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Are You Working in the Dark?

Even the brightest teams can lose their shine.

By Dr. Fred Johnson

Fluorescent lights illuminate my garage. One of the "two bulb" fixtures was flickering and the faulty bulb replaced. After the new bulb was installed, I noticed the remaining "non-flickering" bulb was quite a bit dimmer than the new bulb installed alongside of it.

Prior to the replacement of its "flickering" partner, I had no idea anything was wrong with the light bulb now in question. However, when paired against fresh competition, it was obvious that over time the light bulb had lost much of its effectiveness.

The ongoing effectiveness of leadership teams can be compared to the light bulb I've described above. Leadership teams can get into a fixed pattern of doing things, of tackling problems and issues and of devising solutions. Without realizing it, the teams can fall into a gradual rut without even realizing it is happening. Left to its own, the team can "dim" over time. Nobody notices at first because the team is still working as hard as ever, still diligent in guiding the organization.

Realistically, every team dims over time. If two or more of the following characteristics exist, it is likely the team's effectiveness has been significantly compromised. Excellent team leaders recognize this as a given reality of team dynamics and implement systematic processes to combat the lethargy.

10 Signs of a "Dimmed" Team

1. *Working with the team is not as invigorating. A sense of boredom and routine has set in. It is just not as fun as it used to be.*

2. *Team members have developed various camps within the team as synergy has given way to political maneuvering.*

3. *The team has become an isolated reservoir. Ideas are flowing into the team, but the team is not invigorating the rest of the organization. It concentrates on being crisis control central instead of providing a sense of hope, stimulation and empowerment for others.*

4. *Teammates jockey for power and influence as turf protection wars are common.*

5. *Unresolved conflicts and tensions between teammates affect trust and openness.*

6. *Expertise from persons outside of the team or organization are resisted, viewed cynically or even are attacked as it may reflect upon them critically .*

7. *Email wars are common instead of healthy, direct conflict resolution.*

8. *Persons within the team are concerned about getting credit for successes.*

9. *Team members are primarily concerned about their own agendas instead of prescribing what is best for the overall success of the organization.*

10. *Sacred cow personalities or issues exist. Fear of conflict or retribution persists over a commitment of principle-based decisions.*

Please consider these questions as you evaluate your positioning:

Do you regularly introduce your team to innovative books, articles and journals on relevant leadership topics? Does your team conduct a thorough examination of company needs, challenges, goals and initiatives at least every two years? Are outside coaches and resources utilized to stimulate new thinking and growth for individual team members? Are cutting edge leadership development processes regularly utilized by your team?

An interesting finding...the strongest teams are committed to processes that strengthen the team in a continuous, ongoing fashion. Ironically, the "dimmest" teams routinely view such efforts as superfluous. Such teams are typically focused on yet another problem, justifying that time does not permit them the "luxury" of investing in their team's growth.

In determining whether it is timely to invest in efforts to "brighten" your team, which of the following comparisons best describes your leadership team?

A flickering bulb
A steady floodlight
A lighthouse beacon
A small nightlight
A bulb that won't work

If you don't know which of the above comparison best applies to your team, ask those in the organization outside of the team. I have a strong suspicion they already know the answer.