

The Art of Leadership: Skills to Inspire the Team to Overcome Project Challenges and Achieve Their Goals

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II. LEADING TEAMS

Abstract—This paper highlights skills that a leader needs to acquire to lead a team successfully. With an appropriate vision and strategy, a team can be inspired, influenced and easily led. The importance of setting codes of conduct and establishing mutual agreements between the team members can help in minimizing issues and improving overall productivity. Leadership skills include the power of questioning (PoQ), effective communication, identification of team member responsibilities, and assessment of self and the team. This paper will highlight the impact of good leadership on work progress and overall team performance. The paper explains how leaders make correct decisions by avoiding hasty actions that could generate new errors, mistakes, and issues. The importance of positive expectations for the team is addressed in this paper that could result in efficient control of the work with better outcomes.

Keywords—Leadership, inspire, confidence, power of questioning, leader impacts.

I. INTRODUCTION

LEADERSHIP is influencing a team or a group of people to work together for achieving common goals. The leader is the one who has a clear vision and has skills required to convert a vision into a reality. John Maxwell defines the leader in his quote as “A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way,” [1] and defines the leadership as “leadership is influence.” [2] The leader should be able to clearly communicate for others to understand, and possess persuasion skills for others to follow him or her, and to implement the view to achieve the desired objectives and goals. To be a leader, it is crucial to gain the needed skills and knowledge, and to be strong, thoughtful, patient, and humble. For a leader’s view to be understood, it must be outlined inside a clear strategy that is implementable and easily understood by the followers. They are the most important parameter in the leadership equation: allowing the followers to communicate their opinions and provide feedback, build the feeling of ownership, and enhance comradery among the team members. The leader’s role is to build trust among the team, to gain their support and to encourage the team to make the changes needed to become better and succeed. A real leader listens to his/her followers, understands their queries, attending their issues and resolving their problems. The leader shall be fair and should be monitored and evaluated, and should be removed if not leading the team to success and improving their status.

The leader influences and inspires the team, creates vision and strategy, establishes mutual understanding between the team members, evaluates the progress and performance, and knows the way to reach the target and achieve the goals. Teams need to be developed and prepared for taking on their roles and executing the work plan, which could be achieved by learning courses and gaining the required experiences. The leader encourages the team to improve and do better, by experiencing new tasks, building self-confidence and encouraging good relationships, and emphasizing cooperation between team members. Placing big challenges with the team will result in a very well-prepared team, which is then able to take on responsibilities and handle issues diligently, with the goal to create new opportunities out of the experience from those challenges. The fair and faithful leader builds honest followers, while the unfair leader gathers compliments and cajolers.

A. Influence and Inspire the Team

For the leaders to influence and inspire their teams, they need to ensure that the team members are interested and aware of their importance to the team’s success, and the value of their contributions in achieving objectives and goals. The leader should show care for every team member by monitoring and directing the member to gain the required skills and knowledge, with the goal to improve the overall outcome. To inspire the team, the leader needs to show respect and trust, and acknowledge the importance of the team members.

- i. Creates vision and strategy: A proverb says “*where there is no vision, the people perish.*” The leader should create the vision for the team to know where they are and to imagine where they need to be. It is the image that is thoughtfully developed in the leader’s brain and heart, with the intent to change to a better outcome.
- ii. Establishes mutual understanding between team members: The team needs a charter of ethics or code of conduct to define the ethical behavior expected from the team members, while they perform their duties and handle their responsibilities and obligations and deal with each other. Every team member should know his/her roles and tasks assigned to him/her by the leader, and should comply with all applicable rules and regulations. Working in a team calls for the respect and cooperation between its members

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and harmony to ensure continuous improvement and productivity. The real team member is the one who shows respect, performs his/her duties, knows what other members are doing, and is ready to act on behalf of other members, if they are absent or have to leave the team.

