Back to Basics

By Wally Bock

Leadership literature is filled with tricks and hacks and little things you can do that are guaranteed to work "according to science." I don't know about you, but I am seriously tired of it.

Leadership is hard. But it's not hard because there's so much to understand. It's hard because you must do the right things, every day, over and over, with unremitting diligence. You must do them even when you're stressed, even if you don't particularly want to.

Let's get back to those basics you've got to do and not worry so much about the tricks and the hacks. Here some thoughts on six basics, one "basic" at a time.

Know Your Job

If you're a person who's responsible for the performance of a group, your job is to help the team and the team members succeed. That's it.

Your job is not to look good. It's not to win an award. It's not to fulfill some ambition. Your job is to help your team and the team members succeed. That's the basic.

Build Relationships

The best bosses have good relationships with their team members. The team members have great relationships with each other. Part of your job is to build and nourish those relationships.

It's simple. Touch base a lot. Lots of contact gives you lots of opportunities for conversations. In a conversation both of you talk and both of you listen. You don't get to talk more just because you're nominally in charge.

Now comes the hard part. You do this with everyone on your team. There will be people that you're not "compatible" with. Build a relationship anyway. There will be people you don't like or who don't like you. Build a relationship. There will be people who have a different heritage than you. Some will have different values and vote for different candidates. Build relationships. That's the basic.

Give People Freedom

Your job is not to be in charge or give directions. It's to help the team and team members succeed.

That's most likely to happen when you give people the ability to do their job well, then get out of the way. Make sure people know what to do. Make sure they have the resources to do it. Then step back and enjoy the ride. That's the basic.

Pay Attention to The Team

People like working in teams. They enjoy working with people they like and who pull their weight. It's your job to help that happen.

Create a psychologically safe zone. People should be able to voice their opinion safely. That's true even if the opinion is that you're wrong. It's true even if the opinion is silly or not helpful. It should be safe to share.

If you want the team to succeed, you must pay attention to the way that the team members work together. Discord is not just one rotten apple that spoils the bunch. It's more like corrosive super acid that burns through the apples and the barrel and leaves a smoking hole in the ground. Heathy teams have disagreements. They don't have discord.

Help them succeed as a team. That's the basic.

Help People Develop Their Skills

Your job is helping people get better. Help them build on their strengths and make their weaknesses irrelevant. Help them get better at today's job. Help them prepare for whatever's next. Your job is to help people develop. That's the basic.

A Little Progress Every Day

High productivity and high morale happen when people are making progress. Help your team members make a little progress every day. Help your team make a little progress every day. Make a little progress yourself. A little progress every day is a basic.

Takeaways

Know your job.

Build relationships.

Give people freedom.

Pay attention to the team.

Help people develop their skills.

Make a little progress every day.

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