



What to consider when your whole team needs development

By Alaina Love

Four months ago, Kerri was ecstatic. She had just been hired by a company that she'd longed to work for her entire career. Along with her new role came responsibility for leading five different divisions across multiple functional areas. She was keen to learn more about the talents and skills of the people who comprised the teams within each division and spent her first 90 days doing exactly that. When we sat down to chat, I discovered that Kerri had a good understanding of the hand she'd been dealt in her new role. Four of the departments were functioning superbly, she told me, but one was in her words, "a mess."

As we delved further into her experiences, I discovered that the dysfunctional team had previously been headed by a leader with a style very different from Kerri's. He was extremely directive, often dictating what each person on the team should be doing with their day. Rarely were members of the team, even those most senior, given the autonomy to design strategies or carry projects forward without micromanagement from their leader.

"That experience has resulted in the most passive team I've ever led. They won't make a move without permission, and even then, they stall," Kerri shared. "They need to be developed as leaders or we are never going to achieve what this company has the potential to deliver."

Kerri's description of the team's needs was no small order. If her assessment was correct, she had ten undeveloped people occupying leadership roles in a complex department. They needed to be upskilled ... and quickly. Kerri's ability to be successful in transforming the team depended on a whole lot of factors, but we pondered some questions to consider before she took on this challenge:

Does the business have the time?

One of the most critical considerations when you're faced with developing an entire team is whether the needs of the business are so urgent that you don't have the runway for development that you need. In such cases, you'll need to make tough decisions about where to invest and whom to let go, so you can quickly source the skills and talents externally that the business needs before it's too late. Consider businesses like the now-defunct Circuit City, where leadership didn't balance the team's development needs with the urgency of the business's evolution.

Who is most receptive?

You may be committed to developing a member of your team, but they must be invested in their own growth. That means they exhibit an interest in learning and are willing to take on new projects or assignments that boost their skills. Most importantly, as you pour energy into their development, they demonstrate evolution and enthusiasm. Begin with the people who are ready to grow and make their development progress a priority.

Are you willing to invest in both training and coaching?

Chances are high that if the whole team is struggling, what has been invested in their development thus far has been insufficient. While it's tempting to identify skill gaps and send the team through a quick training program to address them, rarely are development needs for leaders responsive to training alone. It's true that particular leadership skillsets can be developed through training, but research proves that in times of greatest change, a coaching culture is essential to a team's success. Therefore, addressing the skill needs of the team is but one step to creating high performers. Coaching takes it further by offering team members the safe space required to be vulnerable and explore their own leadership soft spots. It works best when they take ownership of the agenda that will improve their ability to contribute.

Are there underlying factors contributing to the behaviors you're observing? Is the person willing to address them?

Working with a coach often reveals underlying factors that hamper success. “Joe,” for example — an important member of Kerri’s team — is known as a perfectionist. He was raised by demanding parents who insisted that he excel in every subject he studied. If Joe achieved less than top grades each semester, his parents punished what they perceived to be poor performance. Consequently, Joe continues to hold himself to high standards and struggles with delegation because he fears that the results produced by his direct reports will be sub-standard. His own unresolved struggle with perfectionism is impacting how Joe develops the people he leads. He offers them few opportunities to learn because he's not allowing them to take on stretch projects. To resolve the team’s development needs, a good coach must first tackle Joe’s fears about failure and support him in addressing them.

How will you empower the team to act?

People grow when they’re given permission to stumble, knowing their leader will be there to support their success. Kerri’s challenge is to identify appropriate roles for each member of her team in accordance with their development needs. For the team to become high performing and regain its confidence, she needs to step back and observe how people deliver in their roles, rather than dictate their daily actions. Providing guidance and encouragement as they execute on the job is central to each person’s transformation.

<https://corp.smartbrief.com/original/2023/07/what-to-consider-when-your-whole-team-needs-development>