- iii. Evaluates progress and team performance: Evaluating progress is important to ensure that activities are implemented according to the plan. Project evaluation results are required to be shared with the team, to keep or adjust the team's effort to stay on the right track. Every team member should be aware of the evaluation criteria that will be used to assess individual performance. The goals and competencies should be related to the role of the member, and the weight of each goal should be fairly distributed. If the leader is not fair, goals are not correct or the weights of goals and competencies are not set properly. In that situation, the team member may lose both interest in the project and trust in the leader. But if the member is patient, capable, and smart enough, then he/she may find a way to success.

B. Power of Questioning

The CEO of Google from 2001 to 2011, Eric Schmidt, said "We run this company on questions, not answers." [3] By keeping with the practice of asking good questions, better answers could be found. Asking good questions opens the door for understanding, involvement, and obtaining feedback of the team members. Questions direct, stimulate and focus our thinking, and invite others to participate and share opinions, and generate new valuable ideas. PoQ requires both a powerful communication medium and the skill to establish a common ground of understanding.

PoQ is an excellent technique used to energize team members and enhance their involvement in various projects and business activities. PoQ is the tool required for building the team's trust, and creating and enhancing confidence among its members. PoQ helps to identify the responsibilities of each member and the required education, which could generate the needed encouragement for the team to achieve their set of targets and goals, and to make the difference. PoQ is used to evaluate and assess work progress and team member performance. The objective is to highlight and discover the required training and important standards and documents the team members need to achieve success. PoQ stimulates thinking, e.g., the statement "In what ways can I improve my performance?" This has more emotional impact than "Ways to improve my performance." The powerful and direct questions lead to the most important point and bring close attention to it.

C. Effective Communication

The main purpose of effective communication includes: to stay in touch with other people, to listen to them, to understand their points of view, to know their thoughts and positions to obtain their feedback, and to act on their needs. Effective communication requires us to ensure that the provided data are accurate, directions are clear, and both are relevant to the objectives of the project. Effective communication could be

achieved with open discussions, asking questions and offering help, clarifying issues, and avoiding confusion.

D. Build Trust and Create Confidence

To earn trust, one needs to keep his or her promises, to be honest, supportive to his or her team, clear and consistent and behave very well, be accountable for the outcome of the vision, and be the example for the team to follow; and be a good listener to the team members. Earning trust requires a leader to demonstrate care for the team and interest in their feedback. Creating and building confidence could be achieved in several ways: by educating and motivating team members, by supporting and encouraging them, by providing them with new opportunities and by highlighting their achievements to others and showing appreciation for their efforts. All of this requires the leader to create the right environment in which people will do their best and run the business like they own it.

E. Identify Responsibilities, Educate and Encourage

Defining the responsibilities for each team member is achieved by clearly identifying individual assigned work activities and tasks, removing overlaps, and providing the required education, which could enhance the team's productivity and understanding to easily achieve the project and business goals. The team needs to be encouraged to carry on their responsibilities, to remove the fear, and to energize them to achieve their targets.

F. Self- and Team-Assessment

The main purpose of self- and team-assessment is to build a more efficient team, and to help members perform better, by providing them with performance feedback, and by listening to them and understanding their point of view. Correct feedback helps to identify strengths and weaknesses, and uncover any performance issues, and ensure that the team is on the correct path. Feedback needs to be clear, correct, and fair. If the assessment is not right, correct or fair, it could result in breaking the trust between the team members and their leader.

G. Read, Understand and Lead

Team members should be aware of the project's overall scope by carefully reading their assigned activities and understanding their roles. Members should ask themselves questions, e.g., what documents should I read to understand my assigned activities? How will others' activities impact my current and future activities? Whom should I ask to answer my questions? These all could result in uncovering important information and exploring valuable documents, strengthening member knowledge about member and others' assigned activities on the team, and others' activities possible impact and interactions with a member's own activities. Knowing the dependencies of others' goals necessitates that the leader follow-up with them, helping and pushing them to achieve their goals, to achieve the leader's goals, and leading team members to complete their assigned work and activities.

III. HOW TO BUILD TEAM CONFIDENCE

Building confidence is one of the most important leadership

objectives, and can be achieved through different mechanisms: starting with setting the goals, helping team members understand their tasks and work activities, closely following the team to strengthen their knowledge, and encouraging them to achieve their goals. In all cases the team members are winning, whether they succeed or they fail, because they will gain new knowledge, become more experienced and confident, and they will learn from their failures.

