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The Digital Airport Company

AVOID A DISCONNECT & GET IN THE TRENCHES

To lead a high-performance team you need to work alongside team members in the trenches.

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AS THE CEO of a company that provides technology solutions and manages services and 24/7 operations for the airport industry. I have had the unique opportunity to lead and develop high-performing teams for some of the most prestigious airports in India and upcoming opportunities in the Middle East. Before that, my exposure to telecom and enterprise start-ups and large global companies in Silicon Valley gave me valuable insights into working closely with and leading result-oriented teams.

One of the critical challenges of leadership is building and sustaining teams that consistently deliver outstanding results. I have learned that it is a journey that never ends once you embark on it. Effective leadership requires a continuous effort to identify areas for improvement and implement strategies to drive success. One of the key strategies I have found to be effective in building and leading high-performance teams is working alongside my team members in the trenches. This involves going in the field with them, staying late with implementation and support engineers, going with my

team(s) to some of the most challenging customer meetings, etc. Leading by example is always more effective than mere words and direction, and it helps to build trust and demonstrate commitment to the teams' success. Both success and failure should be shared among team members, but as a leader, one should always be willing to take the blame and fall on one's sword for the failures.

The trust that a leader eventually develops with the team by closely working with them paves the way for effective crisis management, and these crises tend to show up at the most inopportune times (Murphy's Law). Whether it is a significant incident or a minor disruption, responding quickly and decisively is essential to minimizing the impact on the customer, team and organization. The ability to react effectively requires adapting and pivoting to address the crisis at hand. It is much easier to do this when the team sees you as one of them rather than as an outsider. When they see you as one of them because you led from their turf, they are equally bought into the process of change and crisis management.

CASE IN POINT

Here is a perfect example. Recently, my project team worked tirelessly for several months to meet a tight deadline for installing and operationalizing the technology stack at the new Mopa Airport in Goa, India. To build trust and teamwork, some of my senior leaders and I made a point to be on-site with the local team on a rotational basis, often working 12-plus-hour days. This helped us to understand the environment and challenges firsthand and showed our team that we were willing to work just as hard as they were. Additionally, even when we were away from the location, our team members and end customers knew they could reach out to us without hesitation for any issues that needed our immediate attention. This created a sense of unity and trust between leaders and team members, and I believe that it helped our team to step up as well and become de facto leaders at the local site.

CONCLUSIONS

Leadership is more than just titles, it's about passion for solving problems and working together to achieve common goals irrespective of where one is on the corporate ladder. I have many similar

examples of leading or working closely with high-performance teams, and each such experience has been extremely rewarding to me in terms of learning and honing my skills as a leader.

To accomplish this level of trust and cohesion within a team, I tend to gravitate toward a servant leadership approach, which involves putting the needs of the team and the organization ahead of one's interests and empowering team members to take ownership of their work and contribute to their fullest potential. Servant leadership does not preclude one from being decisive, and it does not mean that you cannot act strongly when your intuition and the data tell a consistent theme, even if others do not believe it. You do it in a manner where you always keep the higher objectives of furthering the organization's cause ahead of your own.

Lastly, the technologies, tools, processes and systems we adopt to strengthen collaboration, communication, and agile decision-making can enhance human elements and leadership skills. By leveraging these resources, we can create an environment that supports teamwork, creativity, regular feedback and continuous learning, all of which are essential to building and sustaining high-performance teams.

