

4 POWERFUL ACTIONS TO BRING OUT THE DISCRETIONARY EFFORT OF YOUR TEAM

Here are 4 powerful steps you can take to engage, grow and motivate your teams, and thereby your organisation.

Motivation and passion abound when we experience life with openness, engage our friends, enjoy hobbies and try new things; yet they are sadly absent in many work environments. Companies hire motivated and passionate people, but, in a matter of months, they often find their motivation and level of engagement has been extinguished or at least substantially diminished.



Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts or magic formulas to sustain the level of motivation and engagement of your people. It is something

that successful leaders and managers deliberately and consistently do as an integral part of their work, not as an optional 'nice to do'.

In most organisations the challenges faced can be broadly divided into either 'technical' or 'adaptive'. With any problem, immediately ask what the technical dimension is and what is the adaptive opportunity? The first will suggest the tools needed (hardware, software, technology, processes, templates, procedures, etc.); the latter will point to how we have to adapt and adjust our own strategies, priorities, behaviours, habits and reactions in order to address the problem.

STEP 1: GET TO KNOW YOUR TEAM

How well we know each other is a pre-requisite to effective team-work: you can hardly work effectively with those you don't know. Intimacy isn't an abstract, mystical aspiration, it's a pragmatic necessity. Its opposite would be remoteness, alienation and apathy towards each other. No one considering this latter option is likely to gush with excitement at the prospect.

Useful tip: When people share a view, emotions or an insight, don't rush to take it at face value. Ask questions to probe and to better understand; put it into your own words, and LISTEN. Each time, you'll deepen your insight, gain rapport and have a better sense of the other person. Insights into your emotional coordinates, when expressed appropriately and constructively, build empathy and invite people to connect with you. As you connect better with one another, you will trust one another more, and you will also achieve more together.

STEP 2: MAKE SURE EVERYONE IS AIMING AT THE RIGHT TARGET

Energies that are aligned, focused, measured, and which build on collaborative efforts, deliver windfall results. Therefore, we have to: 1) ensure we pick the right targets for our business – those that will deliver profits, increase share value and strengthen our brand; and 2) make sure these targets deliver some larger goal or vision with

significance, so that people genuinely want to make them happen; and 3) translate these larger aspirations and aims into the daily accountabilities of people throughout the organisation.

For everyone in your company, make sure they have personal targets. These should ideally be a composite of:

- ✓ What they are doing overall in the coming six to nine months to deliver the strategy.
- ✓ The top 3 goals, agreed with their boss, for which they are taking accountability in the near to medium term – including clarity as to who they have to partner with for this to be delivered.
- ✓ The biggest way they are going to add value to their team's goals this quarter.
- ✓ The most critical way they are seeking to improve their own leadership effectiveness this quarter.

STEP 3: HAVE 'RADICAL' CONVERSATIONS

Relationships are progressed via conversations. 'Radical' conversations go to the heart of where engagement is needed most. They are 'root', 'core' and, hopefully, emotionally vivifying enough to call forth our best – in terms of intelligence, maturity, flexibility and commitment.

Every senior leader should identify 3-4 transformational 'radical' conversations that could be game-changing. These could relate to innovation, customer intimacy, breaking a deadlock, eliciting cooperation or strategically influencing people across the value chain.

Each radical conversation needs preparation. What preliminary conversations are needed? Who else can give us insight into the people we are seeking to dialogue with? Who knows them and has natural rapport with them?

How can we frame the conversation so that it is about an outcome important enough for us to rise above our peevishness, our vanity, our turf issues and any baggage we may be bringing with us? And can I conduct it in such a way that I surmount my own

defensiveness, take on personal accountability and invite the other person to jointly brainstorm and design a way forward with me?



You know you've had a successful radical conversation when there are clear next steps, shared accountability in some way, agreed ways to stay in touch and provide ongoing input, and a previous impasse now at least potentially surmounted. Moreover, every successful radical conversation leaves us with at least an improved relationship. We have a well of mutual trust, however tentative, to draw on for next time.

If we can improve the calibre, candour and openness of our conversations, productive opportunities will follow.

STEP 4: BE ACCOUNTABLE

When we feel we can't influence our results, our work culture or our possibilities, passion is sapped away. A primary way to build engagement and motivation in others is to encourage everyone to take responsibility for building the kind of culture they wish to inhabit.

So, relative to bosses, peers, other stakeholders, and members of our team, there is one overriding constant: discerning, real-time, specific appreciation leads people to do more of what was recognised. Note, however, the essential ingredients:

First, appreciation has to be 'discerning'. In other words, you have to be known to offer appreciation when merited, you have to be known to care about results, and you have to have a reputation for high standards. Ladling on insincere flattery helps no one.

Second, appreciation has to be in real-time, meaning as close as possible to the event, behaviour or action that you are appreciating. That's when we are most engaged with what we've done, that's when it will get the highest voltage attention.

Third, appreciation has to be specific. "I really appreciated it when you took the time to back me up at that critical meeting"; "your attention to detail in responding to that client was inspiring", etc. The more specific it is, the less it can be swatted away as an empty comment. Foster a culture where people catch each other doing things right, and highlight what is genuinely praise-worthy.

We also need to confront in discerning, real-time and specific ways. If all you do is appreciate, no one will trust you. If all you do is confront, you won't be credible, as people will believe you have an axe to grind, or have them in the cross-hairs. Confronting should be preceded by first checking the facts, then sharing your view and your feelings as constructively as possible, and finally making a request for a behavioural change in the future.

In conclusion, global research carried out in the past two decades in relation to organisational talent management affirms that, for the foreseeable future, 'human capital' intelligently harnessed will be an organisation's most significant enabler in an environment where technology has already begun to level the playing field.

'A Journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.' - Chinese Proverb

What steps are you taking today?

Melanie de Jong, April 2011

Adapted from the book 'Liberating Passion – How the world's best global leaders produce winning results' by Omar Khan, Founder and Senior Partner of Sensei International.



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