Essentials

Leadership

The first essential, the foundation, is a Cohesive Leadership Team.   Before defining a cohesive leadership team and how to develop one, let's define the terms independently: *Leadership is the capacity to translate intention into reality and sustain it.*

"The test of our leadership is simple: Are the people entrusted to our care better off?"
   ---*Cheryl Bachelder*

A Team is a relatively small group of people (3-8) that shares common goals as well as the rewards and responsibilities for achieving them; team members readily set aside their individual or personal needs for the greater good of the group. A collection of people who report to the same manager but with little interdependence and mutual accountability is <u>not</u> a team.

Why teams? When people come together and set aside their individual needs for the good of the whole, they can accomplish what appears to be impossible. In addition, teams help people find fulfillment (connection and belonging) in their work. Fulfillment and joy at work leads to increased productivity.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has".   ---*Margaret Mead*

Cohesive is the act or state of cohering, uniting, or sticking together

Therefore a cohesive leadership team is a relatively small group of individuals with the capacity to translate intention into reality that is united around common goals, rewards and responsibilities for achieving and sustaining those goals. Such teams can transform an organization. On the other hand, if a leadership team is dysfunctional, that dysfunction will cascade throughout the rest of the organization. Think of an organization being composed of a series of gears where the senior leadership is the biggest gear and employees on the lowest level of the organization are the smallest gears.
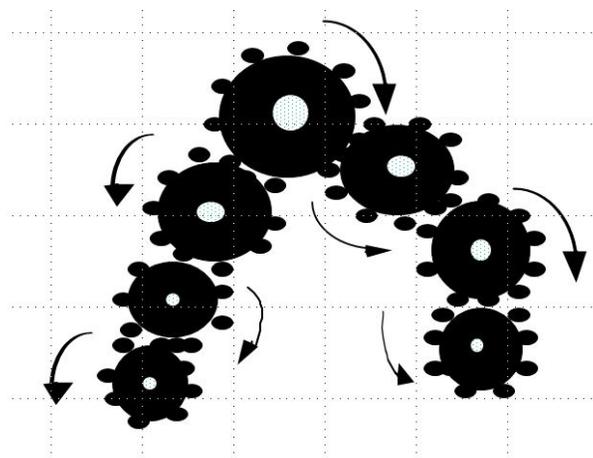
One inconsistent communication or confusion about an activity's importance or refusal to provide resources by a leader will spin its way throughout the organization, faster and faster as it goes down the organization chart resulting in silos, turf wars and disengaged employees

A cohesive team exhibits the following five behaviors:
1. Trust;
2. constructively debates with one another;
3. commitment to important decisions;
4. hold one another accountable; and
5. pay attention to results

Being a team is hard work. This raises an important question: Is the team able and willing to invest considerable time and emotional energy in becoming a cohesive team?

Building Trust
No quality or characteristic of a cohesive team is more important than trust; it is also rare. Trust is used inconsistently and is hard to achieve. The trust we are concerned with here is not the ability to predict one another's behaviors because we have worked together for a long period of time. Trust in cohesive teams is all about vulnerability – members are comfortable being open, even exposed to one another around their failures, weaknesses, even fears. Vulnerability-based trust is not a touchy-feely, theory. Quite the contrary, it is predicated on the simple and practical truth that people who are not afraid to admit the truth about themselves are not going to engage in political behavior that wastes everyone's time and energy. To identify low levels of trust within a team look for: meaningful conversations happening outside team meetings (mail room, hallway, or parking lot), frequently run out of time for discussion and debate, repetitive conversations with team members restating their view several times.

Recent neuroscience research has shown that higher levels of oxytocin create higher levels of trust and joy. Experiments have shown that a higher sense of purpose (common goal) stimulates higher oxytocin production in the brain. Trust and purpose then mutually reinforce each other to produce high levels of happiness, which in turn further promotes trust within the team.

Why is vulnerability-based trust so rare? Human beings, especially adults, have a strong desire for self-preservation. The idea of putting themselves at risk for the good of others is simply not natural. Instead we learn "look out for number one" and "don't let them see you sweat" and other such clichés that call us to think of ourselves before others.

The key to building trust then is to help team members get comfortable being exposed to one another and able to say "I made a mistake" and "I need help."

Establishing real trust is hard, but doable; it does not have to take a lot of time. But, it does take courage. Leaders must be willing to take risks without a guarantee of success, to be vulnerable without knowing if it will be respected and reciprocated.

It is best to start small to help people get comfortable with moderate vulnerability. One way to do this is with a "personal histories" exercise. It is as simple as asking every team member to share three things: 1)where they grew up; 2) how many kids in their family; and 3) what was the most difficult challenge of their childhood. In addition to helping everyone open up, it also helps overcome fundamental attribution error, the tendency of humans to falsely attribute negative behaviors of others to their character, while they attribute their own negative behaviors to their environment. Through the exercise team members come to understand how they each became the people they are today. This replaces judgment and accusation with empathy and understanding.

