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Effective team leadership

The 5 traits you need for success

Latest research reveals the best ways
to get the most from your team.

Overview

Team leaders are critical to organisational success.

They are accountable for the day-to-day actions of their team, which help the organisation to achieve its overall strategy and vision.

Effective team leaders help drive organisational performance. On the other hand, ineffective team leaders can result in unhappy, unproductive and potentially toxic teams.

Insync's research – based on over 50,000 employee responses from more than 220 studies – has uncovered the five traits of high-performing team leaders. Looking at the top performing 25% of organisations in our benchmark database, there are **five clear team leadership themes** that relate to high performance.

We also share some **best practice suggestions** for team leaders on how to get the most out of their staff, plus a self-assessment guide for leaders to measure their effectiveness, recognise their strengths and aim to become better leaders.





01. Provide direction

An effective team leader establishes clear, overarching goals for the team. They actively support the organisation's direction and strategy, and connect the team goals to this broader picture.

Key indicators of effective team leadership

Percentage of employees from the top 25% of organisations in our employee engagement database who agree with survey statements around direction and strategy.



Ideas for improvement

Effective team leaders should aim to:

- Establish a clear, overarching goal or vision for the team
- Articulate how the team goals feed into the organisation's goals
- Regularly hold an extended meeting to review and clarify the team's purpose and mission, individual roles and expectations, and how the team can collaborate more effectively
- Ensure all team members know why they are doing what they are doing, how it fits into the broader picture, and what impact it has on customers/clients/stakeholders

- Ask questions of the team about the organisation and team goals; why are the goals important? How are they contributing? Are there any aspects that are not clear?
- Ask all team members to write a personal vision statement, where they articulate clearly what they feel passionate about and what legacy they would like to leave the organisation
- Ensure the team have all the information they need to succeed. Keep them informed of what is going on in the organisation. Pass on relevant information and provide an open opportunity for them to ask questions or provide feedback.



02. Build good personal connections

Effective team leaders authentically build and maintain strong personal connections with team members. They understand – and are considerate of – individuals' needs and preferences. They communicate effectively and display appropriate organisational behaviours.

Key indicators of effective team leadership

Percentage of employees from the top 25% of organisations in our employee engagement database who agree with survey statements around connecting with team members.



Ideas for improvement

Effective team leaders should aim to:

- Set a regular one-on-one meeting to discuss work priorities, challenges and development. Never cancel this meeting, only re-schedule
- Build trust by doing what you say you will do. Act in a way that aligns with your words, and follow through on promises and commitments
- Be an exemplar of the values and behaviours expected of the organisation. If you have areas you know you do not do well, ask your team to hold you to account
- Be accessible and approachable to members of the team; make sure they know when and how they can contact you with their problems, concerns or successes
- Show genuine interest in team members as individuals; understand their strengths, weaknesses, and short and long-term goals. Know something about team members outside the work environment; family life, hobbies and personal preferences

- Actively encourage your team to share their opinions within the team environment and/or one-on-one. Listen to their input and take this on board wherever possible. If the input cannot be taken on board, explain why
- Actively support your team by helping them to remove roadblocks and find solutions
- Ask for feedback on your leadership style; ask your team questions such as: Is there anything I do that bothers you or creates obstacles? What can I do to improve or better support you? Be prepared to listen carefully, and ask further questions to fully understand their feedback
- Empower your team by helping them increase their competence, choices and trust in the work setting. Differentiate between coaching and counselling situations:
 - **Coaching** is needed when there is a need for more understanding. In these scenarios offer advice, direction, or additional information
 - **Counselling** is needed when facing a problem with attitude, personality or emotions. In these scenarios, offer support, understanding or motivation. Practice empathy, not sympathy.

* The average score of the top 25% in Insync's NFP benchmark database



03. Support development

Effective team leaders support continued growth and learning for the individuals and the team. They set challenging goals for team members to utilise their skills and abilities, and provide regular and constructive feedback.

Key indicators of effective team leadership

Percentage of employees from the top 25% of organisations in our employee engagement database who agree with survey statements around growth and development.



Ideas for improvement

Effective team leaders should aim to:

- Set challenging (but realistic) role expectations in collaboration with individual team members. Review progress during one-on-one meetings and link expectations to the organisation's goals
- Allow team members the opportunity to grow via different and challenging tasks and projects that put them just outside their comfort zone; provide guidance and support through the process
- Create opportunities to praise and thank employees in front of others. Hold regular team get-togethers where individuals' achievements are recognised

- Treat every interaction with team members as an opportunity for recognition, constructive feedback or discussion of what can support employees to carry out their job to the best of their ability
- Form personal development plans with individual team members and discuss their career goals and aspirations. Review plans at least twice a year
- Look for formal development opportunities such as skip-level meetings, training, secondments and mentoring.