A. Inspire the Team Members

The real leader cares about the team members (and their needs), and can easily inspire them. Because the team members are important to the leader and to the company; and because they are considered the most important assets with the greatest impact on the company's future and success; team members will need to be kept motivated and effective. Inspiring the team and treating them well will create an enjoyable work environment. In turn team members are willing to spend more time and effort to achieve success and reach and exceed the targets. Team members need to be gathered in events and left to work in groups, helping and encouraging each other, and working together to compete big challenges. Exerting energy and spending time helping someone will inspire others to do the same. Before a leader can inspire people, time is needed to build relationships and trust, and have them attached to the leader — only then will the leader's words and directions become inspirational. People need to be encouraged to do more and better. They need to repeatedly hear encouraging words, e.g., good job, thank you, etc. They need to hear compliments, which encourages them to put forth their best effort and support, working to full capacity, fully focused, while understanding other members' values. Learning, teaching, and sharing ideas helps in attracting people, inspiring them and gaining their support by saying good words.

It was narrated about Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him and his progeny, that he said "A good (kind) word is charity." [4]

B. Learning from Mistakes

Learning from mistakes is important to the team. Mistakes are considered as important lessons learned. Mistakes can be minimized but not avoided, and can either paralyze or energize. To minimize mistakes, information and data need to be collected to understand the current situation and set the right goals. Then plans and strategies need to be developed to achieve the goals, and they should be made available and accessible to the team members. Encouraging the team to work together and appreciating their efforts help remove stress, and focus their concentration, which will minimize and/or avoid mistakes. Teams need to be encouraged to overcome sad feelings inherited from their mistakes, to be reenergized, to rework, and to achieve the goals and objectives.

C. Correct Mistakes but Avoid New Errors

Once a mistake is found, it requires attention to be attended carefully and correctly. Acting quick in resolving issues could generate new issues that are difficult to resolve. Patience, correct strategy, and a clear plan are required before starting the

remedial action. The leader should be smart and should think carefully and quickly to avoid the consequences of a new problem. At the same time, the leader should be brave enough and accountable for any mistake that occurs within the team and area of responsibility.

D. Good Leaders' (Bosses) Impacts on Workers' Productivities

Data for a company that has 2,000 bosses and 23,000 employees were analyzed by Stanford economist Edward Lazear, and his coauthors Kathryn Shaw and Christopher Stanton. It was concluded that the productivity of workers and teams reporting to good bosses improved by around 10% [5].

Analyzing the reasons for improved productivity is not easily done, as it depends several factors: the worker, leader (boss), and the technology being used to enhance the work productivity, as well as the working environment. The workers might be very productive and led by a nonproductive boss, but a productive leader (boss) cannot make the improvement in productivity unless the team is productive or has some productive members. The improvement of productivity is mainly related to the team members; however, the great leaders are the ones who could influence the team and direct their efforts to be more productive and to produce a better outcome. For example, if a leader requests a team member to collect data and to have it in a presentation, that leader is hoping for the team member to gain presentation skills, to be capable to share knowledge, and to understand the scope and to teach others.

Fig. 1 is an example of the impact of the good leader. The figure data were taken from a live project and clearly shows that the Project Quality Index was improving and increasing by around 10%, starting from January 2018, which happened after having a new more qualified quality supervisors in the project, who organized the work and had the quality team reorganized and well involved in addressing the project issues.

IV. EXPECTATIONS' IMPACTS ON PERFORMANCES

It could be easily demonstrated that high expectations on teams come with good results, and low expectations come with poor results. The expectations of the leader will be transferred to the team through how the leader talks, acts, and the ways s/he deals with the team members. High expectations translated into good encouraging words cultivate a nice feeling inside the team, and results in having the team concentrate on the targets and abiding by the rules and procedures. It could build a high potential team with members capable of widening their thoughts, innovative in achieving their goals and exceeding the expectations, and in having expectations that can be raised to a higher level, while low expectations transferred to the team through harmful words can distract the team's attention and kill their motivation. The team will be of low performance, unfocused, and more likely to fail and to make errors, which would result in rework, and even impact safety by causing subsequent accidents. Author Sylvia Plath (American writer), says in her *The Bell Jar* novel "If you expect nothing from somebody you are never disappointed." [6] Treating the team and team members correctly can improve the productivity and

quality beyond the expectations.