Real breakthroughs in trust come when leaders use a behavioral profiling tool that allows team members to accurately and openly assess their strengths and weaknesses.   It increases the likelihood that team members will admit their weaknesses and strengths to one another. It provides team members with a common vocabulary for describing their differences and similarities and makes it safe to give feedback without sounding accusatory. There are many profiling tools available: DiSC, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Social Style Model, Right Path profiles and Insights. Whichever tool is selected, a certified or qualified facilitator should be chosen to administer the tool (SOS Consulting is an authorized partner for Everything DiSC and Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team profiling tools).

Constructive Debate

In order for a team to constructively debate issues of importance to the team, the team needs to master conflict. When people don't trust one another to engage in debate, they are focused on winning the argument and don't listen to each other's ideas. Worse yet, a polite atmosphere is created that is perceived as respectful and limits the sharing of information and ideas.

Conflict exists within a continuum from artificial harmony to mean-spirited personal attacks. The ideal point it where a team is having every bit of constructive debate possible without stepping into destructive territory.
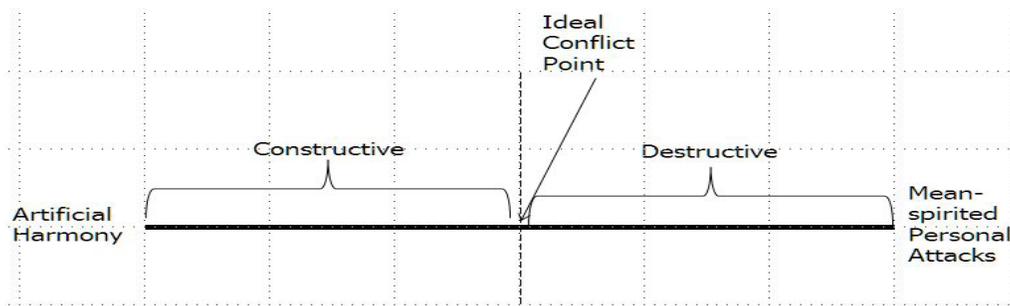
Different people respond to conflict in different ways, determined by their temperament or personality, cultural background and family norms. How does a team figure out its collective conflict "profile?" A simple way is to talk about it using their behavioral profile and views of conflict as shaped by their childhood or maturation process.   The Thomas-Kilmann Model (go to

www.cpp.com to learn more) helps teams identify and understand their conflict tendencies and profile by describing five different approaches to conflict according to how people think about the importance of a task versus the importance of their relationship with the people involved. With this understanding of the team's collective conflict profile, rules of engagement or code of cooperation can be developed and used during team interactions.

People who do not like conflict have an amazing ability to avoid it, so a team leader may have to mine for it and gently fan the flame of conflict for a while to get the team comfortable with constructive debate. If after becoming comfortable with conflict a team struggles to achieve resolution around the issue being debated, there is an obstacle in the way that needs to be acknowledged so that it does not continue to cloud the real issue. Obstacles may include environmental obstacles, relationship obstacles and individual obstacles.

Even among the best teams, conflict will at times be uncomfortable. The key is to learn from the experience and use it to improve the team's ability to constructively debate important issues.

Achieving Commitment

Teams that achieve commitment do so because they know how to hold two concepts: buy-in and clarity. Buy-in is the achievement of honest emotional support, while clarity is the removal of assumptions and ambiguity from a situation. With leadership commitment, there is collective ownership for the decision which has a powerful effect on the rest of the organization.

Let's be clear. Buy-in is not consensus. Waiting for everyone to agree on a decision takes time and often results in mediocrity and frustration. In contrast, commitment is about a group of individuals buying into a decision when they don't naturally agree.

Good leaders provide for commitment by first extracting every possible idea, opinion and perspective about the situation from the team. Most people really just need to have their ideas heard, understood and considered. A leader must then have the courage to make a decision.

Commitment does not guarantee success, however; a team can fail to benefit from their commitment. That's because they fail to achieve clarity and alignment on a decision. Instead they make assumptions about what they have agreed to. A favorite example of this is:

"A team committed to complete a task Anybody could do, but Everybody assumed Somebody else would do it so consequently Nobody did."

Two techniques to align a team around commitments are relatively simple:
1. Commitment clarification: With five minutes to go to the end of a meeting, the leader asks: "What exactly have we decided here today?" He/she then captures the response on a flip chart or white board for all to see and checks for agreement. This makes

commitments explicit and allows the team to identify and act upon discrepancies before leaving the meeting.
2. Cascading communication: Once commitment achieved, team leader demands each member of the team communicate the decision(s) to their staff within 24 hours in a two-way dialog (staff are given a chance to ask questions for clarification). Even the most passive team members will state their concerns or misgivings of a decision if they know they will be expected to communicate it publically in a short period of time.

