development plans or IDPs. IDPs focus on short-, mid-range and longer-term goals. They tie career aspirations to the organization’s broader needs. They may include new certifications or licenses, greater exposure to senior leadership or other parts of the organization and one-on-one mentoring and coaching. Ensure that you meet at least quarterly to assess IDP progress—business changes too quickly to only hold such meetings once per year.

Most important, place HIPOs into the role of “paying it forward.” Creating the space and expectation that those with the greatest skills can share them with others fosters a sense of selfless leadership that, for many, creates the highest levels of career satisfaction. As the saying goes, you cannot give away anything you don’t already have. Placing HIPOs into positions of influence where they can share their wealth and talents is likely the greatest way to cement loyalty to the organization while building a personal brand that lifts others and builds a stronger sense of teamwork and camaraderie.

Paul Falcone (www.PaulFalconeHR.com) is principal of Paul Falcone Workplace Leadership Consulting, LLC. He is a columnist for SHRM and a bestselling author of 15 books, including the 5-book Paul Falcone Workplace Leadership Series.

Training and development lacking, leaders say

Business Management Daily posed the following question to leaders in a recent survey: What are the biggest challenges you face when it comes to managing employees? Employee training and development ranked number two at 26% (behind retaining good employees at 38%).



Here is what some respondents lamented about training:

“New hires coming in are not given professional training (through the HRIS system) or even enough training when asked to ‘jump in’ and work. I think this creates not only issues with catch-up but bad feelings that a new person is immediately going to fail. I think all companies do more with less headcount, but unfortunately, companies don’t want to pay for the knowledge new employees bring in and overworking them becomes a norm—this is where the ‘quiet quitting’ comes in.”

“Tight deadlines leave no time for training. Senior leadership wants staff to learn on their own time.”

There is good news—leaders recognize the importance of training and generating employee engagement through the process.

“When it comes to training, the challenge is the engagement piece,” says Greg Lindsey, manager of maintenance strategic planning and support at USPS. “It’s hard to be successful at one without the other. The challenge to me as a leader is to inspire the desire for learning in my team. I don’t want them to enter training just to check the box. It needs to be an engaged approach.”

Solution: It’s your job as a leader to ensure employees get the training they need. Work with your managers to make this happen by making it part of their goals and expectations. Then follow up to ensure they are making this happen. And take Lindsey’s approach of inspiring employees who want to learn and engage with others.

6 principles of a successful leader

To sell ideas effectively to employees, you must first establish a track record of trustworthiness and competence. Here are six traits that will help you establish that leadership base:

1. A positive outlook. When you are honestly enthusiastic about what you do, your base of support continually widens. In time, it becomes far easier to gain support for projects.

2. A willingness to empower others. People who merely delegate work never achieve enthusiastic support. But those who enable others to learn, make progress and reach their own goals do.

3. Clear goals. Show that you have a clear vision about what you want to achieve.

4. Consistency. If you want to be taken seriously, adhere to the same standards and principles tomorrow that you do today. Only then will people count on you.

5. Integrity. Real leaders never fail to honor their promises and commitments. They never misrepresent themselves.

6. Communication skills. Not all effective leaders are eloquent public speakers or writers. But all have found ways to communicate their ambitions clearly to others—sometimes simply by pursuing their goals with boundless energy.

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Personal Growth

Do you have a self-leadership mindset?

Self-leadership is the practice of understanding who you are, identifying your desired experiences and intentionally guiding yourself toward them.

According to speaker, author and leadership trainer Peggy Vasquez, “Discover how to lead yourself to achieve your personal and professional goals while also ensuring the success of your organization. You won’t be a leader worth following if you don’t lead yourself well.”

Leaders worth following and people who are worth emulating are people who have mastered self-leadership.

What is self-leadership, and why do you need it?

“Because it’s time to reset, refocus and recenter, which are at the core of self-leadership,” says Vasquez. “It’s about continually developing your mindset and taking action. It describes how you lead your own life—setting your course, fol-

lowing it, modifying it and correcting it as you go. Self-leadership shows up in how you interact with your CEO, managers, colleagues and clients.”

Self-leadership is a daily process. It’s also a skill, not a trait you were born with, and that means you can learn it and hone it, just like all the other skills you’ve mastered.

Vasquez’s tips for honing your self-leadership skills:

- Motivation and determination.
- Constructive thought and decision making.
- Developing a growth mindset.
- Self-leadership model: Intention, influence and impact.
- Self-awareness and self-knowledge.
- Planning and goal setting.
- Embracing failure and cultivating grit.
- Accountability and sitting in the driver’s seat of your life and career.

