

First Time Team Leader

Introduction

In this short article we address the issue of how to make the move from team member or work colleague to Team Leader. This can cause issues and problems, from natural awkwardness to wilful subversion.

This short article discusses some of the problems that can arise and offers a few pointers on how to handle the situation.

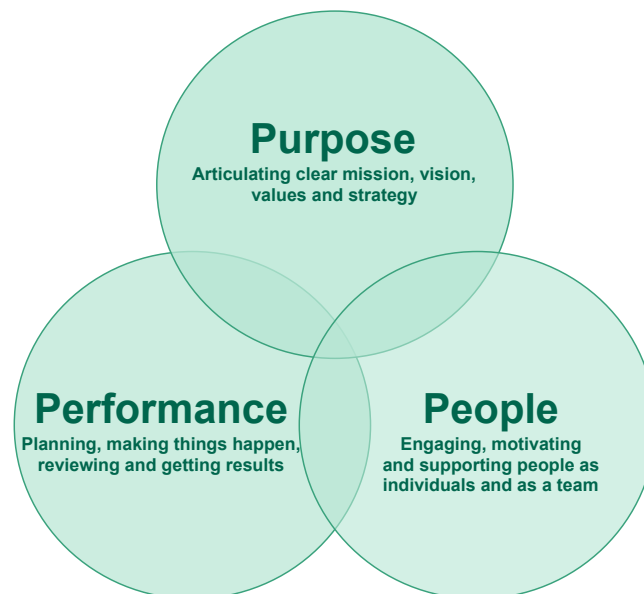
Winning Hearts and Minds

Winning the hearts and minds of a new team is the first test you will face as a new leader and it is now your job to navigate the different personalities that make up every group of individuals who are asked to work as a team.

At Stellar, we work to a three-circle model of team leadership and this helps highlight the need to address three interlocking fundamentals. As Richard O’Rawe points out:

“The real trick here is to show that your first duty is to the team purpose and what the organisation and stakeholders expect of you. This shows that whilst you will want to get the best from individuals, there is a higher purpose and broader context for asking each individual to play a role and lead on different aspects of the team’s work. The message is that it is not personal. It is about performance and achieving purpose.”

The three circles in full are as illustrated below:



Team First

It pays to focus first on the team, its role and identity. This emphasis on shared identity and common purpose will take the shine off any one individual, for the moment. It will allow ground rules to be set and may just give some time for the doubters to reconcile your good intent to their concerns about how this new relationship with you will work out.

“Some members of the team will find it easier than others to adjust and it is your job to engage with each person on a one-to-one basis, learning of their history, their expectations, their strengths and their weaknesses”

From the leaders perspective, it is important to take time to learn from others, at all levels of the organisation and its internal hierarchy. As a new leader you should make it clear what they (outside the team) might expect from your team and demonstrate that your team understands what is expected of them.

This is particularly important for someone who has been promoted within an organisation, since people around the team as well as the team itself need to get used to the new role and authority you now have as a team leader.

Finding yourself suddenly a superior to those who were previously your equals can be awkward. In this circumstance, a spirit of openness, caring, calm and fair-mindedness will help ease the transition to the new relationship.

Take Time

Taking on a position of authority does not mean that you must change the way you interact with people in the team. In fact it is important to show that your position of leadership is aimed at achieving the goals of the whole team and that you see it as your job to engage with, listen to and support individuals. Be open to sharing leadership so that different people, where they are willing and able, will be left free to take a lead in their area of work.

It may even be useful to find someone that you know and respect that is willing to act as a mentor whilst you settle in to your new role. This may only involve a coffee and a chat from time to time, but taking advice from those who have more experience can often help you avoid wasting energy trying to find solutions to problems that are new to you but not to others.

Work as a Team

Many new managers find delegation to be the most difficult part of the new job: This can be a difficult shift for new managers because they've spent most of their working lives getting recognition for doing a good job. It is important to realise that in your circumstance, recognition may only come through other people doing well.

Being patient enough to demonstrate and delegate will make for a more productive group in the long term. Delegating to long serving, experienced and deserving team members should help to ease any resistance to change they may feel. They will feel respected and valued.

Finally, make sure to carefully outline your plan of action and goals for the first months of your new role. Clear targets will help to focus you and your team after the honeymoon period is over. With clear goals, you and your team can settle into a new team working pattern and form winning relationships.