Embrace Accountability

Accountability is the willingness of team members to remind one another of their commitments when they do not follow through with their actions. This is peer-to-peer accountability that is modelled by the leader. If the team knows that the leader will eventually step in and call someone out, they will not do it themselves. Likewise, if the leader does not call someone out, then the rest of the team members will hesitate to be "the heavy."

It is hard and uncomfortable to give someone critical feedback. Without accountability, a team chooses a path of slow, uncomfortable decline.

One way to build accountability within a team that trusts one another is devote a team meeting or off-site session to ask each member of an assembled team two questions about each of the other members:
1) What is the single most important behavioral characteristic demonstrated by this individual that contributes to the success of our team?
2) What is the single most important characteristic demonstrated by this person that can sometimes derail the team?

Once everyone has captured their notes, starting with the team leader, one-by-one the team members read their positive quality about the leader. The leader cannot respond other than to ask for clarification. Then repeat the process with the constructive feedback for the leader. When everyone is finished, the leader may summarize the feedback, both positive and constructive, highlighting what they commit to improve. Repeat for each member of the team. Everyone leaves generally flattered by the positive feedback and clarity of what they need to do to improve as a team. Simple and powerful because people do not have a lot of time to think about their answers, the leader goes first, and with one positive and one constructive feedback, they do not feel like the team has ganged-up on them. Once team members know what each is working on improving, they can more easily hold each other accountable.

Focusing on Results

Even with trust, constructive debate, commitment, and accountability, a team can lose sight of its objective, the result it was formed to achieve. It is natural human behavior to lose focus, mostly because we are hard-wired for self-preservation (strong tendency to look out for ourselves before others). To execute, the team needs to keep its goals front and center."

Everyone needs to know the "score." Like in sports each member of the team needs to know whether or no they are "winning" so they can do their part to improve the score. This can be done using some form of scorecard that is publically posted. An example of doing this across an entire company may be found in Jack Stack's book, *The Great Game of Business.* The scores/measures should be quantitative and well-defined to avoid ambiguity, few and tied to the team objectives/goals. The scorecard should be reviewed frequently by the team so appropriate corrective action(s) are taken in a timely manner.

Still it is easy to become distracted. Four common distractions are: ego, career development and money, and my department, all which boil down to team members looking out for themselves and the staff they lead more than the team they are a member of.

A useful tool for assessing the cohesiveness of your team is the team assessment found in Section Four of Patrick Lencioni's book, *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team Field Guide.*

Servant Leadership

Cohesive leadership is a philosophy centered on service – building trust, commitment and accountabity **to one another**. Service has multiple meanings: the action of helping someone, a system of supplying a need, and performing routine maintenance. The action of helping is to make it easier for someone to do something. In a manufacturing environment, it is to provide a person not only with the materials, but also the time necessary to operate their process effectively. It is more than providing training or SOPs, it is investing in the individual, growing their knowledge and experience. This allows the individuals to be part of something bigger than themselves, to feel empowered to make improvements, to execute on a daily basis.

Jim Collins, author of <u>Good to Great</u>, found through his research on the best organizations, two qualities of great leaders: 1) humility, and 2) a strong, professional will to do the right thing for their organization. Collins and his team called this "Level 5 Leadership," as the use of the word" servant" conjures up negative images for most people. He states: "*The most powerfully transformative executives (level-five leaders) possess a paradoxical mixture of personal humility and professional will. They are timid and ferocious. Shy and fearless, rare—and unstoppable. Good-to-great transformations don't happen without level-five leaders*." In *Built to Last*, Jim Collins also writes: "*Leaders must define the organization by reference to core values and purpose; build connection and commitment rooted in freedom of choice, rather than coercion and control; and accept that the exercise of true leadership is inversely proportional to the exercise of power.*"

Servant leaders bring a caring humbleness. Humbleness is the mother of all the virtues because humbleness acknowledges that there are natural laws or principles that govern the universe. They are in charge. We are not. Pride teaches us that we are in charge. Humbleness teaches us to live by principles and values, because they ultimately govern the consequences of our actions. If humbleness is the mother, courage is the father of innovation, wisdom and execution. Servant

leadership integrates a caring humbleness and courage, bringing with it, new mindsets, mindsets rooted in serving before self.

When we serve purposes greater than ourselves, going beyond our comfort zones, we desire to build upon the help of others, with shades of caring humbleness.   Successfully working with others makes us more productive and facilitates the building-up of those we touch to create forces that are almost invincible. Stephen Covey reminds us that servant leadership increases our commitment to mentored learning in such areas as personal growth, relationships, and communication. When information and knowledge are seeded with worthy purposes and principles, we create innovation, wisdom and execution. Innovation, wisdom and execution are fathered by courage built from integrity around principles.

