

Building A Cohesive Leadership Team



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A cohesive leadership team is comprised of the top-level managers, as well as employees who would be considered strategic in nature. It's important to include all functional areas of the organization so that all areas are represented. If one or more functional areas are excluded, decisions made by the leadership team may not take into account implications for the excluded area(s).

In addition to ensuring that all functional areas are represented, it's common for individuals in strategic roles to be included on the leadership team, even if they have no management responsibility. If you're tasked with recommending individuals to be on your leadership team, ask yourself: "If we're facing a huge decision affecting the entire organization, who do I want sitting at the table with me?"

Sometimes it's difficult to know who has a strategic mind and who doesn't – or to understand what makes the people in our organizations tick. Fortunately, some excellent tools exist for discovering these things. One of the best is StrengthsFinder by Gallup. My company has been working with the Gallup organization for some time now, and we are completely blown away by the depth and quality of this program. When members of a team really understand each other, they are much more likely to be engaged, unified and effective. This is especially true of a leadership team.

A cohesive leadership team comes together on a regular basis to discuss problems, issues, challenges and opportunities. This is typically done during a weekly meeting, but it could happen more or less frequently, depending on the season and rate of change that's occurring in the organization. The general rule is that a faster rate of change requires more frequent leadership team meetings in order to remain ahead of the issues facing the organization. During seasons of high execution, meeting frequency may be reduced since the organizational focus is on delivering services, and there are typically fewer big decisions to be made.

Cohesive leadership teams also engage in long-term planning meetings or strategic planning sessions. Typically held once per quarter, these meetings are different from a weekly meeting in that they are from an entirely different perspective – long-term and more strategic in nature versus short-term and tactical.

Cohesive leadership teams hold each other accountable. They don't let things slide. They call each other out when things get missed. Together they review actual data points and compare them to the stated goals.

There exists mutual respect and a healthy dose of peer pressure to perform at a high level. Those who are unable to perform are replaced over time.

A cohesive leadership team is skilled at identifying root causes of problems and resolving them quickly and without political posturing. When problems arise, they look for the underlying root cause before taking action. Once the root cause is properly addressed, the problem goes away. However, if only the surface cause is addressed, the problem continues to exist. If you're facing the same problem over and over again, most likely you haven't addressed the root cause.

Problem-solving within a cohesive leadership team is a systematic and deliberate process. Problems, challenges and opportunities are identified and listed for the team to discuss. Priority items are quickly flushed out so no time is spent on low-priority items. Root causes are identified and potential solutions are considered. The person responsible for the functional area, not the head honcho, makes the final decision.

The above outlined decision-making process is not what typically transpires. Problems are often met with emotional reactions, political maneuvering, and a final decision by the boss, who may or may not have taken into consideration the implications of his decision. When this happens, the team is left scarred, defeated and not unified.

Building a cohesive leadership team requires the right design, people and dedicated effort. Where does your organization need improvement? What is in place and what is not? Once the busy season is over, refocus on your leadership team and implement some of the important changes you recognize. My hope is that you have at least one great idea for you to take away. Go forth.

Editor's note: This article was originally published in June 2014 and has been updated.