

Leadership Instalments

Achievement Drives Performance

By Dan Gaynor

GREAT LEADERS BUILD PERFORMANCE AND JOB SATISFACTION BY TAPPING INTO powerful human motivators - achievement is among these. Achievement is satisfying and it leads to more achievement. Give someone a taste of this and he or she will come back for more.

There are five steps you can take to light this flame.

Set good goals: Achievement cannot take root without challenge so setting the right goals is the starting point. Like a good boxing trainer, set goals that you know are challenging and also within reach to build confidence. Set goals that build performance progressively. Don't send someone in against the "heavyweight champ" before they are ready. Provide step by step challenge and avoid confidence-destroying knock-outs.

Encourage: Tell the people you are leading that you believe in them and their ability to rise to the challenge. When you believe in them they believe in themselves.

Prepare: Now set them up for success. Make sure they are well prepared with the training and resources they need. If you challenge people and provide no preparation you'll only set them up to fail and they will see you as unfair. So roll up your sleeves and prepare people with the skills and practice they need to succeed.

Provide lots of feedback and coaching: As the work unfolds support the individual or team with lots of good feedback and coaching. These are among the most important leadership tools you can develop. You've got to get out from behind the desk to do this. Don't do the work for them but give them the support they need to do it well themselves.

Celebrate success: When you have set the right goals, encouraged, prepared people for the work and provided lots of feedback and coaching along the way, the most likely outcome is success. Don't forget to celebrate it and attribute it to the achiever. My favorite moments as a leader were those when I celebrated a success with someone who had worked hard to reach a tough goal. You can see them stand a little taller.

With each cycle of achievement confidence and performance grows. As people experience achievement, they are driven to find more. One person, one experience at a time, the performance of an entire team will grow as achievement becomes a part of the culture.

Our daughters went to a school that fostered achievement much the same way. They challenged students, prepared them well, provided lots of support and celebrated each success. Achievement became a vivid part of the culture and it gained momentum that built even more achievement. Isn't this what we want at work? Make it part of life on your team.



Just as achievement builds confidence and performance, failure destroys it. Failure breaks confidence, which in turn leads to more failure in a downward cycle. Here too, you have an active role. Do not allow these demoralizing cycles to persist. Correct the problems that led to the failure. Scale back goals temporarily when necessary to rebuild confidence, then provide extra preparation feedback and coaching. When this fails, caring leaders don't allow people to remain in situations where they continue to fail - this does not serve anyone's interests.

I have worked with many people for whom an experience with achievement made a dramatic difference. Virtually all developed a new enthusiasm for their work, those who didn't were in the small minority. Don't leave achievement to chance.

Discussion Questions:

1. What has your own experience with achievement been?
2. Which of the five steps can you most improve on as a leader?
3. Who is the next person you want to work on fostering achievement with?

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