> *"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear".*
>   - Ambrose Redmoon

Why does an organization need servant leadership? Does your organization need better innovation, wisdom and execution?

During a leadership development week with Stephen Covey, he told the class that the top people of great organizations are servant-leaders. They are the most humble, reverent, open, teachable, respectful, and caring. When you borrow strength from position, you build weakness in yourself, because you are not developing moral authority in others; they become codependent with your use of formal authority and unauthentic openness causing trust to atrophy, thus destroying cohesiveness – our first essential.

> *"The surest way to reveal one's character is not through adversity but by giving away power."*
>   -Abraham Lincoln

Trust

No quality or characteristic of a team is more important than trust; it is also rare. There are many myths about trust: trust is 'soft; trust is slow, trust is only about character, trusting people is risky, and trust is established one person at a time. On the contrary, trust is hard and quantifiable, nothing is as fast as the speed of trust, trust is a function of both character and competence, not trusting people is expensive and riskier, trust with one establishes trust with many.

The trust we are concerned with here is not the ability to predict one another's behaviors because we have worked together for a long period of time. Trust in teams is about vulnerability and congruence – members are comfortable being open, even exposed to one another around their failures, weaknesses, even fears and these actions are consistent over time.   Vulnerability-trust is not a touchy-feely, theory. It is predicated on the simple and practical truth that people

who are not afraid to admit the truth about themselves are not going to engage in political behavior that wastes everyone's time and energy. To identify low levels of trust within a team look for: meaningful conversations happening outside team meetings (mail room, hallway, or parking lot), meetings frequently run out of time for discussion and debate, repetitive conversations with team members restating their view several times.

The Economics of Trust

According to Stephen M. R. Covey in his book, *The Speed of Trust*, the economics of trust can be stated in a simple equation:

$$Trust = speed/Cost$$

When trust goes down, speed goes down, cost goes up; when trust goes up, speed goes up and costs go down.
Good strategy and execution can be derailed by low trust; high trust serves as a multiplier. In this way, trust serves as either a tax or a dividend. If we consider that results achieved by an organization are a function of both strategy and execution or **Results = Strategy* Execution,** trust becomes a 'hidden variable" and the equation changes to:

$$Results = (Strategy* Execution) * Trust$$

With trust at 20%, you lose 80% of potential results (tax); trust at 80%, you lose 20% of potential results; 120% trust, you gain 20% potential results. How is 20% more possible? People go beyond the call of duty and phenomenal things happen (dividend). No/low trust results in CYA (cover your ass) behavior, hidden agendas, political camps, redundant systems that punish/blame individuals, dissatisfied employees, high stress, low productivity, high absenteeism and low employee retention. High trust results in a healthy working environment – little office politics, good communication, aligned systems, satisfied employees and low turnover.

Levels of Trust

Stephen M.R. Covey further describes trust as a function of character and competence

$$Trust = f (character, competence)$$

where character is defined as your integrity, motive and intent and competence is defined as your capabilities, skills, results, and track record. The quickest way to decrease trust is to violate a behavior of character. The quickest way to increase trust is to demonstrate a behavior of competence.

Trust starts with self-trust and ripples out to include 4 additional levels of trust:
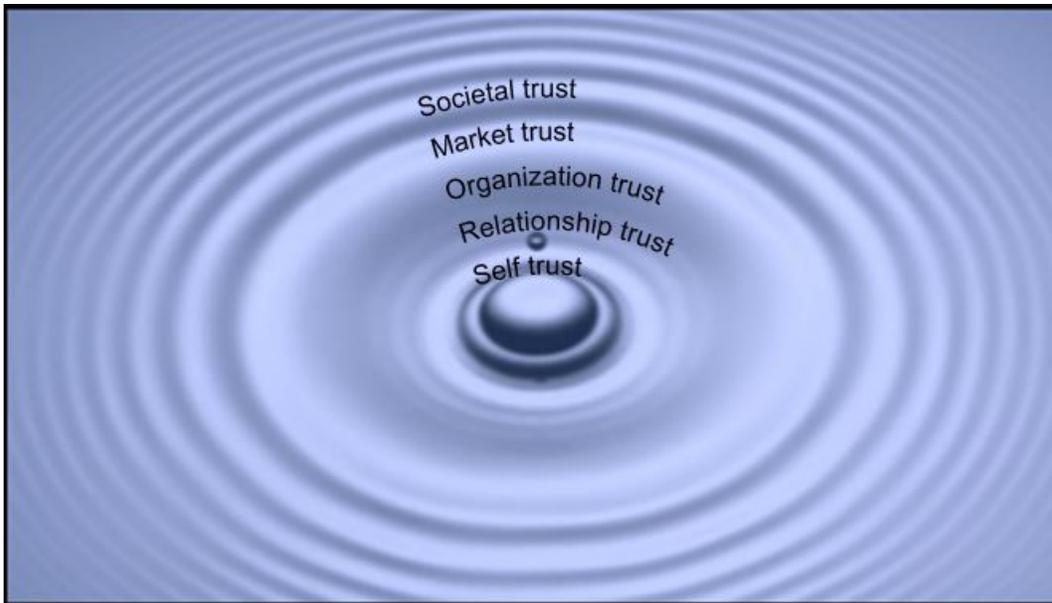
Self-Trust is confidence in self to set and achieve goals, keep commitments and walk the talk; the underlying principle is **credibility.** Credibility is the quality of being convincing or believable; acting in accordance with your values and beliefs with genuine care for self and others as well as having a track record of getting things done.

