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HIGH PERFORMANCE

AND

THE HUMAN TOUCH

THE PRAGMATIC
CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP FOR HEALTHY
TOP PERFORMANCE

GABAL

1 GROUNDWORK

Key question for leadership

We are on our way! The question of all questions as mentioned is the golden thread regarding leadership: Under which conditions are people in the business venture as a rule prepared to incorporate their potential on a high level long term? The answer to this and its consequential implementation leads businesses to the top.

Definition of the league

Everything begins with an entrepreneurial decision: In which performance league do I want to play in with my business?

My aspiration as an entrepreneur and the aspiration of this book are geared towards Champions League. All businesses like to play here but only a few in each branch manage to get the necessary pre-requisites. It is hard to get there and then hard to keep up to that level. And that is when the fun stops in many businesses.

It must be clear and made clear time and time again to all participants, managerial staff and employees what a top performance aspiration means. What can managerial staff and employees expect from their business in such a case? What must the business expect from them as well? He who wants to reach something extraordinary must perform extraordinarily too.

Who goes before what

The right people in the right place

The principle “Who goes before what” is my focal point when it concerns long lasting top performance. Make sure therefore that you have the right hand-picked team playing for you. Make sure you have the right people in the right places. For it is possible to have the right people in the wrong place. In such a case, it is our job as managerial staff to make sure they get to the right place – and there is always a right place for right people.

Practical example: *The manager of an electronics retailer store told me of an employee working in the department for “white goods” (appliances for household work, for example, washing machines) that it had been noticed that for nearly a year he had shown poor performance and was unreliable. The manager then had the “sacking” discussion with him and asked the employee irritably “You have annoyed me for a year now and you obviously don’t want to work here anymore. But what do you want?” The employee then answered “Seeing as you are asking me, I’d like to work in EDP and new media.”*

The manager then reported that he would never have dreamt of putting that employee in the EDP department. He gave the man the option and saw how, within a few weeks, he had become an important top performer.

I can only recommend you not to give up on employees too quickly, especially under the current circumstances on the labour market. If you are not satisfied with an employee's performance, have a clarifying talk to see whether the person concerned may be the 'right person' in another job position.

However take care: there are wrong people too, and they are wrong in every job in a business. It is indeed the unpleasant and uncomfortable job of managerial staff to recognise the wrong people who are fundamentally not prepared to really become committed and to join in at a high level. And then to ensure that such employees either change their performance - that doesn't happen very often – or leave the business very soon, as they are extremely dangerous for the performance of the whole team.

To raise the who-question when such problems occur

“Who goes before what” also means however: If things are not working out at some place in the business, if there is always something going wrong, if business aims are not being met, then as a rule there are the who-questions to be met, and not what-questions. This is also part of the unpleasant and uncomfortable managerial tasks leading to controversy.

The reality is often different: There are some managerial staff who try very hard to bypass the who-question and proceed to the what-level. A working group or a project group is then formed, a seminar is offered, all people concerned turn round in circles and are then surprised that they land where they began: the problem not solved.

I maintain: Problems in business are in the finish always who-problems. If you face up to the problem consequentially, then you are on the way to top performance.

With the right salon-management we will then have the right salon team sooner or later which will delight customers with their input and good atmosphere and thereby achieve first class results for the branch. If the salon is not doing well, this always has something to do with the salon's management – which is often difficult to see in detail from the outside. But we have often experienced “spontaneous improvements” when there has been a switch-over in salon management, and this too with the same team.

The leadership rank

For me is clear: If the basic business idea is fair enough and is pursued in an economically realistic manner, then the leadership quality in the business is the most decisive factor for long-term business success. And yet it is not only the quality of leadership at the executive level; just as important is the quality of the following managerial levels, especially on the basic managerial level.

Focal point for the daily routine: the lowest managerial level

Why? Because on this level in all businesses about ninety percent of all employees are managed. Employees on the spot see their direct manager daily – not the executive – and register daily: We are well dealt with, we are led well.....or not.

It's easy to imagine what an impact these daily experiences have on the employees' dedication, work enthusiasm and on the team's morale. It is at the point that the employee (if he is the right one) contributes his real potential. This is the reason why the basic managerial level is for me the most important in my company.

The leadership skills of my salon management have a decisive influence on the dedication and morale on the staff basis. A much stronger influence than I myself could give! I can ensure the framework circumstances in the business are fair enough, that on the senior managerial level there are suitable people and I can further the quality of salon management through training – if they are the right people. However the daily leadership work and everything which reaches the employees, is the achievement of the salon manager himself. And has to be.

Professional qualification is not the same as leadership qualification

This aspect, the question of leadership quality especially on the basic managerial level is often seriously neglected. The best sales assistant is promoted to areal sales manager, the best hairdresser is promoted to salon manager, the best worker to group leader. Often in cases like this, the technical qualification and performance are only seen, and the question of leadership quality which is of significant importance in the new position, is hardly taken into consideration or only looked on from a distance. And then the drama begins, the end of which is not only having to look for a new manager but also having lost a good salesman. And the team's performance has become less.

