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People Make The Difference whitepaper

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Three toughest challenges faced by those in high performing teams

It's a leadership dream, isn't it? Leading a team of high-performing individuals who work so well together they outperform all other teams.

Yet what is a high-performing team? And how do you create one? Distinguishing a high performing team from simply another collection of people is not only about characteristics, but also results. If your business is seeking better quality, faster response times, higher productivity, greater sensitivity to customers, and improved profitability then people, working together in teams, can make this happen.

High performing teams, however, are highly focused on their goals and achieve superior business results. They outperform all other similar teams and they outperform expectations given their composition.

Knowing whether you have a high-performing team relies on the demonstration of certain characteristics. These include:

- A strong sense of purpose and commitment to the team and its mission
- More ambitious performance goals than average teams
- Clear understanding of every team member's responsibilities – and how everyone is mutually accountable
- Diverse range of expertise that complements other team members
- Trust and interdependence between members

In my experience, there are three major challenges for most teams that prevent them from achieving high performance. Yet, as leaders, it is a privilege and benefit to lead and manage superior performance teams so it's worth spending some time addressing the major challenges:

1) Building trust and having an aligned purpose

For a team to achieve superior performance the people in it need to have a solid and deep trust in each other and in the team's purpose. It doesn't matter how talented or capable your people are, they may never reach their full potential if trust isn't present. Trust is essential because it provides a sense of safety. Only when your team feel safe will they take risks and be vulnerable – rather than staying in a protectionist headspace that is all about self-interest.

2) Knowing that disagreement is welcomed

Disagreement needs to be viewed as a good thing. This is a challenge if trust is not present. Yet while conflict and disagreement may be uncomfortable, both can be healthy and positive when managed well. As a leader you will come across a variety of personality types, each with their own ways of solving problems, communicating, dealing with pressure, even in perception of what a problem is or is not. So members must be encouraged to work toward perceiving, understanding, and respecting where others are coming from, with the bottom line being everyone's opinions matter, and they must be able to express them without fear.

3) Decisions by natural agreement

There are times when a team can make decisions by natural agreement – and in the cases where agreement is elusive, a decision is made by the team leader. For a team to reach high-performance, there can be no second-guessing. Why? Respect has to be a priority. Disagreement and disrespect are two different things. Regardless of whether or not perspectives and opinions differ, a position of respect should be adhered to. Respect is the foundation that supports high performance teams – it's the attribute that allows you to navigate disagreements and move forward; having the right to differ while being productive.

Over the next weeks, People Make The Difference will be tackling the individual challenges of teams and how each characteristic can be developed for high team performance.

Have you been part of a high performing team? Or experienced challenges in leading one? We would love your feedback.

If you want to take your leadership skills to the next level, People Make The Difference can help you with our training workshops, one-on-one coaching and Coach On Call services. To find out more, call us on 0412 333 415 or visit peplemakethedifference.com.au.