> *"Self-trust is the first secret of success… the essence of heroism."*
> - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Relationship Trust is the ability to create and build trust with others through **consistency/congruence.** Behavior does not vary greatly over time; character and actions are in harmony with one another over time.

> *"In every relationship, what you do has far more impact than what you say."*
> - Stephen M. R. Covey

Organizational Trust is confidence the organization's systems and structures create dividends. The underlying principle is alignment. It is all about building relationship trust with internal stakeholders - after all, an organization is a group of individuals.

Market Trust is the confidence customers, investors and others in the market have in the organization; the underlying principle is **reputation** – widespread belief in the character and competence of the organization. It is about building relationship trust with external stakeholders (considering the market as a group of organizations and individuals).

Societal Trust is creating value for others and society at large; the underlying principle is **contribution or global citizenship.**

"Trust men and they will be true to you; treat them greatly and they will show themselves great."
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Covey defines 13 trust behaviors for building relationship trust:
1. Talk Straight
2. Demonstrate Respect
3. Create Transparency
4. Right Wrongs
5. Show Loyalty
6. Deliver Results
7. Get Better
8. Confront Reality
9. Clarify Expectations
10. Accountability
11. Listen First
12. Keep Commitments
13. Extend Trust

All 13 require a combination of character and competence. The first five primarily flow from character, the second five from competence and the last three are an equal mix of character and competence. The 13 behaviors work together to create balance. Similar to the best practice behaviors in the *Everything DiSC Work of Leaders* ®, these behaviors exist on a continuum. Too much results in blind trust; too little results in distrust. The "sweet spot" is **Smart trust**:
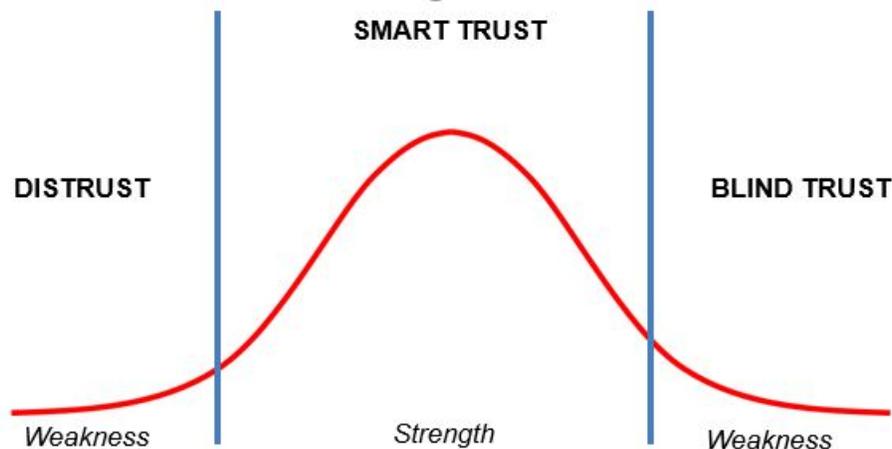
*Continuum of trust behaviors from: Covey, Stephen M.R, The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything. Free Press, 2006

Behavior	Distrust	Smart Trust	Blind Trust
Talk Straight	Lies, spin, double-talk, flattery to avoid discomfort	Truth told in a way people can verify; real and genuine. "What you see, you get." No hidden agendas or information.	Too much information too fast (people unprepared)
Demonstrate Respect	Fake concern. Ego	Genuine care for others. Respect for dignity of every person and every role, especially for those who cannot do anything for you. Kindness shown in the little things.	Overprotectiveness, jealousy, unproductive worry
Create Transparency	Hide, cover or make obscure; secrets, hidden agendas	Honesty. Simple language to let people know where stand. No manipulation of people or facts. No spin or false impressions.	Too much information too fast (people unprepared).
Right Wrongs	Hide, cover or make obscure; secrets, hidden agendas	Honesty. Simple language to let people know where stand. No manipulation of people or facts. No spin or false impressions.	Apologize profusely or repeatedly
Show Loyalty	Loyal as long as it is convenient	Credit given freely. Contributions of others acknowledged. No bad-mouthing others behind their backs or disclose private information; speak about people as if they were present.	Extremely loyal at the moment, but not to future well-being or principles
Deliver Results	Overpromise and under deliver	Get right things done right. Make things happen on time and budget without excuses,	Plenty of results with no consideration if they are the right ones.
Clarify Expectations	Not sufficiently clear with expectations or communications	Disclose and reveal expectations. Discuss them. Validate them and renegotiate as needed. Don't assume expectations are clear or shared.	Too detailed, micromanaging

