

Why Team Leading Is Like Riding A Bike

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Leading a team is far more of an art than a science. That's because it is a balancing act, much like riding a bicycle. As leader, you have to balance the 3 most important factors in your team. Do these right, and you can lead your team anywhere.

Content:

Team leaders have three functions:

• to get the team to perform a given task to the satisfaction of the customer

• to allow for individuals to find job satisfaction and sufficient motivation to want to continue in the team
• to develop the team so that, with the same people and the same resources, a higher performance can be obtained.

The triple concerns of Task, Team and Individuals mean that the team leader is constantly faced with dilemmas and paradoxes: should task come before the team or team before task? Should the leader meet individuals one-to-one or only meet with the team as a whole? These dilemmas mean that effective team leadership is a series of checks and balances rather than a simple question of implementing the rules.

"Teamwork is like riding a bicycle. You can only move forward if you stay in balance."

1. The Task. In the balancing act that is team leadership, the task becomes the team's number one priority whenever the customer's needs are uppermost in their minds. Working on the team's task may mean putting the team's team and individual needs on hold. It may also become necessary to work on the task if the team has spent too much time on its people needs and needs to re-discover a balance.

Some of the features of the task-oriented team leader are:

- she rules with an iron fist
- she talks about how much should be done
- she asks for sacrifices for the good of the whole team
- she sees to it that people are working to their limits
- she stresses being ahead of competing work teams
- she decides in detail what needs to be done
- she emphasises deadlines
- she emphasises quality of work.

2. The Team. In their position of being either slightly outside the team or wholly outside it, team leaders are the best people to see the team objectively as a team. They are able to give the team its shape and reality, making the team more than just a collection of individuals.

They can do this by:

- meeting with the team as a whole, involving the team in discussions and reaching team decisions
- making selections to the team based on what newcomers can add to the team
- removing from the team anyone who unbalances or disrupts the team

- sensing the team's energy and making the necessary interventions to help it move forward
- fostering team spirit
- giving the team its unique identity.

3. The Individual. The route to all effective teamwork lies through managing the individuals in the team. Only through one-to-one contact and management can a team leader develop people who have the skills, motivation and inspiration to fulfil the task needs of the team and develop the team as a unit.

The areas a team leader needs to address in managing the individuals in the team include:

- appointing newcomers to the team
- building up individual skills and realising personal potential through training, coaching, and mentoring
- getting to know individuals well enough to be able to make sensible adjustments to who does what in the team
- individual rewards, pay and conditions
- personal performance appraisal
- dealing with individual performance problems through counselling and discipline.

The team leader's concern for balancing task, team and individuals may be likened to the human functions of hand, heart and head:

- the hand represents the mechanical or technological way a task should be performed.
- the heart represents the inspiration that can unite a team and achieve more than you can measure.
- the head represents the sensible and logical way individuals should be managed.

When hand, heart and head are all properly cared for, not only is there a whole, but also a healthy balance.

"A man who works with his hands is a labourer a man who works with his hands and his brain is a craftsman but a man who works with his hands and his brain and his heart is an artist." (Louis Nizer, 1902-94)

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