

Rejuvenating and rebuilding your team

Derek Mowbray

February 2023

Introduction

Everyone will be struggling to find the positives in life right now, after an extended period of high end uncertainty, fear, exhaustion and disaffection for some of our major institutions – Government, Police, Church, and NHS to name a few – that seem to conspire to make life worse instead of better.

There are plenty of positives to be found. We tend to look for small successes when times are tough. There are loads of small successes if we break down our daily routine and take each step, throughout the day, at a time, and register each step taken as a success before we embark on the next.

For some this is easier than others. Imagine what each day must be like for those with very little or no excess money; for those on strike who have had enough after years of neglect and live on strike pay when their normal pay is withdrawn; for those living in a war zone with the constant noise of war; for those who have experienced sudden death of a close relative. The list goes on, but this is a piece about the positive side of things, so I won't dwell on the sadness's and horrors that some are enduring. For anyone experiencing such challenges, scoring each step as a success helps to move forwards and eventually tolerate the emotional turmoil such situations inevitably cause.

Those at work are no different to anyone else. They may have the added extras of fragmented working lives, brought on by the pandemic. So many were furloughed and made redundant. So many had to work from home. So many had to rapidly acquire new skills to cope with and overcome the challenges of their new and different situation.

The churn that all this has caused on working lives is hard to exaggerate.

People returning to the workplace after being isolated at home, albeit with contact through Zoom and the like, have reported changes to their former cultural environment. In the image are features that may have been part of their culture before lockdown but have become amplified after lockdown when people are meeting each other once again.

**Blame; bullying; dis-engagement;
pass the buck; lack of motivation;
lethargy; lack of responsibility;
loss of identity; lack of ownership;
loss of purpose**

A consequence is continued misery, exacerbated by no relief from the workplace.

The workplace should be an oasis, somewhere that people run towards to get away from their domestic lives for a while; where they find the triggers to make them feel great about themselves, happy, industrious, curious and engaged

with life (albeit working life). The workplace should never be a place that makes living more stressful and difficult.

The workplace is a controlled community, controlled by leaders and managers, and it is they who hold the responsibility to facilitate the workplace as a fabulous and high performing place to work.

If you are in or lead a team that isn't a fantastic team to be part of, then you need to consider how to rejuvenate or rebuild the team as a desirable group of people to be with, where you thrive, and where you get the energy to deal with your domestic life's challenges.

Step 1- getting right your attitude towards others.

Everyone in a team is of equal value to everyone else in achieving success and happiness for team members and for the team as a whole.

This means you listen to each other, learn from each other, and engage with each other.

You share the responsibility for the success of your team with everyone else in the team.

If there are challenges, such as hybrid working, or shift arrangements, you discuss with others what is best for all, and particularly, what is best for the success and happiness for the team members and the team as a whole. You persuade, encourage and compromise.

The success and happiness of team members and the team as a whole boils down to feeling successful and engaged. This is always directly linked to great performance.

Success breeds success, and when the team is performing brilliantly, everyone feels great and wants to maintain that level of success, and improve on it.

Step 2 – getting right the purpose of the team

Why does the team exist? The answer should be expressed in outcome terms.

When the purpose of the team aligns closely with the purpose of each team member as they perceive their lives, then team members will be more closely bonded with the purpose and want the team to be a success.

Finding out individual purpose is part of this step. This may be easier expressed as individual aspirations, and whether the team purpose aligns with individual aspiration. It is the job of a leader to ensure this alignment occurs with each team member.

There follows the identification of individual purpose within the team, and ensuring each team member purpose is aligned and complements each other team member purpose, so the whole team is a group of inter-linked purposes making sure the team purpose is achieved successfully and happily.

The team's identity is derived from its purpose. Identity is critical in ensuring team members each have an identity both within the team and as part of the whole team. Identity gives meaning to the team and its members.

Team brand is, also, important. The brand needs to clearly reflect team purpose and helps it establish its identity, so the team is recognised by everyone else in the workplace as standing for something.

Step 3 – getting right the team culture and values.

Culture is the most influential enabler of team members achieving their best performance.

Culture is formed of the behaviours, symbols, ways of doing things that the team adopts, dress and level of formality.

With step 1 being applied, the culture should be a warm and welcoming environment where each person is respected as being of equal value to each other in achieving success and happiness for the team and for its members.

To help with this, the team should establish how it wants to work by exploring the cultural values that are of greatest importance to its members. Cultural values should align closely with the personal values of each team member. Such items might include – psychological safety, giving control, encouragement, delegation.

The team should, also, establish team values – what is of value to the team. These items might be – the team itself, its products and services, its customers, its shareholders and so on.

Finally, the team should be identifying its ethical values – the values that help resolve dilemmas. Such items might include – what's best for clients; openness in all matters; mutual support and so on.

The team culture will, also, be heavily influenced by two cultural principles – sharing responsibility for the success of the team amongst every team member, and Psychological Responsibility – the obligation each team member adopts to look after their own psychological wellbeing and to help each other look after their psychological wellbeing.

Step 4 – getting right the team leadership.

Someone has to kick off the rejuvenation, and this will be a leader. The aim is for everyone in the team to 'take a lead', as each team member is sharing responsibility for the team's success and happiness.

However, there will be an executive leader. The role of this leader is to 'guarantee the team is in perfect working order, knows where it's going and knows how to get there'.

A leader needs to have certain talents and skills. The talent lies in being perceived as the authentic leader of the team, someone that team members rely on and who they each trust with their working lives. The skills are in persuasion, and as part of persuasion, the ability to motivate the team. Motivation relies on each person being open to be enticed by something and something enticing them. The team leader needs to ensure the purpose, vision for the team and values of the team are constantly enticing for each team member, so team members are constantly motivated to ensure the team is a success and a happy group of people to work together.

Leadership is the style of all leaders, including the executive leader. This includes everyone in the team, as everyone is expected to 'take a lead'.

The style is adaptive leadership which has, as its basic principle, the concept of sharing responsibility for the future success of the team amongst each team member. This means creating the environment where everyone feels psychologically safe so each can openly critique how the team functions, come up with unsolicited ideas, and view all failures as successes

waiting to happen. There's lots more to it than these factors but all are in the direction of openness and frankness within a compassionate environment.

Step 5 – getting right the team management.

Intelligent management uses the cultural atmosphere in routine management activities.

Performance appraisal, for example, is everyday, informal and encourages risk taking. Failure is regarded as a step toward success.

Team meetings have only questions to be answered as agenda items.

Worklife balance is expecting anyone with a domestic crisis to be supported by the team, enabling the team member with the crisis to sort out the problem with or without the direct help from others in the team.

Training and development is designed around the future skills and knowledge needs of the team.

Conclusion

Teams are controlled communities, controlled by leaders.

In this article, everyone in a team 'takes a lead' and, therefore, is in control of their team, with an executive leader providing direction.

Teams should be the oasis for members; a place where people can run towards as a refuge against the events in the domestic world. Teams should be able to provide the triggers that help each member attain success and happiness for themselves as well as for the team as a whole.

The world outside of the team is in a sad and difficult state. One way for those in work to thrive and grow is for their team to provide everything that makes team members feel great and want to perform at their best. Success and happiness for each member is attainable if the steps are taken to achieve this aim.

For more on this topic, and for advice, support and encouragement, please contact barbara.leigh@mas.org.uk to explore the services, publications and distance learning products available to make the workplace a fabulous and high performing place to work.