Behavior	Distrust	Smart Trust	Blind Trust
Practice Accountability	Failure to accept full responsibility or to follow-through; little ownership	Take responsibility for results. Clear communication on what and how things are being done. No finger pointing when things go wrong.	Accept responsibility for things out of your control; too much ownership
Get Better	Resting on laurels; complacent. Becoming irrelevant	Continuously improve. Life-long learner. Act on feedback from both formal and informal systems. Accept today's knowledge/skills/abilities are not sufficient for tomorrow's challenges.	Always learning, never producing
Confront Reality	Ignored or dilute reality or too mild to be effective	Address the tough stuff head on. Real issues not buried in the sand.	Brutally confront people instead of the situation; blame/victimize.
Extend Trust	Give people responsibility, but not authority or resources to get task done.	Trust extended abundantly to those who have earned it; extended conditionally to those who are still earning it based on situation, risk & credibility of the people involved.	Extending too much trust and getting burned.
Listen First	Do not determine needs/ preferences and insights of stakeholders before taking action	Give credit freely. Acknowledge contributions of others. Speak about people as if they were present. Don't bad-mouth others behind their backs or disclose private information.	Spend all time listening, not bringing conversation to point of decision-making.
Keep Commitments	Not making enough commitments or not following through well	Do what say. Commitments made carefully and kept as. symbol of your honor. Confidences not broken	Make too many commitments or keeping at all costs even when impractical or unwise.

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each other to produce high levels of happiness, which in turn further promotes trust within the team.

The key to building trust then is to help team members get comfortable being exposed to one another and able to say "I made a mistake" and "I need help" around a common purpose (goal).

Establishing real trust is hard, but doable; it does not have to take a lot of time. But it does take courage.

What is the Work of Leaders?

The work of leaders can simply be stated as:
1. Craft a **V**ision - imagining a future state that the group will make real
2. Build **A**lignment
3. Champion **E**xecution

We will simply refer to this model as VAE. While these responsibilities on the surface appear to be sequential, as we have seen from previous sections on leadership, it is an on-going process.

But, how do you actually do this work?   In the book, *The Work of Leaders* by Julie Straw, Mark Scullard, Susie Kukkonnen, and Barry Davis identify three drivers each for vision, alignment and execution that make it achievable. We'll summarize the drivers in this section.

Drivers of Vision

A truly great vision elevates our work. It sparks our imagination. It touches our human need to do something bigger than ourselves. The drivers of Vision are: Exploration, Boldness and Testing Assumptions.

"The human is the only animal that thinks about the future."

Exploration: Remaining Open

Many of us have a need for closure – to check things off the to-do list, to remove ambiguity, to create a clear path forward. Unfortunately, if that need for closure is high, you will tend to run with the first good idea you have and accept a vision that is not a good fit. Being open does not mean indecision. Rather, remaining open is about not making a decision **too early**, resisting the temptation to run with the first idea, giving ourselves permission to take time to let the brain wander into unchartered territory.

Exploration: Prioritizing the Big Picture.

It is always easier to put together a puzzle using the picture on the front of the box as a guide – literally the "big picture." The six questions of strategic clarity help leaders define the big picture:
1. Why do we exist?
2. How do we behave?
3. What do we do?

4. How will we succeed?
5. What is most important, right now?
6. Who must do what?

<u>Boldness: Adventurous</u>

Adventurous leaders stretch the boundaries beyond current practice and/or knowledge. Our nature too often is to "play it safe." Leaders that want to be more adventurous need to ask themselves: *What's the worst thing that could happen? What's the best?* Once you have identified your worst fear, you can confront it. Knowledge of the best thing can help you instill confidence in yourself and your team.

<u>Boldness: Speaking Out</u>

The desire to not look like a fool is a strong instinct. As leaders, we need to rein in our self-preservation instincts and go out on a limb, speaking out to voice ideas that seem unconventional and/or impractical. Most bold ideas are born into a fragile existence. If the idea is powerful, analysis and ingenuity will turn it into a practical, winning idea. This takes courage. Build up to it by pitching your ideas to others informally to get a sense of how others will react and to polish your delivery. Don't apologize or back down too quickly when you get negative feedback. Instead use the feedback to refine the idea and your pitch. Also, challenge others skepticism, don't let them off easy playing 'devil's advocate.' Some people will need time to reflect on the idea and come to see it from their own perspective. That is always part of change. Expect it.