04. Manage team dynamics

Effective team leaders foster an environment that focuses on collaboration, shared understanding and support. They bring the team together and encourage open and transparent discussion. They demonstrate and support a strong customer service culture.

Key indicators of effective team leadership

Percentage of employees from the top 25% of organisations in our employee engagement database who agree with survey statements around team dynamics.



Ideas for improvement

Effective team leaders should aim to:

- Model the behaviours you wish to foster for the team. Set the example, and help others know how to improve through demonstration
- Hold regular (at least weekly) team meetings to connect, discuss work priorities and share learnings. Seek feedback on what will make the meetings most effective for the team
- Link team members together to support effective service delivery. Encourage team members to regularly communicate and keep in touch

- Foster more personal connections among the team by organising semi-regular (monthly) catch-ups outside the workplace; a casual coffee, Friday-night drinks or team-building activities
- When team members disagree or experience conflict, do not take sides. Avoid making it personal, keep issues centred, label the conflict and deal with it directly; help the team seek alternative solutions.



05. Ensure execution

Effective team leaders set clear expectations for performance. They encourage autonomy among team members to achieve the required results. They regularly report on performance targets and celebrate individual and team achievements.

Key indicators of effective team leadership

Percentage of employees from the top 25% of organisations in our employee engagement database who agree with survey statements around performance.



Ideas for improvement

Effective team leaders should aim to:

- Establish SMART goals with their team – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound
- Identify specific actions the team can take to accomplish the goals; implement a system of reporting to assign and track accountability to execute tasks
- Be clear about performance expectations. This provides certainty and clarity for team members and increases the likelihood of achieving the goals
- Create a sense of ownership for allocated tasks and act when plans are not executed. If team members think they can get away with not doing things, it will become the norm. If there are ramifications or a sense of letting the team down, it will help to build a culture of accountability

- Encourage and support team members to take risks and try diverse ways of doing things. Create space for trying new things; take on board what works and learn from failings
- Celebrate achievements and reward performance; this might be through informal recognition for little wins (thanks and praise, team coffee) and/or formal/high-value rewards for the achievements of major team goals.

Self-assessment guide



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Current level of proficiency

After reviewing your team's employee engagement report, how would you rate your leadership style in each of these key areas?

Review the key indicators associated with each area and give yourself a rating.

To what extent do the following statements describe how you engage with your team?

Domain	Not at all	Sometimes	Generally	A lot of the time	Most of the time	Always
Providing direction Establishing a clear, overarching goal or vision for the team.						
Personal connections Authentically build and maintain strong personal relationships with individual team members.						
Supporting personal development Supporting continued growth and learning for team members.						
Managing team dynamics Fosters an environment that focuses on collaboration, shared understanding and support.						
Ensuring execution Set clear expectations for performance. Encourage autonomy among team members to achieve the required results.						

Strengths

Following your review, identify three strengths and how you can further leverage these in your role.

Strength	How can you leverage this strength further?

Focus areas

Identify three focus areas as well as some possible goals to aid your development. These notes can form the basis of a practical discussion with your manager and be reflected in your organisational learning and development plan.

Domain	Focus area 1	Focus area 2	Focus area 3
Leadership factor/item			
Goal			
Resources required to achieve the goal			
Key milestone/actions to achieve the goal			
Timing (i.e. 3 months, 12 months)			
How will you know you have achieved your goal?			

About Insync

We help make the complex simple.

Insync is a leader in integrated experience management, research and consulting. Our purpose is to inspire success, and that's what we've done for over 1,000 organisations in over 50 industries.

We provide evidence, expertise and actionable insights to shape employee and customer experience, ensure good governance and help organisations manage the risks that matter most.

We have delivered surveys, research and consulting projects in around 100 countries, 40 languages and across a variety of different industries. Clients such as CUA, Telstra, Energy Australia, Toll, IOOF, KPMG, CSIRO, St Vincent's Health, YMCA and UnitingCare trust us to deep dive into their culture, experiences and risk processes, and surface with actionable insights that drive real change.

Our team of registered psychologists, researchers, consultants and analysts have developed frameworks that draw insights from your data, make sense of the numbers and provide unbiased and strategic guidance for positive change.



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