

CORPORATED MANAGEMENT / HUMAN RESOURCES

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BUILDING a high-performance culture – what a powerful and catchy phrase that encapsulates what every organisation dreams of – a place where everyone is working at their optimum best and no one is slacking off. Yet, high performance may not be sustainable if you are not aware of one major blind spot.

The need for performance could blind you to the necessity for conversations.

What does it take to sustain a high-performance culture that goes beyond just neat slogans and detailed quality charts? The tool for maintaining the momentum of performance has more to do with words than works. How well you control your tongue is more important than how you manage your task.

TONGUE DISCIPLINE NO.1: CONFRONT DEVIATION IMMEDIATELY

Your power to act is directly proportional to your confrontational speed.

Let's say you discovered your employee lied about the reason why he was on medical leave yesterday. The effectiveness of your leadership depends on the speed of your next confrontational conversation with him. Any delay in having this conversation will be interpreted as license for future offense. Being confrontational does not mean that you aggressively "bully" and "push your weight"; rather, it is the commitment to surface the truth. The longer you wait, the weaker the truth becomes (and more distortions and excuses may creep in).

Performance stress happens when leaders delay holding confrontational conversations.

Tip for a Character-Wise Conversation:

Despite the fact that the evidence may be overwhelming against the other party, you must begin by playing the role of the lawyer rather than the judge i.e. converse to discover rather

than dive quickly into a state of prejudice and judgement.

Here are the basic steps for a confrontational conversation:

- 1 Share the facts and wait for a response (in case there are other factors you're not aware of).
- 2 Relate how the offense affects the bigger picture (team performance, company reputation, the employee's own future, etc). Never make it a personal affront.
- 3 State your own responsibility (what you are willing to do).
- 4 Ask for a response (what the other party is willing to do).
- 5 Decide the next course of action (depending on the response above).

TONGUE DISCIPLINE NO.2: COMPLIMENT OTHERS PUBLICLY

When an employee is asked to go the "extra mile" when it comes to performance and productivity, they also need that "extra smile" from you as the authority. Think about it – wouldn't it be more pleasurable working for someone who recognises your effort and "smiles" in appreciation?

Do not fall into the trap of being a "militant manager" who prefers to make a public example of those who do not do well. On the contrary, your responsibility as a manager is to make a public example of those who do well. For those who do not do well, the step to take is private conversation.

Tip for a Character-Wise Conversation:

Do not underestimate the power of a simple and sincere compliment. Many make the mistake of waiting for the moment of performance appraisal or long service awards night to "officially" state your compliments. The

longer you delay your words of praise and compliment, the more insincere it becomes when you finally get around to doing it.

Here are the steps towards a complimenting conversation:

- 1 Define the character qualities demonstrated (responsibility, creativity, punctuality, diligence, dependability, thoroughness, etc).
- 2 Illustrate the incident with details – who was involved, what was the task, when it took place, and what the circumstances were.
- 3 State the benefits. Link the demonstration of good character with commendable results.

TONGUE DISCIPLINE NO.3: COMMITMENT BEFORE COMMUNICATION

The weight of your words becomes heavier as you progress in your leadership responsibilities.

THE STRESS OF A HIGH-PERFORMANCE CULTURE



Here are the steps towards a commitment conversation:

- 1 Keep a written record of your commitment. Review it before the next meeting and show others that you are the first person who reports on his action items!
- 2 When in doubt, it is a better policy not to commit yourself to any action.
- 3 Learn to take notes when employees speak to you about matters of importance.
- 4 Apologise promptly when there is a failure in commitment. The longer you wait, the more your action will be regarded as a weakness.
- 5 Step out of your comfort zone to converse with those who have to actually execute on your commitments. It is easy to announce a decision – but do you know the

This means that you can no longer speak frivolously and expect to get away with it!

What is the major complaint levy against leaders? It is hypocrisy, defined as saying one thing but doing another. Hypocrisy hits especially hard because it goes against the essence of what is expected of a leader, integrity, measured in terms of your commitment to do what you say you will do.

Performance stress happens when followers no longer trust the deceptive words of leaders.

You can generally get people to perform based on your positional authority but when it comes to sustainable performance, you need to demonstrate that you are a person of principle and of your word.

conditions and challenges faced by the "troops" who will actually carry out your instructions? A general who takes time off to regularly converse with his troops will certainly have a committed band of soldiers ready to give it all during a battle.

Similarly, if you desire high performance from your troops, you better do your part in exercising regular commitment conversations. You will be surprised how productive your employees will become once they are assured of your integrity and trustworthiness.

■ Joseph Tan is a trainer that aims to equip leaders to achieve consistent results at work, at home and in life through the development of personal character and the discovery of unique strengths. If you are interested in attending one of his courses, email people@leaderonomics.com

Tip for a Character-Wise Conversation:

Increase your "integrity quotient" by being aware of your "commitment liability" whenever you open your mouth.