<u>Testing Assumptions: Seek Counsel</u>

People are predictably prone to overconfidence when it comes to checking their intuition. When we believe we have come up with the greatest idea ever, our instincts are to protect it from criticism and rejection. Due diligence is an opportunity to enhance, tweak and understand the vision at a deeper level. Seek counsel by inviting people whose skills, knowledge and experience you respect into your vision – test it out with them and let it unfold. This is <u>not</u> asking for approval, but input. This is best done individually to prevent 'groupthink." Don't limit your counsel to folks you work with either – you may get fresh perspectives from a supplier, a customer, a neighbor, or your spouse.

<u>Testing Assumptions: Explore Implications</u>

Sometimes the vision seems so clear, so compelling we are more likely to believe arguments that support it, even when those arguments are unsound. One way to avoid this is to conduct a "pre-mortem" on your vision. We are all familiar with post-mortems or "after project reviews." Don't wait until <u>after</u> the vision is achieved to review it. Ask your team to imagine the vision has failed and to identify all the reasons for the failure before starting to work the plan. This will not only give you confidence in the vision and insights to improve the vision, but will sensitize your team to early warning signs of failure and give them time to respond in a way that will enhance the probability of success.

Drivers of Alignment

Gaining alignment is critical in moving from an imagined future state (vision) to reality. It is a dynamic, ongoing process that requires constant realigning as condition and needs change. True alignment will meet both the rational and emotional needs of employees, customers and partners. This means that you must reach both the head and the heart through Clarity, Dialogue and Inspiration

Clarity: Explain the Rationale
Clear communication is crisp. It is communication that provides enough information, but not too much; it is well-structured and efficient. It is simple but addresses real-world complexities. But crisp is hard work. Leaders often overlook communicating what is obvious to them but a mystery to everyone else. This means leaders need to share enough specifics to anticipate questions without overwhelming the hearer in details. A simple reason for a change should help people follow your logic and reach the same conclusion. Providing rationale is particularly important in times of uncertainty or large change. Speculation and gossip will occur if leaders do not step forward to offer clarity on the situation; people will fill in the gaps in communication, often with information that is far from the truth. A way to address this is through transparency – people at all levels have access to essential information when they want/need it. When crafting communications, leaders should look at the situation from the listener's point of view and then monitor people's reaction for comprehension.

Clarity: Structure Messages
Being crisp and clear takes time to structure the message. Meandering, unfocused communication leaves people confused and questioning leadership. Start by identifying the "headline." This should be no more than 8 words. Next, nail down the talking points. Ask: *"If people walk away with nothing else, what two or three points, what do I want them to remember?"* Finally, once you have structured your message, refer back to it often and consistently. Repetition and familiarity will shape people's attitudes and feelings.

Dialogue: Exchanging Perspectives
The factor with the highest correlation to job satisfaction is "a chance to have my opinion heard and considered." The word dialog means "through meaning," suggesting, "a free-flow of meaning through a group, allowing the group to discover insights not attainable individually. Dialog is an opportunity to give people voice which opens the door to shared ownership and accountability. To exchange perspectives, leaders first need to give people a safe place to open up, a place where they do not feel rushed or threatened. Second, leaders need to practice "reflective listening." Reflective listening is the leader summarizing what someone said using own words and checking for understanding.

Dialog: Being Receptive
Being receptive is not about the message or process of dialog (crisp and reflective listening); it is about the vibe the leader is sending out during dialog. People sense, both consciously and unconsciously, whether you are receptive and approachable. Your tone of voice and body language verify your receptiveness. People can quickly sense skepticism or disapproval, so

leaders should try to suppress these emotions and to hold back on challenging the response from others. Remember dialog is a time for openness, not debate.

Inspiration: Be Expressive

Inspiration helps leaders obtain buy-in. It breathes life into the vision, galvanizing people. It is about bringing positive energy to the group and its goals. Being expressive is connecting to the audience. To do this, a leader must first be clear in their own mind why they are passionate about the vision. Next, leaders need to be specific. Like structuring the message for alignment, the leader should choose three key points. These points should speak to people's hearts, not just their heads. Employees perceive the environment through the eyes of their leaders. The moods, opinions, and actions of leaders rub off on their employees.   If the leader is cynical or pessimistic about the vision, it will be reflected by the group. Likewise, if the leader appears excited and committed to the vision, the group will be too.

Inspiration: Be Encouraging

Leadership is about relationship. If the relationship goes sour between leader and follower, followers/employees will gradually lose their commitment to work. Being encouraging means giving support, confidence and hope to someone. It makes people feel good about themselves, their team, and their work. To encourage, give people a common aspiration, something the whole group can latch onto and be inspired by. Traditional strategies are to identify a "common enemy," a "noble cause," or a 'rallying cry." This requires knowing your audience – what motivates you may not motivate others.

