

Executive Team Alignment

The Advantage No One Can Take Away: Get Real or Self-Destruct

It can be brutal getting everyone on the same page. Accountability, authenticity, and the pursuit of a unified vision can disappear when people line up at your door to complain about their peers who are hard to work with. In this environment, upsets, subtle intimidation, overwhelm, and a lack of full engagement diminish your organization's genuine power. At best, this makes it much more difficult than necessary to be successful. At worst, you slowly self-destruct.

A more challenging and rewarding path is available to leaders who are bold enough to take it: making respectful honesty about what is important to your success non-negotiable!

Over 70% of employees nationwide are disengaged. Stress costs our US economy over \$300 billion annually. There's enormous waste in those numbers. Your people all expect to be paid every month. Why not require them to learn how to make it more satisfying for everyone when you make that payroll?

- Do you have key people who are not well matched to their responsibilities?
- Or people not stepping up to where you need them to perform better?
- How about overly aggressive managers who can't see how they are inhibiting others from fully contributing?
- And should we ignore those who only express their real feelings after hours at the watering hole?

Think about it. Imagine the cost of these dynamics in your own organization today. If you are honest with yourself, there are many relevant issues your people are unwilling to talk about where it would make a difference. This means there are impediments to performance your people don't know how to resolve and *meaningful opportunities* languishing in the background.

At the same time, *meaningless chatter* is trashing your conversational atmosphere and sapping the energy out of people who want to be more productive. This wasted energy and these missed opportunities are the path to self-destruction!

Your people need the motivation and skills to address your most important problems and pursue your best opportunities. We are not suggesting that you have angry, accusatory outbursts to “get stuff off your chest” or “clear the air.” Nor are we suggesting you become a perfectly calm human being devoid of all emotion.

Your team needs to listen with an open mind and welcome input without defensiveness. They also need to learn to challenge one another respectfully so that everyone remains focused, on what can be learned, improved, and accomplished. Essentially, you need to bring these conversations out of the parking lot and into your conference room – and have them make a positive impact.

The foundation necessary to get real about what’s not working is surprisingly simple and readily available. Every organization has an abundance of good news that doesn’t get much attention. When you fill the conversational airwaves with what’s going right, you create a positive energy within your team that strengthens mutual respect. This creates the confidence and trust to address what is important, yet seemingly undiscussable.

Assessment: The following 12 questions will help you identify where you can begin to strengthen this “elusive advantage” that no one can take from you. Once your executive team has completed this assessment you will be ready to begin a new type of dialogue. On a 1–10 scale (low – high):

- ___ 1. Are all of our executive team members fully bought in to an inspiring vision of the future?
- ___ 2. Are we all delivering on our own responsibilities and helping others make their complete contribution where they add the most value?
- ___ 3. Do the CEO’s direct reports resolve their differences directly and effectively on their own?
- ___ 4. Do we all openly acknowledge our strengths and weaknesses in a manner that welcomes supportive input from our colleagues?
- ___ 5. Do the CEO’s direct reports all freely question and respectfully challenge the direction and leadership style of the CEO until uncertainty and hesitation transform into commitment?
- ___ 6. Does the CEO completely trust the executive team to achieve results in a manner that is fulfilling, unifying, and sustainable for the foreseeable future?
- ___ 7. Do we all challenge one another to be personally accountable for modeling and upholding our declared culture and values?

You need to land in the center of these two extremes with a straightforward, no-nonsense approach: acknowledge your emotions while clearly addressing what’s happening, what’s important, what’s missing, and what actions are necessary.

- ___ 8. Do we regularly use disappointments and breakdowns to rally together for learning and creative problem solving?
- ___ 9. Does every executive team member step into the role of “leader in the moment” when they have the expertise or insight necessary to move the team forward?
- ___ 10. Do we speak and act with one unified voice in a manner that inspires exceptional cooperation throughout the entire organization?
- ___ 11. Do we all engage in a daily improvement practice that accelerates our individual and team growth?
- ___ 12. Are we effectively developing the next level of leadership and the rest of the organization to be prepared for the future we are committed to?

This brief survey will prepare your group for a process of self-reflection and dialogue that is very powerful. And if you want to forgo the survey, your fundamental question to start with is this, “Are we consistently having every conversation necessary to fully achieve what is most important to us?”

As CEO, you must take the lead in this endeavor. Be forewarned. When you offer this type of dialogue to your team, you will need to make it safe to challenge you. The learning curve will take time, and be messy on occasion. Once done constructively, however, it will provide tremendous growth for you and potentially revolutionary change for your organization.

This is a business advantage that sets you apart because few leaders have the confidence and humility required to be this real with their team. It is an enduring advantage that no one can take from you because this level of open, honest, respectful communication is what the best performers long for.

A skilled facilitator can ensure this commitment to honesty is done respectfully and people can successfully navigate the necessary learning curve. At LionHeart we teach very successful people to be open to coaching from their colleagues and subordinates. We also teach advanced coaching skills that are built upon principles of mutual respect, permission, and inquiry.

Our emphasis is to:

- replace avoidance, criticism, blame, and judgment with learning and accountability
- build on people’s strengths and the idea that everyone’s job is to create good news
- challenge people to focus on learning and mastering one priority competency at a time
- have people become more self-aware by observing themselves while performing their work
- bring this learning process into a daily activity that has Monday serve as practice for Tuesday and so on

Once you demonstrate the strength to inspire and create strong team alignment, your new norm will challenge every team member to show up more fully. With this standard of open, honest, respectful communication in place, it will be tremendously easier to get everyone on the same page.

The spirit of heightened camaraderie that arises out of this newfound unity will make it possible to achieve your next level of success more easily. For those willing to do the work, there’s really no need to slowly self-destruct.