

Achieving the LOOK & SOUND of LEADERSHIP

By Tom Henschel



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Leading Teams ▶ 11/03/11

Team members out of sync

Arturo had been leading 40 risk management professionals for about a year when he asked if I would meet with him privately. I'd been coaching one of his direct reports for five months and assumed we were going to discuss the coaching. I was wrong.

"I've been saying I want our group to be 'world class' since the day I got here, but my direct reports are all over the map. And a lot of their people are still doing what they were doing when Melanie was leading the group," he said, referring to his predecessor. "I feel like I can't get this group moving in the same direction."

I asked about the direction he wanted the group to go. He responded with words like "excellence," "integrity" and "good judgment."

"If I were one of your direct reports, how would I know if I was acting with 'excellence,' 'integrity' or 'good judgment'?" I asked. "What would those things look like? And how would you measure them?"

As we talked, Arturo began to see that his ideas and concepts, which were perfectly clear to him, most likely were just vague truisms to his direct reports and the team at large. Arturo was a smart enough leader to recognize that his frustrations with his team had been misdirected: the likely source of confusion was him, not them.

"OK," he said energetically, "so I need to define the behaviors I want to see. And decide how to measure them. Right?"

"Well, those are important questions but I'd suggest you start from a different place. What teams need most is a clear understanding of their purpose. Teams need to know why they exist and what the organization expects from them."

"Oh, no," he groaned, "not a vision and mission statement!"



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He looked so pained, I laughed. "Well, your group isn't the executive team so I don't think you need a vision statement. But without a clear statement of the team's mission, it'll be hard to get everyone moving in the same direction."

Define the team's reason to exist

"OK," he said, sounding a little daunted. "Will you define mission versus vision for me?"

I said a vision statement answers the question, "Where do we want to go?" A mission statement, on the other hand, answers the question, "Why do we exist?" I felt his team needed to know their mission.

For example, The Walt Disney Company's mission statement is, "To make people happy." That's why they exist.

3M's mission statement: "To solve unsolved problems innovatively." That's why they exist.

Mary Kay Cosmetics: "To give unlimited opportunity to women." That's why they exist.

Arturo was making notes. "Great. I can see that answering 'why we exist' would help our team. I bet we're not all in agreement about that. Is that it for the mission statement?"

"Well, if you want to make it really powerful, be sure it ties into the company's mission statement."

Here's an example. One part of Amazon.com's mission statement says this: "Our vision is to be the earth's most customer-centric company." Within Amazon, one team has this as their mission: "Our team exists to ensure that all Amazon customer comments, questions, complaints or concerns are handled in a timely way, with accurate responses and solutions, that not only take care of this situation, but build their loyalty to our site and company."

Tying the team's mission to the company's mission gives the team real heft.

Four more defining questions

Then I gave him four more questions he and his direct reports could discuss:

- 1 What does the organization expect from us?
- 2 What are our tangible deliverables?
- 3 How are our deliverables important to the organization's vision, mission and strategy?
- 4 How interdependent do we need to be with other groups?



Arturo looked up from his note taking. "I don't suppose I could just answer all these myself, could I?"

"I suppose you *could* . . ." I began.

"But you don't think I should," he finished.

"No, I don't," I agreed. "Three reasons why. First, if your direct reports help answer these questions, they'll own the result much more than if you tell them what to think.

"Second, if you and your direct reports discuss these questions in a meaningful way, you'll mature into a stronger leadership team.

"And finally, Arturo, your direct reports see the team from a different point of view than you do. So they'll bring different ideas to the conversation. That has to make the answers richer."

"OK. So my leadership group and I have five questions to answer. Is that the whole ball of wax?"

"If you want more, here are two other ideas."

Three layers support the mission

The first idea is that the mission statement is only the top layer of a four-layer pyramid. The three additional layers, in descending order, are:

- ▶ Strategies
- ▶ Goals
- ▶ Tactics

Each layer supports the one immediately above it. In other words, tactics support the goals; goals support the strategies; and strategies support the mission.

Here's an example.

Suppose one strategy calls for the team to submit weekly data reports that are flawless. A goal to support that strategy might be: "Collect data from every branch worldwide, without exception, at the end of every week." A tactic to support that goal might be: "Every branch manager will use the 'xyz' reporting system that scrubs the data."





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When each layer of the pyramid clearly supports the one above it, managers at every level know what to measure and are able to diagnose problems quickly. And people performing the work know how they're contributing to the team (and to the company!) as a whole.

Measure the bottom three layers

I'd said there were two ideas. Explaining the bottom three layers of the pyramid was the first one. The second idea got back to something we'd only touched on: measurement.

Measuring a team against a mission statement is often hard. But the bottom three layers—strategies, goals and tactics—have to be measurable if they're going to be meaningful.

Up above, I gave the example of a strategy that called for "flawless" data reports. But what if my example had called for data reports that "display world-class excellence"?

Can "world-class excellence" be measured consistently, week in and week out? I don't think so. But measuring "flawless" is easy.

It's critical that every item on each of the three bottom layers of the pyramid be measurable. (Having more than one strategy, goal and tactic is normal.)

The recap

No matter how large or small your team is, they will gain purpose from knowing the answer to these five questions:

- 1 Why do we exist?
- 2 What does the organization want from us?
- 3 What are our tangible deliverables?
- 4 How are our deliverables important to the organization's vision, mission and strategy?
- 5 How interdependent do we need to be with other groups?

In addition, define strategies, goals, and tactics. And be specific how you'll measure each of them.

When a team knows all this information, it's as if they are looking at a detailed map that clearly shows them how to get to the destination called, *The Look & Sound of Leadership*™.



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