I recommend when looking for managerial personnel to be very careful and apart from the essential technical competence to put leadership quality on a high level.

Look at this aspect with newly appointed managerial personnel if you are a superior manager. Use a trial period and may be time limits to get a picture of the leadership work – talk to employees too!

In my enterprise new salon managers from outside only get temporary contracts – at the most for one year. During this time there is comprehensive coaching: Next to leadership training there are regular – at the minimum every three months – managerial talks with the senior management.

Up-and-coming salon managers from the business get a temporary contract to begin with for their new function as in spite of their training beforehand the leadership quality can only be seen in the position itself. This temporary contract makes a return to the employee position easier, maybe in another salon, if the salon management function does not work out successfully. This at least keeps a good hairdresser for us.

The concept HIGH PERFORMANCE AND THE HUMAN TOUCH

How can it be a success to utilise the enormous performance potential which is there with all employees of all businesses in a really extensive way? The answer is: HIGH PERFORMANCE AND THE HUMAN TOUCH.

Some of the participants of my training courses explain at the beginning that they are very curious as to how this contradiction which the terms obviously give rise to, can be resolved.

High performance and the human touch – no contradiction

I am convinced that for lasting top performance – Champions League – these two terms have to be brought together. They are two sides of the same coin. The big challenge for and demand on managerial staff is that they recognise this and live it out in their leadership practice.

He who wants to be successful today and tomorrow as a manager must be in the position to expect and get good performance from his employees. This is the claim for high performance from managerial staff. This is definitely to do with pressure, confrontation, demands and stimulations. This is the “hard” side of leadership work without which sustainable success is not possible.

But the same manager who demands high performance level and who puts pressure on his employees must on the other hand be able to provide a pleasant working climate and treat his employees decently. That is the “soft” side of leadership work.

Only those managerial staff who cope with both sides of the coin will be successful on an over average scale. That however is difficult, that is the highest kind of leadership skill. That has to be trained, but it is, however, trainable.

High performance without human touch

I am always most surprised to see many companies and managerial staff who still believe by getting high performance without the human touch that they will get the best results. Employees are put under pressure, they are threatened that they will lose their job, they are blackmailed and bossed about, in short: fear is present.

Under threats or with fear, people will not run faster, nor will they run faster playing soccer. Under certain conditions something like this may function once short term; middle term or long term definitely not! This is because the best are first to leave. They don't have to put up with being treated like that. The others keep their head down and just work to rule at the very most.

I am surprised for two reasons about managerial staff who act like this. On the one hand these managerial staff want – and need! – the achievement potential of their staff too. They will definitely not get this in an extensive manner with this kind of leadership. And on the other hand, the labour market has changed in favour of the employee. Due to this shortage of trained staff, well trained persons can choose more than ever which employer they fancy. The well trained personnel in a company have more alternatives than ever before, outside of their company too. This dangerous bloodletting is bound to occur.

Managerial quality is a competitive advantage

Businesses which already have difficulty even to find personnel are tomorrow's losers. Companies with good leadership work and a good reputation on the labour market, for example with a large number of speculative applications, are already today and definitely even more so tomorrow the winners on the market, as high leadership quality and a good reputation are real, long term effective competitive advantages.

Each company can bring in on the short term lower pricing, a new advertising idea or a product variation. Leadership quality and a good reputation as an employer must be developed and acquired over a longer period of time. Only a few companies can muster up the consequence for this arduous route. They however then play in the Champions League and to be sure long term!

The human touch without high performance

The game of human touch without high performance is often and willingly played. I have often seen it in many small and medium sized companies, but also in parts of large companies. The predominant motto is then: "We want to be nice to each other, nothing should hurt, we like each other personally too, we do a lot together on the personal side...."

However atmosphere on its own, however important – is not sufficient for lasting high performance as in such an atmosphere the concept of performance is often pushed into the background.

As nice as it would be, the human touch does not function without high performance either and is social romanticism. Recently I heard the term "guinea pig culture": "Everybody loves each other, but there is not a pig on the move." Avoid guinea pig culture. Unfortunately the human touch without high performance avoids top performance as well as high performance without the human touch.

Winner-winner-reasoning

As an important basis for long term first class leadership work, managerial staff with a so called winner-winner-mentality prove themselves again and again. They are of course very ambitious and want to win, be successful and get first class results. That's their job! But they know that those which they need to win, are namely their members of staff, who have to be winners too, otherwise the game will not take place on a high level.

Who would leave a winner game? And which employee in the long run stays in a game which he perceives as a loser game? And should somebody do that: With what motivation is he playing?

It is not esoterism, but business management: Today nobody gains in the long run at the expense of the other. No company gains in the long run at the expense of its staff. However no member of staff gains in the long run at the expense of his company either. The gladly

played winner-loser-games are all disguised loser-loser-games within business in the long run. You just have to look long and closely enough.

Definition “High Performance”

For me “high performance” means

- ◆ in the long run
 - ◆ definitely over average –
 - ◆ on outcome measurable –
 - ◆ performance of the business.
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The four elements of high performance are:

- ◆ *Length of time*

The point is to belong to the best on the market permanently. It doesn't mean playing just once in the Champions League and then fighting to stay in the league.

