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Spotlight on Leadership: How to Achieve Exceptional Team Performance

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We live in extraordinary times. Economic, social and political landscapes are in flux across the globe. Job security is on the decline. People are working harder than ever, taking on more responsibility, with fewer resources, and feeling tremendous pressure to perform.

There has never been a greater need for exceptional leadership.

Outstanding leaders recognize that sustainable results, in good times and bad, stem from the collective contributions of their people. Superior team performance leads to bottom-line success for the entire organization.

Whether you are taking on a new leadership role and inheriting an existing team, adding new members to your group, or establishing a completely new team, great team performance begins with learning about whom you've got. Ask yourself how well you know each of the unique individuals that comprise your group.

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE ANYWAY?

Take the time to get to know your team members as people:

- Are they newly married or divorced?
- How old are their children?
- What joys and challenges do they face in their home lives?

Remember that people bring their entire selves to work. The better you know the folks who show up for work each day, the better you can help them manage the stressors that threaten to impair performance. While you're at it, give your team a chance to learn something about who you are, too. This is an important step in gaining credibility, building trust and fostering strong relationships.

LEARN ABOUT MANAGEMENT NEEDS.

- What type of support does each member require?
- Which of your reports requires frequent communication and direction?
- Who expects greater autonomy?

While few people like to be micromanaged or left completely to their own devices, there is tremendous variability in terms of individual management needs and preferences. Learn what each of your people wants from you and how each team member works best. Adapt your style accordingly.

IDENTIFY STRENGTHS.

- What does each team member do particularly well?
- How will you leverage these strengths to maximally benefit the team, the organization and the individual?

Look for opportunities to help each team member build upon existing skills and aptitudes and, where needed, develop relevant missing competencies.

DON'T LEAVE ANYONE OUT.

Don't neglect the layers of employees below your direct reports. While the interaction with these folks may be less frequent, they still need to see and hear from you:

- Stay in touch with them.
- Get to know who they are and what they are working on.
- Convey your respect for them and your appreciation for their contributions.

There is no underestimating the positive impact this sort of connection has on employee engagement, morale and productivity.

TAKE NOTE OF TEAM DYNAMICS.

In addition to learning about the individual members of your team, you'll need to figure out how they work together as a group:

- Are they collaborative?
- Do they freely share information and resources?
- Do they engage in open and candid communication, including a healthy dose of creative conflict?

You'll want to assess the dynamics of your team and uncover the greatest collaborative opportunities as well as any counter-productive undercurrents of mistrust or misalignment. Remember, even a group of top performers can flounder if the team isn't working well as a whole. ●

Dr. Liz Bywater is an internationally recognized expert in leadership and workplace excellence. She consults, writes and speaks on a variety of workplace topics, including exceptional leadership, outstanding communication, purposeful goal setting, mentoring for success, team effectiveness, stress management, conflict resolution and work-life balance. You can follow her on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/drlizbywater> and check out her blog, Career Success with Liz Bywater: <http://bywatercareersuccess.blogspot.com>. For your free subscription to the Bywater Journal, filled with tips for improving individual, team and organizational performance, send an e-mail to info@bywaterconsultinggroup.com. For more information, visit www.bywaterconsultinggroup.com or call 800.846.4546.