



LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Great leaders have the capacity to achieve results while focusing as much on maintaining a high-performance culture as they focus on the bottom line. One of the foundational elements of a high performing culture is a climate of trust that leads to psychological safety. Psychological safety in the workplace is critical for sustaining high performance.

This past year – 2020 – has challenged CEOs’ ability to inspire and lead high performing teams and to create psychological safety on those teams—and beyond—in the workplace.

The greatest leaders defy all barriers and just get to it.

Great leaders foster five key team leadership qualities/actions that differentiate effective and high-performing teams (even during high uncertainty and stress) from teams that do not operate well. These five characteristic actions are:

1. **Make the team culture as high a priority as key business results.** Be willing to prioritize the work required to ensure a high level of team performance and functioning. Some CEOs take teamwork off the agenda. Others, like Chris Roth, CEO, of St. Luke’s Health System in Boise, Idaho, keep teamwork on the agenda to ensure there is an ongoing team effectiveness dialogue despite the unimaginable stresses on the healthcare industry over the past year.
2. **Create a feedback culture on the team.** As CEO and/or team leader, create and sustain the ability to—as Marshall Goldsmith says—ask for feedback, listen to the feedback, follow up on the feedback, and ask again.
3. **Assess and eliminate key dysfunction on the team.** Lack of trust is a sign of team dysfunction (Lencioni). Even great teams must do housekeeping – an ongoing “due diligence” practice like sleep, exercise, healthy eating, and so on. Make it a habit to notice and eliminate dysfunction. Sweeping conflict under the table always undermines the team’s trust quotient.
4. **Establish team ground rules.** Create a team “code of conduct” or rules of the road or team behaviors and interaction. This is a fun process that makes teams think about both how they want to function to get the results they want, and how they want to be treated themselves. A couple of examples – Do I want to see people on their devices during my presentation? Is it ok to change my mind when I walk out of a meeting about a decision I just agreed to?
5. **Hold each member of the team accountable.** A team should be held accountable for leadership, individual behavior, and results. Accountability requires discipline and the ability to say what needs to be said to those who need to hear it in a way that they can hear it. Every member of the team needs a coaching plan, and the team itself needs a coaching plan. Following up on those coaching plans with a coach (internal or external – often it is the boss) and other stakeholders creates accountability. As Deming said, “What gets measured gets done.”

We have discovered that most leaders and their teams, even the greatest, need some Strategic Team Coaching® to access the linked processes of creating psychological safety and high performance. In fact, the greatest leaders are normally the ones who reach out and ask for support first. They and their teams work to develop the skills, and ultimately to take the process inside their organization. We are proud of our partnership with several great leaders who have strengthened their teams through this process, and they would be pleased to share their stories with you. We plan – in collaboration with the client – to share one of their success stories in the near future.

Does your team have the necessary characteristics to become high-performing? Does your team need to make some changes to achieve psychological safety?