

# DO YOU HAVE A STRONG LEADERSHIP TEAM?

How you assemble your leadership team can help determine the overall health — and future — of your business.



BY MARK RICHARDSON

Sometimes in life you learn from your mistakes. Sometimes you learn from a teacher or a coach. Sometimes you learn by just getting lucky when doing something right the first time.

As I deal with a variety of different businesses, the one element that separates the good ones from the great ones is not the leader. It is not the founder. It is not the size or even the product of the business. It is the leadership team.

The leadership team is the muscle to create excellence. It is the leadership team that brings a leader's vision to life. A great leadership team is synergistic and lives by the formula 1 + 1 = 3.

I was lucky to get this concept early on. As I look back on my management experiences, I may have been a force but it was the leadership team that provided what it took to become great.

## DEVELOPING THE TEAM

Leadership teams can look and feel quite different from each other, but what is not in question is that developing one is the difference between good and great. It is also the difference between solid growth and amazing growth.

Here are a few insights/themes that might help you on this journey:

- 1. Make it a priority:** How much time are you devoting to creating or growing your leadership team? This time should involve finding the right members/coaching them/challenging them/discussing the topic. For a smaller business, this may be in mentoring while doing; and for a larger business it may be more leadership workshops or outside coaching. If it is a top priority, you invest the time and energy. If it is a top priority, you wake up thinking about how to achieve this.
- 2. Take inventory:** It is important you have the right ingredients. These people not

only need the right competencies but also the right energy and fit for you and the culture. In Kim Scott's book "Radical Candor: Be a Kickass Boss without Losing your Humanity," she refers to superstars and rock stars. She also looks at high performance and a high growth trajectory. Both are important to consider, but I also prefer to have some stability and calm too. Getting an outside perspective on this is healthy as well. Ask yourself these three questions: Can they do the job? (competency); Will they do the job? (mindset and attitude); Do they fit? (pace/culture). While these are simple, it makes it clearer who you need to invest in and who you should move on.

- 3. Visualize the leadership team:** When I am advising a CEO, I have them visualize a conference room table with X seats. Each seat has a person or is empty. The more you can visualize the strength and the voice in each seat the more you can fill the voids and see the strength and weaknesses.
- 4. Alignment:** This has a lot of legs and is important — alignment and belief in the vision and growth; alignment in the culture and style; and alignment in the plan and the strategy. Everyone needs to row in the same direction and, ideally, in cadence.
- 5. Investing in themselves:** It is extremely hard for leaders to take their game to the next level if they are not investing in themselves. This not only takes time and energy outside business hours to do this, but they also need to require the same of their team. Great leaders are developed not just born. Development requires guidance and coaching but at the end of the day the real sweat needs to be coming off their noses not yours.

- 6. Dissident voices:** While you want a strong leadership team most great ones are made up of diverse individuals and personalities. It is up to you to bring the dissident voices into the mix. You need to encourage these differences to create the magic of great leadership meetings. Some look at the world through an important analytical lens and some don't. Both are very important.
- 7. Change:** This may be one of the harder elements. Leadership teams need to change and grow in sync with the business. The team needs to understand the business is the patient and the doctors (leadership team) around the patient may not always remain the same. When you are leading a business through very stormy water it requires different talent than calm and steady. Change is not good or bad, it just is. I believe the healthy leaders and leadership teams understand this and are not handcuffed by the players on the team.

In closing, whether you are big or small, having a great leadership team is important. Begin by spending a couple of hours a week thinking and working on this theme. Make the topic part of your conversations. Begin to study others and get some outside perspective.

The bottom line is having a great leadership team is a choice. If you want a great business, it is not an option to not focus on this. ■

Mark Richardson is an author, speaker, columnist and business growth strategist. He has written several books on business management including "How Fit Is Your Business?" and "Fit to Grow." His latest book is "Control Your Day Before It Controls You: The 7 Steps to Mastering Your Time." All of his books are available on amazon.com. He can be reached at [mrichardson@mrichardson.com](mailto:mrichardson@mrichardson.com).

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