Drivers of Execution

Execution is making the vision a reality.   Execution is how organizations take good ideas and turn them into results. Harvard Business School research has identified components necessary for people to do good work. Two components deal with a sense of achievement: passion for a task, and a working environment that stimulates creativity.   Leaders are responsible for making sure people have what they need to do their work effectively, including creating the work environment. Leaders that champion execution, *defend* the time needed by the team to accomplish the work, *advocate* for the team, praising and providing feedback, *lobby* for resources and support from other work areas, and *cheer* on the team to maintain momentum.

Execution: Momentum
Momentum is the ability to accentuate the positive, making success more certain and challenges few and manageable. Consistent with Newton's First Law of Inertia, a body at rest tends to stay at rest, and a body in motion tends to stay in motion, it is harder to create momentum than to sustain it. 50% of change efforts fail at the first stage of "Create a Sense of Urgency." Complacency is hard to overcome. Momentum starts with the mindset of the leader. It is the mentality that the work we do contributes to the success of the team. But leaders cannot do this alone; they need to create a culture of momentum.

> *The speed of the leader determines the pace of the pack."*
> -   *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

The drivers of execution are: Momentum, Structure, and Feedback.

Execution: Be Driven
Being driven is pushing yourself and others forward, believing things could always be better, never wasting an opportunity.   There is an unspoken assumption that we don't wait around. A fast-paced organization doesn't have to be stressful. Leaders should "model the way," never asking team members to work harder than they are working or to maintain a level of sustained activity that they are not committed to do. Leaders set high standards and commit their team to deadlines associated with external events. Why an external event? External events are harder to break or change as someone outside the organization is depending on the team.

Execution: Initiate Action
Leaders take responsibility for change when they see it rather than look the other way; Leaders have initiative. Initiating takes energy, especially when it is about initiating around difficulties that arise during execution. Time is the biggest obstacle; leaders are already busy. To initiate action leaders must continually challenge priorities. What is the most important thing we ought to be doing to make a difference <u>right now</u>? Leaders must help team members take on new initiatives in their daily work, perhaps by writing the initiatives into annual objectives

Structure: Providing a Plan

 One cannot be a good leader without being a good manager, where being a good manager means you: plan, organize, direct, coordinate, and control work. A plan is a framework to bring together people, strategy, and operations. A plan ensures everyone is on the same page and provides a common foundation for the team to rely on. The leader's role in creating the plan will depend on the leader's role, experience of the team, and type of work. A front-line leader in a small organization may be very immersed in the details while the CEO of a large organization may only champion the leaders that report to him to invest in planning. The best way to obtain a team's buy-in to a plan is to engage them in the planning process. Planning is inherently an iterative process that takes time. Leaders need to provide the time to create a realistic plan.

> *"By failing to plan, you are preparing to fail"*
> - *Benjamin Franklin*

Structure: Analyze in Depth

A good plan that can be successfully executed needs to have rigor, depth of planning. Analyzing in-depth is about appreciating the true purpose of execution and understanding all the moving parts. This requires critical thinking to anticipate the cause-and-effect relationships that play out in execution of the plan. Leaders involve the team in this analysis and create an environment in which there is consistent and timely communication across functions and shared understanding of how the pieces are connected (process thinking).   Leaders also challenge the team to think critically about what may happen so undesired variation (statistical-thinking) can be eliminated or minimized.   Leaders must be deliberate about providing plenty of time for such analysis.

Feedback: Addressing problems and Offering Praise

Perfect feedback requires complete transparency – all the cards on the table. This is often not possible in the real world. To provide feedback, a leader must be involved, getting hands dirty to understand what is really going on in the trenches. People do not always speak up about problems due to organizational politics. A leader must speak up (be bold) Addressing problems can be tough as it means disrupting harmony. No one likes confrontation or risking hurting someone's feelings. If candor is done recklessly, it can kill transparency. Leaders must make themselves vulnerable by acknowledging their own mistakes. Also, leaders should facilitate regular, semi-formal dialogues about what is not working. Remember to focus on the problem, not the people – the goal is to find a solution to the problem, not assign blame. People also need to know what is working right and to feel valued. Don't assume people know you appreciate the good work they do. Prioritize celebrations or milestones and build recognition into all your plans. Make sure the recognition is personal and fits the accomplishment.

VAE is a simple model, but not simplistic. It is hard work that requires focus and intention. Start by understanding your tendencies and current performance using the drivers.

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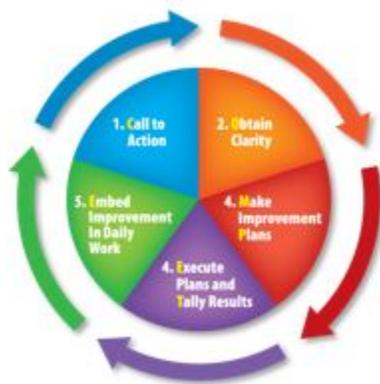
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