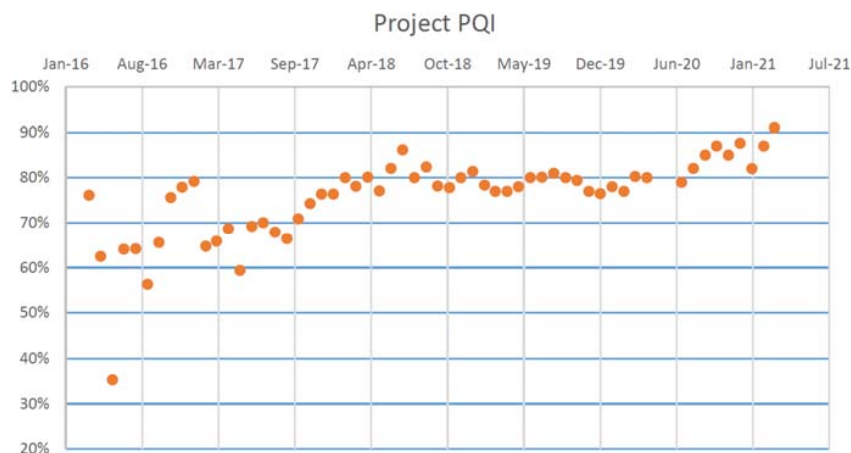


Fig. 1 Positive impacts of the good leader

A. Accomplishment Impacts on Enhancing Team Efforts

The team members are inspired by their new achievements. They become more energetic and motivated to handle their new assignments, and to perform better in their ongoing activities. Team members celebrate their achievements and feel that the remaining work becomes less, and that the target is closer. With their happiness, they look for more activities to consume with their newly gained energy, which was obtained as a result of completing and achieving some of their goals.

B. Importance of the Team Environment

A leader should help the team members to show up and be recognized. [7] This will encourage the team and team members to participate, control fear, and provide better support for resolving project issues and pushing project tasks. The team will show better performance and better organization of the work, tasks, and activities. It will encourage the team to present and unveil skills and develop better strategies. The most important task of a leader is to have the team's energy used effectively, and not have it wasted simply because of unpractical reasons, cases or issues.

Obtaining feedback from the colleagues, team members, family, and friends should help understand and assess the way a person is utilizing his energy and contribution to different tasks. The leader and team members will succeed if they use their energy right, which indicates that the work environment is appropriate and healthy. Otherwise, failure is the fate of the whole team, effort is lost, emotion is drained, and complaints increase, with employees suffering and becoming unsatisfied.

Leaders should positively impact team members to establish the needed ties between everyone in the team. The team members need someone to understand their concerns and help them to move, to excel in effort, and to achieve their goals. Leaders need to stimulate the team to energize them and make them productive.

Harsh actions and words, unfair treatment of the team kill the team potential to participate, damages their trust and causes big confusion, which can cause excellent and brilliant ideas to be

lost and efforts to be wasted. The negativity of a leader could damage an organization, which could be much more productive if the negativity was replaced with positive encouraging feedback.

Positive energy from the leader results on bringing out another clean positive energy produced by other team members. Positive energy creates good and happy feelings; and make the team more confident, effective, and willing for self-development and for following the leaders' direction and instructions.

By improving yourself, your followers will be improved. With the self-development, the team member will gain more skills, perform better and will be more productive. Being unaware creates bad feeling and may result in embarrassing situations, discouragement and could kill good potential. Unawareness is an enemy which needs to be overcome with the self-improvement and development. "The best revenge is to improve yourself." Imam Ali, peace be upon him. [8]

Once the team members are brought to the right environment, complaints will be minimized and will eventually disappear, and the problems and issues will be dealt with, and could be treated as a source of opportunities. The team will work together in an analogous manner, facial expressions will be jovial and achievements will be their main goals and objectives. It is worth noting that facial expressions can drain the team's energy if they show fear and anger, and can reenergize the team if they show happiness and trust. Therefore, everyone on the team needs to have a positive attitude, and avoid negative comments, which could easily kill cooperation and damage morale.

