

Together We Can Achieve More

by Tresha Nelson

There's no doubt that as a leader, a great part of your duty lies in directing your team through the uncharted territory of the future. In fact, the root of the word "lead", means to go or guide. Leadership therefore implies forward motion in a particular direction. Leaders ultimately have responsibility for developing and setting the focus of organisational strategy, as well as communicating this strategy to the team.

Effective strategic leadership however, extends beyond a simple definition of directing people on a journey. It embodies an actual relationship between the leader and employees, encompassing purposeful collaboration and intentional information sharing between the parties. Effective leadership and fostering a culture of teamwork go hand in hand in setting a clear company vision and achieving strategic goals. Here are some practical ways to promote teamwork as a leader within your organisation:

A) Build trust and rapport - Ultimately, the manner in which leaders conduct themselves sets the organisation's cultural tone and what can be considered as acceptable behaviour. To this end, leaders should deliberately create a work environment that encourages honest and open communication. Your key demonstration of integrity is being truthful with employees.

While we acknowledge that not all information can be shared due to its sensitivity, it's still important to be upfront with team members. Let them know that all details cannot be disclosed at this time and proceed to share what you can. In being transparent, you set the pathway for building trust among employees and increasing their engagement. As former CEO of General Electric Jack Welch once stated, "Trust happens when leaders are transparent". Your employees should also have a standing invitation to freely exchange ideas or speak about any issues. An important component of effective communication and building rapport is not only encouraging staff to openly share feedback and disclose challenges, but also involves active listening. Active listening includes paying attention to the speaker, demonstrating through body language that you're listening, providing feedback, deferring judgment until the speaker is finished and responding appropriately by being candid and stating your opinions respectfully.

B) Inspire a shared vision that allows employees to leverage their strengths and expertise - As a leader your actions should inspire others to dream, learn, do and become more. In all you say and do, you should convey a genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of everyone's responsibilities. According to authors James Kouzes and Barry Posner of the best-selling book *The Leadership Challenge*, "Leaders must

foster conditions under which everyone will do things because they want to, not because they have to. One of the most important practices of leadership is giving life and work a sense of meaning and purpose by offering an exciting vision". Essentially, each team member needs to buy into the company's vision. There must be consensus on what constitutes success and you as the leader must lend support to all in working towards organisational goals. Moreover, as employees dutifully work to fulfil the company's vision, avenues and opportunities for their skill advancement and career progression should be identified. Try setting aside time each month to talk about the vision for the future with your employees, whether as part of a staff meeting, a working lunch or via one-on-one conversations.

C) Empower and enable staff to contribute to the decision-making process - Being an effective leader goes far beyond focusing on your individual greatness. Instead of solely making top-down decisions and micromanaging with zero input from others, leaders should engender an environment where persons have the ability to brainstorm, propose solutions and generally engage in the planning process. Your direct reports should be given the opportunity to offer suggestions and be fully involved in problem-solving. This can encourage creativity, boost confidence and develop employees' sense of ownership towards organisational success.

The question should be asked - "how can I offer team members more control or a greater sense of autonomy over aspects of their responsibilities?". You should also speak with employees on an individual basis to find out what manner of support and coaching they require from you. Your role also involves finding ways to connect staff members to the resources they need - whether information, other people, materials, funding and/or training - so that they can excel for the benefit of the entire organisation. Additionally, create opportunities for cross-functional interaction to encourage employees to collaborate with each other.

While too many business leaders tend to overlook it, the fact remains that teamwork can be a company's greatest competitive advantage. Now is the time to recognise the value in the collective wisdom of your team, but this can only be harnessed through the fundamental philosophy of "together we can achieve more".

For assistance in identifying your leadership strengths and areas for development, join *The Leadership Challenge Workshop* facilitated by Caribbean Catalyst Inc. Email info@caribbeancatalyst.com for more information on this highly acclaimed leadership experience.