

Put to Work the Two Most Powerful Truths About People

Most of us can only absorb so many sweeping generalities about humankind before they all just melt together in a grey slab of meaninglessness. But just consider these two – the most important ones I’ve learned in almost 30 years of leading people - and you’ve got the two most useful for helping your people help you succeed.

Here’s the first: ***Most people want to play on a winning team.*** The working world is full of disengaged individual contributors who just want to put in their hours for their paycheck and go home. But most of those people are that way for the same reason: They’ve never experienced the thrill of contributing to a group that achieves something. Virtually everyone who has had that success just once is left hungry for more. Cultivating that hunger for more success is the essence of leadership, and it starts with creating a winning team.

Teams that win have these characteristics:

They know the goal – there’s a clear picture of victory

They keep score – they know & track the measures of success

They know their position – everyone is clear on their own role and those of their teammates

They have a playbook – they use clear, effective procedures

They play by the rules – expectations are clear and enforced

They rely on each other – everyone is valued and everyone is accountable to the team

They practice, practice, practice – everyone is constantly learning and growing

They get actionable feedback – via praise, coaching, performance reviews that help people improve

They have a coach – someone is responsible for helping the team reach its goals. That’s you.

They have fired up players – everyone is eager to share in the rewards of success. That could be money or a promotion; but it has to include the satisfaction that each player helped make it happen.

Think your team isn’t up to this? Don’t dismiss them until you’ve heard the second truth about people: ***People conform to expectations.*** Studies in the mid-20th century demonstrate that people are generally conformist. It doesn’t mean they’re boring: It means that most people will do what’s expected most of the time.

The good news in that truth is that if you set a high bar, most of your people will work to achieve it. But here’s the caveat: If you’re not clear on the bar’s height, people will try to give you what they think you want.

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So if you tolerate slacking, you'll tend to get it. But if you set goals that are high but achievable and help people achieve them, you'll unleash a level of success and engagement you've never seen. And that goes for your clock watchers. That's not just the goal of a leader: Helping people experience that success is the best thing about being a leader.