- ◆ *Being over average*

He who performs over average is better than most others, better than the average market development. Each company and every part of the company must define this element for itself. These can be qualitative standards, maybe customer satisfaction or adherence to schedules or delivery dates. This kind of qualitative standard can also be developed together with company staff. This increases the obligation of these standards and the staff's dedication.

- ◆ *Measurability*

Success expresses itself in results! But I am convinced that the basic objective for every business is “satisfied customers” and not “profit”. That is why I warn companies not to see profit as the first and most important aim. They run the risk of not seeing the essential prerequisite of profit is “satisfied customers”. Even worse, there are measures taken for increase of profit which go against the interest of the customer. And then businesses wonder why their increase in profit so well worked out, doesn't happen because customers react in that they buy less or stay away.

Essential is: Profit is the result of goal directed action. He who targets his aim “satisfied customers” especially well, in fact better than others, is the one who gets a high profit permanently. And rightly so! Because good work (= performance) in the long run shows good results.

Figures speak an objective language

There is no logical context of permanent good performance and bad results or bad performance and good results. The figures, the results are therefore a good indicator to express: your performance is fine – or not. Take the figures, that is, the results, seriously. This protects you from the popular behaviour of whitewashing bad results.

I have this kind of approach time and time again in my business. “In these kinds of conditions these bad results are really quite good! Just think, who wants to go to the hairdressers in this kind of weather?” The weather is always the scapegoat for bad figures in the hairdressing business – it was too warm, too cold, too wet, too dry...”Then there were road works in front of the salon. You had to be a long jump champion to get to the salon. Then a new cheap salon has opened up at the corner and over night we have lost 25 percent of our customers. And then Maria is pregnant. What else can we expect; it could have been so much worse!”

That is how it was with soccer. We lost 0:2, sit together after the match to analyse the game. After half an hour and 3 beers we won 3:2. A goal was offside, the stupid ref missed that; a penalty kick missed, normally we always get that shot in, three clear-cut chances missed, otherwise we are normally accurate with our shots...With this game analysis we'll play again next Sunday and will lose again with 0:2, because we don't perceive the result "0:2" but whitewash it.

◆ *Concentration on the entirety:*

The star in the game must always be the company! Not an individual, no matter which position in the company this person has. In the end it comes down to the performance, the results of the whole business – they must be right. It has nothing to do with the performance of individuals or areas of the business. Top performers in the business must however work as a team; otherwise they are dangerous for the whole game.

Risk: personal interests before overall interests

An ego-trip for managerial staff – the higher hierarchically located, the more so more critical! – is extremely dangerous for every business. A certain sign of indecency in managerial staff is when other staff have to ask: should I be loyal to my manager or to the business? If managerial staff let it happen or forces it to happen that another member of staff gets into such a conflict regarding loyalty, then this manager is playing a nasty game. In good businesses with good managerial staff there isn't such a conflict. It is in everybody's interest that everybody is a winner.

Definition “the human touch”

Pragmatically seen, “the human touch” means:

- ◆ including the staff interests
 - ◆ respect of staff’s dignity
 - ◆ honesty and fairness
 - ◆ clarity and predictability
 - ◆ listening
 - ◆ positive views on people
-

This is an open list which can be added to according to the case and necessity.

- ◆ *Including the staff interests*

With decisions concerning staff, their interests should be taken into consideration. The realisation and carrying out of critical measures are made easier if staff recognise that their interests have been considered.

Practical example: *The extension of opening times to 10 p.m. was important for our business because under these conditions numerous salons wanted to keep open until 10 p.m. or even had to (obligatory in shopping centres and stores). However before we did this, we looked to see how our staff felt. For there was one thing we wanted to be sure about: If you as a customer – by the way we call our customers “guests” – enter our salon at 9.30 p.m., a member of staff should show you that he is happy to attend to you. No way should you as a customer be greeted by a short tempered member of staff who sends out a clear signal “I certainly haven’t been waiting for you. And I am not in the mood either to serve you.” This behaviour is demonstrated by members of staff cleaning quite pointedly so that you wouldn’t even dream of entering the salon. Or you hear the famous words “We’ve just done the till cashing up, please come again tomorrow morning.”*

Apart from this, it was necessary to find out from our staff who used public transport whether it was still possible after 10 p.m.

Therefore first of all we asked our salon managerial staff to clarify in team meetings the situation of staff concerning opening hours. It emerged that many of our young members of staff – average age 25 – did not object to later opening hours and partly arranged their working hours with their leisure-time interests. On Fridays and Saturdays especially the late shifts were welcomed. They rested a short time after the late shift and then went on to partying as there’s not much going on before midnight. Due to the late shift, on Saturdays too, they can rest up a little and do not need to be back at work at 8 or 9 a.m. Due to this situation we had relatively few problems with our late shift working.

Where this did not fit in, we started a short-late-shift from 5 p.m. or 6 p.m. until 10 p.m. and enlisted staff who, due to child-minding, could not work normal hours.