



PATHWAYS

FOCUS

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“As Agreed” Is NOT Enough

A T I S S U E

Leaders of today’s organizations have greater expectations than ever of those who develop and deliver their organization’s products and services. Doing just what was agreed upon is often no longer acceptable. Nowadays, for example, leaders typically view job descriptions and performance contracts as minimal standards of performance—merely “tickets of admission.”

- Performers need to exceed expected performance targets, regularly doing more than the job appeared on the surface to require.
- Suppliers are expected, not simply to meet commitments, but to consistently exceed them. They need to be able to adjust to the client organization’s dynamic, changing environment.

Leaders today expect both performers and suppliers to actively anticipate trends, spot potential problems and issues early, and constantly be on the look-out for ways to enhance organizational performance. In short, leaders see greater value in their support groups when they become trusted advisors.

In this issue we look at how leaders can encourage such support group behavior. In our next issue we will examine what performers and suppliers can do to become trusted advisors.



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The Leader’s Role in Creating a Trusted Advisor Environment

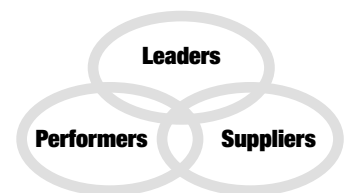
Leaders expect far more of those who support them than the minimum necessary to get by.

- They look for their performers to out-perform, to actively look for and recommend actions to enhance organizational performance.
- They look to suppliers to accommodate the dynamically changing needs of the organization, both rapidly and effectively.

To create an environment in which performers and suppliers become such trusted advisors, leadership is required. As leaders, we can actually stifle the efforts of those who support the organization if we are not careful. Part of a leader’s role is to create a business/work environment in which performers and suppliers are encouraged and reinforced in their efforts to become trusted advisors. Leaders must spearhead the effort if they hope to identify trusted advisors among their support groups. They can do this in a number of ways:

- Make expectations known.
- Establish a teamwork environment.
- Eliminate obstacles.
- Recognize performers and suppliers who gain new knowledge and skills.
- Reward exceptional performance.
- Communicate ... communicate ... communicate.

Common Job Roles



Leaders

CxOs, project managers,
department managers

Performers

information workers,
product/service development
teams, sales staff, other
organizational support groups

Suppliers

vendors, consultants,
channel partners

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Let's look at each of these leadership efforts in more detail.

Make Expectations Known

If you expect more than the minimum required from performers and suppliers, you have to let them know what your expectations are. You will often have better results by challenging than by demanding. The exhortation that "You've got to work harder and faster" is seldom effective; a questioning technique is often more effective. Questions such as the following represent challenges, not demands:

- "How could we be doing this better?"
- "What is our competition doing in this area?"
- "What do you know about ...?"
"What more can you find out?"
- "What prevents us from introducing this (product/service) ahead of schedule?"
- "What do you think is holding up our progress?"
- "Are there other channels we could be using? How does the competition do it?"
- "What are the industry benchmarks?"
- "What can I do to support your efforts?"

Such questions motivate performers and suppliers to exert extra effort. They come to realize that you value them more as trusted advisors than when they just did the minimum expected.

Establish a Teamwork Environment

We are using the word, "team" in a very loose sense here, to include any formal or ad-hoc group of people who are working toward the accomplishment of any activity in support of the organization.

The team may include performers, suppliers, or both. In a sense, the activity leader is also a team member, but his/her primary role is to establish and maintain a teamwork environment. Some key ways of doing this are to:

- Challenge the team by establishing the mission and goals.
- Involve team members in initial and on-going tactical planning and decision-making.
- Allow the team to perform without constant direction.
- Monitor progress, but expect and allow the team to make important decisions.
- Recognize the team and team members for successful accomplishment of their mission.

There are some real advantages to this type of leadership practice. It helps build team member confidence by encouraging them become trusted advisors. And it establishes a model which team members will likely adopt when they rise into leadership positions.

Eliminate Obstacles

Sometimes without our really being aware, environments evolve over time which tend to

discourage people from out-performing. Is yours a leadership environment that encourages or discourages trusted advisor performance?

Encouraging Environments

There is a demand for excellence. Outstanding performance is recognized and rewarded.

Upward communications is viewed as a valuable management "window" on organization performance.

The leader's door is usually open. Leaders encourage questions and suggestions.

Performers and suppliers know what leaders expect of them, and are challenged to exceed expectations.

Stifling Environments

Performers and suppliers are only expected to meet and adhere to schedules, contracts, and standard procedures.

Communication normally flows downward through the organization.

Leaders are threatened by questions about their plans and directives.

Performance feedback is largely limited to "This isn't what I want, but I'll know it when I see it."

Recognize Performers and Suppliers Who Gain New Knowledge and Skills

This leadership effort needn't necessarily entail formal development programs. For example, a sales manager may support her sales team members' efforts to call higher or broader in the client organization. A few well-directed questions during a face-to-face meeting or phone conversation may be more effective than a formal training/retraining program for all. By supporting and coaching them, you can help develop your teams' sales consulting skills. Such skills will lead their clients to view sales team members as trusted advisors. On the other hand, more formal support is sometimes called for. For example, it may be of value to sponsor and provide funds, facilities, and staff for relevant market research. For performers and suppliers to work effectively, they need up-to-date information. Having the most current information at hand leads to the most informed and timely advice. We must also anticipate and be tolerant of occasional mistakes. In their ardor to build trusted adviser relationships with their leaders and clients, performers and suppliers sometimes go overboard. Instead of merely criticizing and stymieing such overly zealous efforts, leaders can build upon such situations as object lessons for constructive counseling.

Leaders sometimes can also help performers and suppliers excel by conducting their own direct, high-level contacts with client and supplier management. However, it is important to work through, not around, the performer or supplier who has the primary interface with the high-level client contacts.

Reward Exceptional Performance

In the Focus section of this issue, we pointed out that minimally acceptable performance is not enough in today's business environment. Performers and suppliers who merely accomplish enough to meet requirements should not be rewarded for their performance. Rewards should be reserved for those who grow and develop trusted advisor relationships with you, your clients, and others in your organization.

Appropriate rewards can take many forms.

- For performers it can range from a pat on the back or letter of commendation to raises, bonuses, or promotion.
- For suppliers it minimally includes additional business. As suppliers develop your trust and confidence, you may come to feel comfortable sharing certain future organizational plans and developments that you normally would not share with those outside the organization.

Finally, it is always appropriate to express appreciation when trusted

advisors help you prioritize potential projects, formulate alternative strategies, consider options, and the like.

Communicate ... Communicate ... Communicate

As you have seen, many of the suggestions we've offered demand effective communications on the part of the leader. Leaders must:

- Be an "active, vocal sponsor" for each initiative that they ask performers and suppliers to carry out.
- Be on the watch for "need-to-know" situations. Take action to ensure that both performers and suppliers have timely access to new information and changes.
- Allow performers and suppliers to escalate issues without feeling threatened.
- Accept and build upon questions and challenges to "business as usual."
- Constantly give feedback to encourage communication flow.
- Give credit to performers and suppliers who help the organization succeed.

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Looking Ahead

In this issue, we've looked at some ways organizational leaders can build an environment that nurtures trusted advisor performance among those who support the organization—the performers and suppliers. In our next issue we will look at what performers and suppliers can do to develop and maintain a trusted advisor relationship with their clients, associates, and leaders.



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