

The Power of Strategic Alignment

It can be brutal getting everyone on the same page. The reason we keep trying is that it's virtually impossible to be successful without it. Alignment can be imposed through overt or subtle intimidation, of course. This approach lacks genuine power. We offer a more challenging and rewarding path for those who aspire to "the high road" way of implementing and sustaining organizational change.

This process will ensure your leadership or management team is working together more closely to accomplish what really matters and discover "the secret" of alignment: respectful honesty that resolves the relevant issues that people don't want to talk about.

Use these key questions and rate each High, Medium or Low according to your experience, and ask others to do the same. Once your team has completed this assessment you will be ready to begin a new type of dialogue.

1. In "this phase of one's leadership development" is the leader clearly articulating the purpose of the organization in a way that enlivens and inspires everyone's commitment? (Every leader's clarity of purpose evolves over time. This question addresses being current with what one is truly passionate about, and knowing the next level of organizational evolution that is needed for excellence.)

Rating _____

2. Are the consistent messages coming from the leader's heart inspired by "pure contribution" and the love of one's work or diluted by uncertainty, fear, scarcity or a self serving agenda? (Every leader's heart is a combination of two "polar opposites" - positive qualities and a sincere intention to make the world a better place on one end of the continuum, and the "ego needs" of survival, control, looking good etc. on the other. This question uncovers how well the leader has cleared away their ego's survival needs to allow their heart's higher intentions to shine through.)

Rating _____

3. Are the leader's closest allies willing and able to respectfully question the leader and share their concerns, uncertainties and disagreements directly until their hesitation is replaced with contributing their ideas and ultimately, total commitment? (Communication, enrollment and alignment are a function of listening to one another until the barriers to understanding are resolved. Once a clear understanding is achieved, people can responsibly choose "in" or "out" as opposed to stay "in" but "act out.")

Rating _____

4. Does the leader have the capacity to patiently listen, clarify and deepen everyone's understanding of purpose as the allies challenge and cross examine what they don't yet understand or are afraid of? Additionally, does the leader welcome the creative input of all team members? (People will not raise their issues or offer their ideas if it is not safe to do so or they feel they are not being listened to. This question highlights the necessity for genuine ongoing dialogue.)

Rating _____

5. Is the leader open to acknowledging and improving the blind-spots and shortcomings that are part of their human condition, or is the leader unwilling to be vulnerable or learn from mistakes? (Given the tendency people have to defer to authority figures, it is incumbent upon the leader to make it safe to be honest about the "tough stuff." This question calls for everyone, especially the leader, to "always be in training".)

Rating _____

6. Are the leader's allies willing and able to respectfully coach the leader when his or her uncertainty, ego needs, or human shortcomings are inhibiting commitment and alignment? (Leadership is often a lonely position where everyone expects someone to "have all of the answers" and "take care of all of their needs". The most precious gift we give our leaders is the truthful, respectful expression of where they are disempowering themselves.)

Rating _____

7. Are team members willing to surrender to the leader's direction once they have explored all of their concerns completely, regardless of whether they agree with everything the leader does or says? (The bottom line of true alignment is everyone's willingness to "disagree and commit" once all views have been expressed and the leader and group are ready to take action. Once the dialogue is over and the decision is made, everyone needs to support the leader and the decision without reservation.)

Rating _____

8. Is the group wise enough to temporarily shift the role of leader to the person who has the expertise or insight of what's needed in the moment? (Collaborative leadership involves allowing the intention and needs of the group, as opposed to hierarchy to designate who the real leader is in every situation. The ideal team is a group of all leaders.)

Rating _____

9. Is it time to reinvent the strategic direction to a higher set of intentions? (We are all evolving and there are times when it is necessary to put down an "old game" that has been won or no longer enlivens the team, in favor of a "new game" that creates a larger contribution and real meaning in our lives. Nothing we do as an organization will be satisfying forever. In addition, changing life conditions require organizational evolution from one "reality" to another.)

Rating _____

10. Have any of these questions been fully addressed and lead to irreconcilable differences? (If true alignment that empowers everyone cannot be achieved, it is best to tell the truth and move on. Otherwise the spirit of the organization and the people in it wither away to mediocrity.)

Rating _____

Merely asking and answering these questions will call your group into a process of self-reflection and dialogue that is very powerful. Leaders who offer this type of dialogue to their team are opening themselves up to being challenged in a constructive way that allows for professional growth for themselves and a culture change for the organization. It is wise to use a skilled facilitator to ensure that the open dialogue is done respectfully.

Once the leader demonstrates the strength to have their vision, level of success, and style cross examined, it will create a new norm that asks every team member to be open in a similar manner. When your team demands open, honest, respectful communication in all directions among themselves, it will be tremendously easier to get everyone on the same page. The spirit of unity that arises out of this open dialogue is the key to making the best decisions that bring the best out of each team member. Only then will you have your best chance of creating or maintaining your competitive edge.