

leadership instalments

Uncooperative Cast Members

By Dan Gaynor

OUR DAUGHTER HAYLEY CAME HOME WITH A STORY that illustrated an important leadership principle the other day. You see Hayley was directing a group of fellow students in a drama class exercise to stage a short play. Frustrated, she stormed through the door, and describing an unenthusiastic and uncooperative cast member, Hayley said, "I can't force this person to learn lines, or move on stage, if this were a real play, this person would be gone." Hayley will have one of the qualities of an effective leader one day if she takes the same understanding to the workplace. Great team building leaders are often set apart from the multitude of ineffective ones because they are willing to act, when others are not.

Hayley's short production is really a good illustration of one of the most important realities of leadership, no leader can force anyone to do something he or she doesn't want to do. Oh sure, you can force basic compliance at times, but it doesn't lead to winning performances. The leader's job is to determine who can and cannot stay - their attitude provides a big part of the answer.

Every workplace leader, who hopes to build a winning team must see himself as a director - and casting is a key part of the director's work. You've only got two choices: you can work with the people you have or change the cast. All great team building leadership requires a little of both. Good leaders start with everyone on a level playing field - everybody gets a chance to earn their place. Those who demonstrate some enthusiasm, effort and talent deserve encouragement. They are rewarded and coached toward their potential. Make sure good performers know you appreciate them. Deal with poor performers differently; when they make it clear that they do not want to "learn their lines, or move on stage" they have to go. The leaders who won't make the call and remove these cast members handicap the team for everyone else who is trying, and they frustrate the strong performers.

The process by which leaders remove poor and uncooperative team members has to be fair, it starts with making expectations clear. People can't perform well if they don't know what success looks like - what you want. Then, when someone is not performing, good leaders point it out and provide clear direction about what needs to change and why. But an actor who cannot take direction has no

place in the cast. He or she has made a choice. When someone willfully decides to disregard a directive to improve, the leader does not condemn him by removing him, he is self-condemned - he has made the choice. The leader is simply following through with the most appropriate outcome.

Hayley's frustration emanates from the realization that she must work with people who are choosing to be uncooperative. If you lead other leaders, do not put them in this position. It's discouraging to be asked to deliver performance when you can't make the necessary changes to build a winning team.

As a leader you're responsible for the team's performance and every successful contributing team member is counting on you for it. Team members who ignore correction do so at their own peril. Sometimes people have to lose a job to learn a lesson. Avoiding performance issues hurts the team and hardens the bad habits for the offender.

Discussion questions:

1. How willing or reluctant are you to remove people who are uncooperative?
2. Are there any cast members on your team who are not pulling their weight today?
3. Do the members of your team know clearly what you expect of them?

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