C. Using Time Effectively

Time needs to be used effectively. Most of the time is lost between travel, in meetings, and with discovering and resolving problems. For example, if a meeting was not well organized, the time of several employees will be wasted. If anyone is traveling a long distance, any meetings should be carefully considered so as not to waste a lot of time. Long distance travel

causes fatigue, and can result in accidents and spending resources inefficiently. With current technologies, meetings can be attended remotely through virtual links from the office, house, or any other place, using the internet or any other data or voice networks. However, virtual meeting is not as effective as face to face meeting.

Meetings need to be organized and kept as short as possible, clear, and to the point. Every meeting attendee should be aware of the meeting agenda and be prepared and ready to participate. Minimizing the frequency of meetings helps employees focus on their daily activities, plan their work, and meet the project expectations. In every meeting, employees need to be encouraged to participate. It is an important event and step to have employees talk, to understand their perspectives and their concerns. This will encourage them to support, to tailor, and to adjust their efforts for better outcomes. It is important for a person to be well prepared — from both physical and emotional aspects — to do the following: satisfy the project requirements, teach others, and obtain their satisfaction and gain their respect. The latter cannot be achieved without understanding and respecting the roles and activities assigned to everyone on the team.

D. Building Ideal Environment

The working environment is not always ideal. The targets can be achieved; however, obstacles are possible and could result in a different outcome than expected or desired. Cleaning the environment of rude and painful words could be imagined like cleaning a house of garbage scattered around its corners. Although we love ourselves and our opinions, it is important to love others and understand their opinions as well, to complement our thoughts and better plan and to achieve our goals. It is a call of the team to clean their working environment, to remove obstacles and to clearly present their perspectives without harming or hurting each other's feelings. Although, the working environment may contain people who may not align with others; however, by understanding them and finding excuses for them, could alleviate problems and easily improve member involvement and productivity.

“Good and evil are not equal. Repel evil with good, and the person who was your enemy becomes like an intimate friend.” Translated Quran, Fussilat, verse 34. [9]

It is very important to treat workers with humanity, to understand them, their opinions and positions for different issues, and not to insult them or in any way hurt their feelings. Showing love and compassion to them and for their opinions and ideas, should be, if we are looking to maximize success and control the outcome.

E. Cure and Control Stress

Stress could impact the result and outcome of the team. It distracts the team members from the main objectives as the team becomes unfocused. Once stress is controlled and cured well, the focus will be gained and all of the thoughts will be concentrated in completing the project work and solving related issues. It is important to ensure that each member is gaining positive and not negative experiences, feels valuable to the

team, and contributes to its success. Every employee is valuable to the project, business and company, and by reducing stress, the employee will be more passionate, productive, happier, and healthier.

F. Control Anger

Anger usually cannot be controlled at the time of the incident. It may be an excellent idea if we rate our success in controlling our anger. It depends on mind programming, a mind could be configured as peaceful, tolerating bad situations, or could be configured as a volcano, waiting for a single negative word to erupt. Configuring our mind to be peaceful helps to control the difficult situations and to bring better outcomes. Controlling one's anger could result in developing a more professional and cohesive team.

V. CONCLUSION

The article summarizes important skills required by a leader to lead the team effectively. The real leader shall be qualified enough to influence and inspire the team, create a vision and strategy, establish mutual understanding between the team members, and fairly evaluate work progress and the team's performance. Having important skills, such as PoQ and effective communication, helps to clearly identify responsibilities, and to correctly perform self- and team-assessment. The good leaders' impact on worker's productivity was found to be in a range of 10%. Good leaders could easily build trust, create confidence, and encourage the team members. Although smart people make mistakes, a hasty correction of mistakes shall be avoided to prevent generating new mistakes and errors. The positive expectations on the team improve the team's performance, outcome, and success. Positive accomplishment can boost efforts and necessitates a stress- and anger-free, friendly work environment.

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