



SMART Leadership

In this busy VUCA world (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) we are all constantly being reminded that we need to work smarter and not harder. This sounds like a really good idea and it is if you know what working smarter actually means. Leaders today are being tasked to take their teams and organisations forward confidently and deal with all the complexity that is thrown at them. This is probably a good time to realise that working smarter can actually mean going back to basics. The two key words that can assist an organisation to stay calm in the chaos and to chart a clear way forward are *clarity* and *focus*.

When working with leaders in organisations at any level I encourage them to cut through all the noise and to look at the following SMARTer Leadership:

S = Strategy

M = Monitoring and Measurement

A = Alignment

R = Reality and Responsibility

T = Teamwork and Trust

If we break this down it is as follows:

1. Strategy

Does the organisation have a clear sense of itself, its purpose and goals? As Simon Sinek says, “do they know the why, what and the how of their business or organization”. Whether you are an international outfit or a small business you need to be clear about what you are doing and why. If the leadership is not clear it sends out a message of uncertainty to the followers. Even if it is not spoken about it, can be felt. If you have a clear strategy then you should be continually sharing it with all your stakeholders, whether internal or external. Build in them confidence about what you stand for and where you are going. People like to follow strong leaders who inspire trust. Announcing it once a year at the company celebration is not enough. You need to be speaking about it constantly and enthusing everyone about it.

2. Monitoring and Measurement

Once you know where you are going it is important to keep on track. Many of us travel these days using our GPS. It becomes our compass to keep us from getting lost, ending up in a cul de sac or a dead end. Identifying the key measurements for your organisation are critical. Once they have been identified there needs to be a regular process for checking in and measuring performance. This is not just merely looking at the budgets and sales forecasts. It is about having a finger on the pulse of the organisation. What are people thinking about the business, both internal staff and other stakeholders; what new ideas are coming up in the marketplace; who are the competitors and this is not just big names as you need to be watching out for the innovators that are coming at you from the offside. The challenge for business is also that your financial indicators are not enough when you have to consider the Triple Bottom Line and how you are going to be measured in terms of environmental and social impact too.

3. Alignment

If there is clarity of purpose and it is shared often with everyone in the organisation, you can create a sense of alignment. At every level of the organisation when individuals and teams are clear how their role fits in to the achievement of the big picture, you make decision-making easier. When faced with options and choices the strategy and organisational objectives will be the guide supported by the company values. Lack of clarity means that individuals are making best guesses

about what to do and even with the best of intentions, they may not be making the best long-term judgements.

4. Reality and Responsibility

Smart leaders do not hide away from facts, threats and opportunities. They do not get caught up in peoples' 'stories' or the blame game. As Cy Wakeman says "Ditch the drama" (2010). It is easier to get caught up in our own story or other peoples' and to lose sight of reality. What is really going on? What are the facts, not the assumptions? No matter how bad a situation is, it is easier to handle when you are really in the picture and can focus on the way forward rather than looking for someone to blame.

Responsibility is something that is often assumed in organisations. The belief is that people know what to do and should get on and do it. However, that supposes that we all have the same worldview and will interpret situations and roles in the same way. Clarity is required here to insure that everyone in the organisation is clear on their role, what they are supposed to deliver, to what quality and in what timescales. The leader setting the expectations is responsible for making sure that they are clearly understood. Early action is required when people are not delivering to expectations. If one individual falls short of expectations you may be able to pick up the slack however if many individuals are falling short you cannot be surprised when the organisation does not achieve its objectives.

Leaders are accountable for the output and deliverables of their teams. They need to ensure that the team members are responsible for what they need to deliver.

5. Teamwork and Trust

Smart leaders know that they cannot do it on their own. They may have climbed up to their current position through their own hard work and efforts. But once you have a team working with you, you can only achieve through them and their efforts. If you have taken the time to share the purpose and objectives with your team you need to work closely with them, at whatever level you are in the organisation. Often the most dysfunctional teams are those at the top of the organisation.

Empower your team and show them that you trust them to deliver. Trust has to be given by the leader and earned by the team. Trust is built on integrity, honesty and consistency.

So being a SMART leader in this VUCA world is not based on how intelligent you are. It is based on your ability to provide direction, clarity and focus for all your followers and team members. It

requires a strong sense of self, and a great appreciation of others coupled with sound business principles.

References:

Wakeman, Cy. 2010, Reality Based Leadership. San Francisco. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Sinek, Simon. 2009, How Great Leaders Inspire Action. Ted.

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