

Summit

***WHEN TEAM
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Strong, high-trust, win-win relationships between leaders and their teams are crucial both to the effectiveness of the team as a whole and the wellbeing of each individual within it. Nevertheless, this relationship, however friendly, is very different to the relationship between friends, and it is vital that this is clear to all parties right from the start.

The blurring of these boundaries can give rise to a multitude of problems that damage the efficiency of the team and the quality of outputs created. This article aims to highlight some of these issues and provide some suggestions on how to avoid them.

WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR...

1. TEAM MEMBERS DON'T KNOW WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THEM

When boundaries, expectations, and standards are not made clear at the beginning of a relationship, team members resort to operating on guesswork, acting how they *think* they should rather than how the organisation has determined is beneficial to its goals. This can cause trouble when the assumptions of the individual conflict with the values or priorities of the organisation.

At the senior leadership level, leaders often have their own areas to manage, which takes most of their time and focus. Problems occur when they are then required to work across divisions on a business-critical project and be effective without these clear relationships already in place.

Investing in relationships and establishing boundaries, permissions, standards, and expectations at this point is too late, as such a high-stakes project requires the team to hit the ground running, which can only be done if these are already established.

2. LEADERS HAVE AN EXCESSIVE FOCUS ON MAINTAINING HARMONY

Being too 'friendly' with team members can mean that tough conversations that deserve to take place do not happen, and tough messages that deserve to be understood are not given, as any disharmony in the team feels like conflict.

If something risks causing discomfort or damage to the one's relationship with the rest of the team, it remains unsaid. This way, comforting lies take the place of uncomfortable truths. Putting the harmony of the team above delivering value for the organisation skews leaders' focus and attention. While the human needs of team members are important, a leader's role requires balancing this with the necessity of delivering expected outputs.

3. THERE IS AN ABSENCE OF HEALTHY CHALLENGE

Don't underestimate danger of *groupthink* – some of worst decisions come from teams full of leaders with technical brilliance, who nonetheless make poor decisions because healthy disagreement is not encouraged, or in some cases actively *discouraged*. They fall into the trap of thinking that if they all agree, then the decision must be correct, rather than encouraging challenges and alternative viewpoints to ensure nothing has been missed.

Oftentimes the problem in a team is not what is said, but what is *not* said. A successful team need collaborative dialogue to help them tackle tough challenges, and something that is not said can't help create clarity, shared understanding, or candid dialogue to help the team and organisation reach their goals.

Speak up, be heard, be understood. And be constructive when you do this of course.

4. LEADERS ARE OVERFAMILIAR WITH TEAM MEMBER

Overfamiliarity within teams can cause a number of problems, and prime among them is the damage it can do to performance management.

If a leader is too close to a team member, they risk only seeing the positives in their work and behaviour. When something goes wrong, and work is delivered late or below standard, the leader's desire for unity can all too easily override the need for valuable feedback, robbing the individual of the chance to develop greater self-awareness and improve their skills, potentially harming the organisation's future outputs as a result.

5. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DECISION-MAKING

Team working is about collaboration, but a leader has that role for a reason and must be able to fulfil it confidently. This means that major decisions are their responsibility and are not to be determined by a whole-team committee.

Delegating some decisions can be hugely beneficial for the team, as it enables members to feel they are trusted, as well as freeing time for leader to carry out other tasks only they can do. However, there must be clarity on which decisions are delegated and which are not, or team members could end up asking their manager for input where it is not needed, or worse, making decisions they do not have the authority to make (or the context and understanding to make well).

SO REMEMBER...

1. UPFRONT INVESTMENT IN DEVELOPING WIN-WIN RELATIONSHIPS IS VITAL

Take the time at the beginning of a new relationship to establish boundaries and set standards of how each individual is expected to operate within the team, as well as how the team as a whole is expected to communicate and collaborate with one another.

Create clarity around what is expected from them and what is not acceptable, and it will pay major dividends in the future.

2. BE FRIENDLY WITH A PURPOSE

Take the time at the beginning of a new relationship to establish boundaries and set standards of how each individual is expected to operate within the team, as well as how the team as a whole is expected to communicate and collaborate with one another.

3. BE AWARE THAT A LEADER IS EXPECTED TO ALWAYS DELIVER VALUE TO THE ORGANISATION

This includes speaking up, raising concerns, sharing recommendations, and inviting alternative thinking – even if it could make others uncomfortable or produce disharmony in the team.

Keep in mind that harmony is *desired* (by you and your team) but objectives are *expected* (by the organisation). How you operate, communicate, and collaborate is set out by their expectations, not your desires. Make it clear to your team from the start what these expectations are, and that healthy disagreement is a key part of them – and nothing personal.

4. DE-PERSONALISE YOUR PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

Free performance management from the expectations of an overfamiliar friend relationship by making the process more objective. This way, results cannot be attributed to personal feelings, so the manager is under less pressure to give wholly positive feedback.

Set measurable goals for each team member and determine success based on their results in relation to these goals. Any critical (but constructive) feedback therefore stems only from observable facts and not personal judgements.

Always use this feedback as the start of a collaborative discussion with the team member about what they can do to improve their performance, and what you can do to support them.

5. BE CLEAR ON WHICH DECISIONS ARE TO BE MADE BY WHOM

When it comes to important decisions, such as those determining the overall direction of the team, it is a good idea for the leader to consult the team in order to ensure they have all the necessary information and perspectives to make an informed decision.

Consultation with others that will be affected by your decision can help open up new ways of thinking and highlight any potential consequences of a certain decision, as well as making the team feel valued and included. However, it is important to make clear that the final decision is yours alone and they are expected to respect that decision.

If you do decide to consult your team on such issues, ensure that you give all members an equal chance to present their ideas and feelings, not just the ones you get on with best. Favouritism can ruin team morale, and you might end up losing an important perspective.

If you would like to learn more about how Emotional Intelligence skills such as relationship development , reality testing and social responsibility can help balance your team's human and organisational needs, you are welcome to get in touch.

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