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Stoke the Energy of Your Group

"Go on the hunt for metrics exceeded, customers delighted, missteps avoided, and problems solved."

Congrats! You've got the right people on your team, doing the right things. Now how are you going to keep them, and keep them productive?

Manage the pressure cooker

It's up to you to translate organizational expectations so your team stays bold rather than burned-out.

- Be thoughtful about which stressors to let roll to your team and which stop with you.
- When team members have been kicking it hard, give them some downtime, in ways that are meaningful to them (such as, feel free to take off the day of your choice next week).
- Set the tone that we're experimenting and learning.
- Communicate in ways that are genuine and human. Watch your subtle cues that signal whether "it's OK here" to show real reactions, or whether reactions have to stay bottled up.

Remember: Brains like wins

Research in progress from my colleague Dr. Dario Nardi of UCLA shows that brains go into "flow" pattern when people "win" something.³³ This is true even if the win is in a kid's card game based mostly on luck. Brains like wins.

So, call attention to wins. Celebrate wins. Heck, engineer some wins. Go on the hunt for metrics exceeded, customers delighted, missteps avoided, and problems solved. Find real reasons for your team to feel successful.

33. <http://www.darionardi.com/articles.html>

Focus on the middle performers who could be even better

That's a conclusion of recent research on 200,000 360° feedback reports by Jack Zenger, et al.³⁴ "In short, we've been putting our leadership development emphasis on the wrong populations. Rather than focus on the top end or the bottom end, our efforts should be directed to the large group in the middle. Building these good leaders' capability to behave like top-tier leaders can produce results that are far beyond incremental."

I see too many leaders spend the bulk of their time prodding C players and pal-ing around with A players. Your A players probably need less of your time, and your C players should either prove they can step up to B or go. Coach your B players, and some will become A. Others will simply be great, hardworking, productive members of your team. Fine.

Don't race too far ahead of your team

We admire leaders who set high standards, right? Who do everything in their power to "model the way" by driving hard themselves?

This "Pacesetter" leadership style sounds great, until you do it. Moving faster than your team feeds a cycle that destroys morale, squashes initiative, stunts skill development, and keeps you working weekends. In a study by Goleman, this style nearly tied with a coercive style for negative impact on organizational performance.³⁵ Instead of racing around hoping your team will follow, set clear performance targets with all your team members and see what they need from you to accomplish the targets.

Transform complaints to commitments

Underneath every complaint is a commitment.³⁶ When salespeople complain about Legal, they're committed to making sales—to their benefit and the company's. When Legal complains about Sales, often they're committed to protecting the company from excessive risk.

You can show your team members how to identify their own commitments. Note that I did not say they have to identify a solution. Leaders who insist that anyone who mentions a problem provide a solution soon find they don't hear about many problems. Conversely, you may hear your team members offering solutions without thinking through the problem; use questions to point them back to problem definition.

When your team talks more about their commitments than their complaints, you'll find they partner far more effectively with others inside and outside the team.

34. Jack Zenger et al. "Five Insights From Leadership Research," July, 2009, http://www.workforce.com/section/11/feature/26/52/35/index_printer.html

35. Daniel Goleman, "Leadership that Gets Results," *Harvard Business Review*, March/April 2000, 78–90.

36. Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey Laskow, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002).