

business issues HITTING NEW HEIGHTS

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Seven habits for taking your shop or firm to new heights.

"WINNING IS A habit. Unfortunately, so is losing."

So said legendary Green Bay Packers coach Vince Lombardi.

Your beliefs dictate your behavior, and your behaviors create habits that determine your destination. You're either going towards greatness or obscurity; there is no neutrality to your momentum. So, where are your habits taking you?

Leading your organization towards a specific destination or goal is like being a pilot of a passenger airplane: Wherever you go, your passengers/company goes. There isn't an auto-pilot setting if you expect to take your team to greater heights.

If you find yourself and your organization stuck, or you're ready to rev up your engine to soar higher, it may be time to engage your discipline and do the difficult things that other leaders may not do. Here are seven habits that can help you raise your organizational culture to a higher plane:

1. Have hopeful expectations. Whatever you look for is exactly what you will find. If you expect to find problems, you will. If you expect your team to discover creative solutions, exceed their potential and come together as a team and support you, your vision and your company goals, they will. A *positive* mindset is the first habit you need to cultivate to grow a *winning* mindset. Without it, you will fail to see what's possible.

Action plan: When faced with a new idea, prospect or proposal (especially in a meeting with your team) always communicate the positives first. Encourage and engage your team members to participate in developing new ideas. Cultivate innovation by asking them to spell out the pros and cons of their ideas. Then, when they're ready, empower them to run with it.

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2. Eliminate multitasking. Just because you're busy doesn't mean you're productive. When too much emphasis is put on multitasking, it could lead to miscommunication, mistakes, frustration and unmet goals. It's not about how much you can multitask but rather knowing which tasks can multiply your results.

Action plan: Remove all distractions and then choose one task that needs your attention, and work on it until it's done. This works for meetings too. Put your devices away and give your full attention to your team. Before you know it, they will follow your lead.

3. Practice intentional kindness. Many people have experienced random acts of kindness, but it's time to be more intentional in showing kindness to yourself and your team members. Become more aware of how you can encourage others, add value, meet the needs you see and extend grace whenever needed. As you do, you'll begin to see that mindset spread throughout your organization and beyond.

Action plan: Set up a charity of the month. Assign a 12-person committee, with each member taking ownership of one month. Some ideas include collecting winter coats and canned food, walking as a team in a fun run or 5K fundraiser, hosting a blood drive, adopting a highway or spending a day with Habitat for Humanity. Encourage involvement by participating full out.

4. Gear down. In today's world, it's tough to find time to think, yet thinking is one of the more critical elements of success. Studies show that intentional downtime improves productivity, energy and results. Don't fall for that top-speed mentality or you'll eventually run out of fuel. Schedule some time to gear down.

Action plan: Prioritize some non-negotiable time on your calendar just for you. Create a distraction-free space where you can clear your mind and unplug from everything. Start with just 10 minutes if that's all you have, but just start. You'll be amazed at the clarity and productivity you'll experience as a result.

5. Find the hidden opportunities. Being proactive is one of the hidden opportunities that leaders often miss. Instead of waiting to see what the day holds and reacting to that email, phone call or situation, a more strategic approach is to determine responses before calamity strikes.

Action plan: Along with your yearly planning meetings to fine-tune the company's vision and goals, be strategic about anticipating potential problems. Have an "anticipation meeting" with a goal of creating contingency plans, and ask each department to develop a "what if" list, along with solutions. This type of strategy allows you and your team to be more creative in your problem-solving abilities while in a calmer state than an emergency would allow.

6. Talk it out. Make it a habit to communicate openly with your team and allow them the opportunity to take part in the conversation. When communication is lost, your teamwork and productivity will suffer right along with your company's goals.

Action plan: No one likes to be kept in the dark. Be clear in meetings about expectations, goals and their command structure. You can also set a time where everyone knows your door is open to discuss topics that need to be dealt with one-on-one.

7. Share the load. Establish a habit of sharing the load. Delegating important tasks is another way you can honor and empower your team to take on new responsibilities that help to sharpen and show off their strengths.

Action plan: Encourage a company culture where employees at all levels have the chance to share their ideas, talk about what they do and possibly mentor new up-and-comers in your organization. When leaders at all levels take ownership of the company's vision and goals, there's no limit to what you and your organization can do.

When you choose winning habits by believing in the potential of your team, looking for the best in others, extending kindness and creating space for them to give back, share ideas and lead, you provide the jet fuel to ignite their creativity as you empower them to discover new levels of success. Don't be satisfied with the status quo. Make winning a habit so you and your team can soar to new heights. ■