

Two Keys to Building High Performing Teams

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The most common complaints I hear from employers about today's workforce are that employees:



Are not motivated. Are not well equipped. Don't own their jobs. Don't treat the business as if it's their own. Are uncommitted and transitory. Are self-indulgent. Lack accountability. Don't want to work. Are too easily distracted. Expect too much too soon from the job, i.e. money, promotions, acknowledgment and praise.

Perhaps that's been your experience. Perhaps not. For the moment, assume all the complaints are true, or that they are partially true... or at least that's how you're currently experiencing leading a business. Regardless, as leaders, we still must achieve our objectives. We have a choice, we can complain, gripe and play the victim... or we can figure it out and become better leaders. As Jim Rohn, one of my early teachers, famously said: "Don't ask why things aren't easier, ask how you can get better."

So, in this article, we're not going to be complaining about why it's not easier to lead in today's marketplace. Instead, we're going to look at two specific ways to get better as leaders and how we can build high performing teams as a result of our improved leadership. Two fundamental keys to building high performing teams are: (i) Choose a sound operating system, and (ii) Implement a well-designed structure.

1. Operating Systems. Think about any well-functioning piece of equipment or technology. It always has a defined operating system. Consider your car or your computer. Each was designed to function in a specified way. Different cars and different computers have different operating systems. However, without a well-designed operating system they either fail, or they operate poorly.

I'm not saying businesses are "machines," however, they do need an operating system to function optimally. Sometimes I hear business owners say something like this: "If I

could just hire great people, my business would function well!" Obviously, having great people on your team is a wonderful thing, but that is not a panacea. Think about your car. You could gather the best mechanical and electrical components, but if they are assembled incorrectly, your car will not function properly. If a beautiful chrome bumper is attached where the transmission should go and a perfectly designed transmission (the best that's ever been invented) is installed across the front of the car, the car simply will not work.

A great car requires great parts, a great structure and a great operating system. So does a business. I find when people are unwilling to do the hard work to design a good structure and install a powerful operating system in their business they default to the protest: "My business is flexible. It's all about people... it's not a rigid machine." This indicates deliberate ignorance, laziness, a lack of knowledge, a lack of faith... or some combination of all these.

The truth is, the more organized an organization is, the better it will function, the better the people will perform and the more freedom there will be for them to pursue focused excellence. Proper boundaries and wise structure ironically produce the environment for people to experience maximum freedom.

Many operating systems for business have been developed over the years. The two most prominent in the current market are arguably: Rockefeller Habits, from the book *Mastering the Rockefeller Habits*, and the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS), from the book *Traction*.

The point of this article is not to advocate for any one particular operating system, but rather to advocate for selecting, implementing and sticking with an operating system... one system. Frankly, about any system is better than no system. Bottom line... if you want to build a high performing team, select, implement and use an excellent operating system. Soon.

2. Structure. Think about how most businesses get started. An entrepreneur has an idea for a product or service. It seems like there should be a market. They start selling. People buy. More people buy. Now the entrepreneur has a problem... how to get the work done? So, they start hiring... often whomever they can find since they are desperate for help. The "organization," such as it is, develops haphazardly and becomes "warm body" and personality driven.

The good news/bad news is that customers keep buying and the business keeps trying to grow, however it often becomes increasingly dis-functional for three main reasons: (i) Poor structure, (ii) Wrong people, and/or (iii) Right people in wrong roles.

I contend that the best leaders begin with structure, not people. In other words, the business leaders figure out the roles and systems necessary to deliver products and services efficiently, effectively and profitably. Then they recruit and place people into the roles for which they are best suited. The converse of this (which happens all too often) is when a business starts trying to design itself around the people who are already employed or those who happen to be available. I call this a personality driven organization and, as such, it ends up being severely handicapped.

At any stage of business, your leadership team can step back from what currently exists and start with a blank page. Consider "firing" everyone (not literally). Then design an optimum structure, and interview people (including people who are already employees) to execute within the structure. Current and potential employees apply for positions within the newly designed structure, or they opt out. Whether people opt in or opt out,



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organizational improvement is the result. The point is, if you want a highly performing team, you must hire people to fit into the structure, rather than trying to make a structure to fit whoever happens to be on the payroll or somebody who wants a job. Hiring for "fit" looks like the jigsaw puzzle image above. People slide easily into a role and thrive. Everything fits together and performance accelerates.

There are many other factors to consider in building high performing teams, but if you don't start with a sound operating system and the proper business structure, you'll be continually frustrated and always fixing breakdowns. The business will never perform at the level at which it's capable. Sadly, when that happens, leaders often blame the employees. But what if many of the problems are due not to poor employees but rather to fundamental errors in leadership... errors that are correctable with good systems and proper structure.

These are the kind of challenging leadership issues we address in our Vistage and 10x Groups for CEOs and business leaders. If you're up for conversations focused on how to get better, rather than on why things are so hard, check out one of these peer groups of top performing Central Oregon leaders.

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