Business Challenges

Leaders talk engagement and retention struggles

We all know it’s not an ideal world, and that applies to the business environment as well. But if we could live in that idyllic reality, Business Management

Daily asked leaders what would allow them to be successful. Forty-seven percent of respondents cited not having

enough tools and resources to support efforts as a real challenge, while 28% cited time management restrictions.

Leaders also struggle with employee engagement and retention—44% of leaders cited it as their biggest challenge (see article on page 1). Following are some of these respondents’ frustrations:

“With a revolving door of new team members, it becomes difficult to improve teamwork, which is another contributor to disengagement and turnover.”

“It is difficult to engage employees when they prefer to stay remote.”

“I’ve only been with the company for two years and have worked remote the



entire time with only a one-week trip to the company headquarters. Getting to know people in the company has

been difficult and limited to the ones I absolutely need to deal with.”

Solution: Stress to your CEO and higher-ups that you want your employees and the company to succeed and need the time and tools to make this happen. Use data to show them the pain points and map out a solution to fix the issues. Stress to them you believe in the company and are in for the long haul, you just need the tools to succeed—and support from top leaders.

Ways to stop resignations before they spread

A new study based on more than three years of research proves that resignations can spread throughout an organization and teams, but it also gives employers specific ways to stop this from happening. For leaders, it's an area to track and make sure your managers are aware of, so they can stop resignations from spreading throughout a team.

The Visier Insights Report, which studied “tens of millions of actual employee records,” reported the following:

- When a resignation happens, employees on that team are 9.1% more likely to leave within up to 135 days after the initial person resigns.
- Smaller teams have a higher probability of experiencing resignations due to turnover contagion: 25.1% in teams of two, 12.1% in teams of three to five and 14.6% in teams of six to 10.
- Turnover contagion peaks around 70 days after the first resignation.

Reducing resignations

Researchers in this study offer managers warning signs to watch for:

1. Watch for pre-quitting behavior.

Managers who worry about losing valuable employees can look for decreased productivity and less commitment to long-term timelines. Leaving early more frequently than usual could also be a sign of disengagement and reveal quitting intentions. While staying connected with team members should be part of every manager's daily leadership tasks, Visier's research shows it is especially critical in the months after a team member's resignation.

2. Pay attention to the time window after a team member's resignation. The risk of losing more team members after an employee's resignation increases for 135 days, or 4.5 months, after the first team member's resignation.

While managers should always work on talent retention activities, it is even more important to focus on career conversations, stay interviews, discussions of growth opportunities and ways to engage employees in this time window.

3. Strengthen social ties during onboarding.

According to Visier's research, considering social connections between employees may be an overlooked component in organizational hiring, onboarding and retention strategies. “Cohort onboarding,” still crucial even in remote environments, is one way to achieve this. “Giving new employees the opportunity to form relationships with others throughout the company at the beginning of their tenure could help root them beyond their immediate teams and potentially mitigate the risk of falling prey to turnover contagion,” researchers say.

Smaller teams have a higher probability of experiencing resignations due to turnover contagion.

Resources for Leaders

When Everyone Leads: The Toughest Challenges Get Seen and Solved

by Ed O'Malley and Julia Fabris McBride

This is the book you can share with everyone on your team. No one can say, “This isn't for me; I'm not a leader.” According to the book's authors, “Leadership is an activity, small actions taken in moments of opportunity.”

► We are giving away a copy of this book to the first person to email ttaffera@businessmanagementndaily.com. Simply email us with the name of your favorite leadership book and your address so we can send you a copy of *When Everyone Leads*.



Motivation-Based Interviewing: A Revolutionary Approach to Hiring the Best

by Carol Quinn

Want to hire high performers by asking all the right interview questions? Quinn tells you how in her guide for accurately and reliably assessing skill, attitude and passion so you can expose the incremental differences that separate the pretenders from the genuine high performers. (For more on the MBI method, see the article on page 3.)

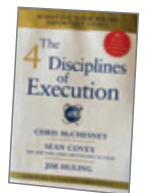


The 4 Disciplines of Execution

by Chris McChesney, Sean Covey and Jim Huling

If you want your organization to achieve its wildly important goals (WIGs) and put an end to the whirlwind, then this book is a must-read. 4DX is a proven formula for executing your most important strategic priorities. The method is based on four disciplines:

1. Focusing on the wildly important.
2. Acting on lead measures.
3. Keeping a compelling scoreboard.
4. Creating a cadence of accountability.



The 6 Types of Working Genius: A Better Way to Understand Your Gifts, Your Frustrations, and Your Team

by Patrick Lencioni

Bestselling author Lencioni always delivers when it comes to developing and leading a team. His latest book unveils a new model that will change the way we think about work and teams forever. It will help you as a leader identify the type of work that brings your team joy and energy, and avoid work that leads to frustration and burnout. The method also gives teams a simple framework for tapping into one another's natural gifts, which increases productivity and reduces unnecessary judgment.



