

CREATING A CULTURE OF HIGH PERFORMANCE

Last month I wrote about creating a high performance organization and used the Tour de France as an example of what drives high performance; in that case individuals functioning at their maximum and working as a team. Unfortunately the Tour de France was mired in controversy (at the beginning and end) as a result of doping allegations. Heroes quickly become villains and damage the sport as a whole.

The same can be true for organizations. Witness the damage caused by unethical behaviours in recent years by CEO's of elite businesses. Their actions not only lowered the confidence of investors but poorly impacted the lives of employees.

Heroes in sport may be compared to leaders in organizations. How the members behave and perform is often a result of the example set by leadership. For instance, if a company's set of published standards are that it values responsibility and accountability, but management often does not abide by these stated principles, employees will, as a consequence, feel it is alright to do the same, thus fostering a culture of deception contrary to the stated value.

According to the encyclopedia Wikipedia,

Organizational values are beliefs and ideas about what kinds of goals members of an organization should pursue and ideas about the appropriate kinds or standards of behavior organizational members should use to achieve these goals. From organizational values develop organizational norms, guidelines or expectations that prescribe appropriate kinds of behavior by employees...and control the behavior of organizational members towards one another.

(Strategic Management, Charles W. L. Hill, Gareth R. Jones, Fifth Edition, 2001 Houghton Mifflin, MeansBusiness, Inc.)

I recently met a business owner who told me that he wanted to build the profitability of his business so he could be in a position to sell in 5 years. The sales people were content with filling existing customer needs and were not pro-actively prospecting for new business in their respective territories. The business owner had accepted this for years even though he was now faced with a new personal goal for his business. Even though he had mapped out a growth plan for the next five years and communicated it to the sales people, they were not changing their behaviours to do what was required. In this case the business owner was sending a message by not responding appropriately to the performance of his sales people and thus preserving a culture of complacency.

What kind of culture exists in your organization? Does it contribute to the personal goals that you, as a leader, have or envision for yourself and your company? Do changes need to happen in your culture, values, beliefs and norms in order to stay competitive and achieve high performance in today's radically changing business environment?

These important questions must be asked and answered by the leaders of organizations, as they are the ones who set the tone and either create or sustain the current organizational culture. For help in answering these questions, and to assess your current situation, contact us so that we may share our expertise with you and your team.

This month Linda continues her series on recruiting top performers, and Benoit addresses turning problems into opportunities for improvement. Fritz tell us more about the type of leader who is motivated by accomplishment, and Sabrina shares her perspective on making performance reviews work for both employers and employees.

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