Roadmap for leaders: Research reveals what employees want most in uncertain times

As the pandemic fades into the rear-view mirror, the lessons learned provide a roadmap toward effective leadership in tough times. Building trust with employees is vital, displaying vulnerability can be useful and providing inspiration is key.

“Inspirational motivation refers to the leader’s ability to inspire confidence, motivation, and a sense of purpose in their followers,” said Kristine W. Powers, a doctoral student at Claremont Graduate University, based in Claremont, Calif. “To do this, leaders must articulate a vision for the future and demonstrate commitment to the goals of their team and organization.”

Powers is one of the co-authors of the recently released report “What Employees Want Most in Uncertain Times.” The report was based on interviews conducted between March and October 2020, during the onslaught of the pandemic. The survey tapped the thoughts of 287 participants representing a variety of industries and organizations. They responded with 398 unique comments addressing one key question: “What is one thing your supervisor could do (or do more of) to help alleviate the uncertainty that arose as a result of the pandemic?”

Upcoming Webinars

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- Stop Managing, Start Coaching: The Coaching Manager’s Playbook—Friday, March 3, 1 p.m. ET
- Avoiding Leadership Landmines: The Five Biggest Mistakes that Managers Can’t Afford to Make—Friday, March 17, 1 p.m. ET
- The Magnetic Manager—Friday, March 24, 1 p.m. ET

Working from home: Do’s and don’ts

The answers revealed in the report offer an early window into how working from home has changed the workplace and still exerts an influence. Quotes from the respondents demonstrate how positive and negative human resource techniques developed during the height of the pandemic, and insight into what leaders need to avoid and lean into.

- “My supervisor has been upfront and transparent about the financial state of the organization as well as the status of my employment,” said one respondent. “She has also taken the time each day to check in about how my family and I are doing. With the closing of childcare centers, both my husband and I have had to balance two full-time jobs and two toddlers. My supervisor has been extremely understanding and flexible and has never made me feel guilty or as if I’m underperforming. I know that many are not as lucky, and I have been grateful.”
- “She is typically a very stoic and matter-of-fact person,” said another respondent. “It would have been helpful for her to acknowledge the emotional aspects of this pandemic. Her bi-weekly check-ins usually only consisted of questions like, ‘How is the work going?’, ‘do you have everything you need to get the work done?’ She could have asked, ‘How are you doing?’, ‘is there any way I can better support you?’ Overall, she could have done a better job of checking in on us emotionally/psychologically, as opposed to pragmatically.”

Asking the right questions

Leading from a remote location requires thoughtful communication with staff. “Regular check-ins are a great first step,” said Jessica B.B. Diaz, report co-author, an assistant professor in the Division of Behavioral and Organizational Sciences

and director of human resource management at Claremont Graduate University. “It’s worth mentioning that simply asking employees, ‘What do you need,’ isn’t likely to be effective. Instead, consider specific questions like, ‘How much guidance would you like on your work this week?’ Start with a leading question like, ‘How can I best support you and your work?’”

Addressing individual needs

The wild card of uncontrollable change transforms the dynamic of effective leadership. Per the report, “research reveals that managing uncertainty is far more complicated than implementing such strategies under more stable conditions. We found that during times of uncertainty, different employees want different kinds of support delivered in different ways.” While some respondents craved leaders who would “communicate their fears,” others preferred executives who would “stay calm and not panic.” Per the report, “Faced with divergent sub-needs, managers must forgo a one-size-fits-all approach that might be effective during times of stability.”

Showing vulnerability

According to the research, uncertainty complicates inspirational efforts. “Over dialing on inspirational motivation is problematic when employees are facing high levels of uncertainty because it can feel inauthentic, too much of a good thing,” said Powers. “Leaders must balance optimism with vulnerability. Some employees wanted more vulnerability from their employees, likely because it helps build a human connection between manager and employee.”

“It’s a manager’s job to normalize stress during uncertain times,” said one respondent. “Recognizing that your employees are human and that they will be more distracted right now, being vulnerable is one of the most courageous things you can do.”

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(Continued on reverse side ...)

About the Speaker:



Morey Stettner is a communication consultant, an executive coach and the author of five popular business books: *The Art of Winning Conversation*, *Skills for New Managers*, *The Manager's Survival Guide*, *The New Manager's Handbook* and *Buyer Beware: An Industry Insider Shows You How to Win the Insurance Game*. A dynamic, crowd-pleasing speaker and corporate trainer, Stettner has addressed many groups across the United States on communication skills and led courses for Toastmasters International and The Learning Annex.

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