



For Managers, Principals, Team Leaders and Internal Consultants  
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### **Issue No 19: Developing the X factor in your business**

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#### **Developing the X factor in your business**

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Last year, one of my clients showcased his successful, 27-year-old business to a group interested business managers. The group was eager to find out the secrets to my client's success. The question the visitors really wanted answered was, 'What is the 'X' Factor that this business has and how can we get it too?'

When the event was over, several participants commented on how impressed they were by Chris, the MD, the facilities and work environment and, importantly, the general friendliness of all of the staff they had come into contact with.

"Is this normal behaviour?" they asked, "Or are they just putting it on for the showcase?" I let them know that this certainly was normal from my experience of the company and it had been the case for many years.

Since this showcase I have reflected upon the essence of the 'X' factor in this business and also in other successful companies I know and work with. I tread carefully here because I don't think that there is a 'one-size-fits-all' prescription. However, there are definitely some observable traits and common themes that distinguish 'Great' from 'good', these are:

- Commitment
- Passion
- Loyalty
- Team work
- Determination
- A positive attitude

These are not new words, but they all point in one direction – to great relationships built, developed and sustained over time. So I have come to see that the key element of the 'X' factor in an organisation is relationships.

Starting in-house and at a leadership level, a key thing I observe, (and Chris is a great case in point), is that the, leaders through strong relationships, inspire their people to run the operations, and trust that they will do that well so that they, (the leaders), can spend their time and energy on longer-term strategy. Their people also know if they need (their leader) they will be there to support them - no matter what happens. It is often said about great leaders that you would'...want them beside you if you were going to war." Would your key people say that about you?

Chris is clear about his audacious vision for the business. And I have no doubt he and his team will achieve this. Chris's team, (yes including most of the operational staff), are able to tell you the big picture vision for the business, and they wear it like a badge of honour. They want it to succeed as much as Chris does - and will do it for Chris. Chris also has good, loyal relationships with his suppliers and service providers. Because of this, he gets the loyalty back in spades. Even his suppliers and service providers understand and support the business' vision. The relationships

### **Being the X factor employer**

If the 'X' factor is about relationships, then how can you develop it? I think one of the best reference books for this is, "How to win friends and influence people", by Dale Carnegie (written early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century but still relevant today). Here is my version of some of the important elements for the workplace:

#### **1. Listen to your people**

Take time to speak with your team members and really listen to them. Find out something you didn't already know about the individuals in your teams. Be curious. And in the words of Steven Covey, (in his book the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People), "... seek to understand before seeking to be understood." This is the essence of a good relationship and is such an important part of a manager's role, however, one not always particularly well done. Many managers just want to tell their staff what to do. What actions will build the trust and you need to sustain your business through good and tough times?

#### **2. Grow your people**

Wes Moxey, (Managing Director of the very successful Riviera Boats), said in a recent interview, "I realised if the company was to grow, you have to grow your people. You have to be absolutely interested and involved and show leadership – so I set about planning that out, how we'd do it."

Tailor a learning and development program to suit your business and your people. Start simple and find out what your people want to learn about that will help develop them and your business. There is always something more for everyone to learn - you just have to ask people to find out what they need. Helping a person, (even a reluctant one), grow and develop builds loyalty and trust and cements relationships. It says, "They care about what I need."

### **3. Setting expectations**

Don't misunderstand me when I talk about the 'X' factor, I don't mean being "namby pamby" and rolling over at every request or complaint. Be very clear about what you expect and say no when you mean no. Move quickly to tell people if they are not performing against those clear expectations. Avoiding any conflict with under performers only sets a bad example and disappoints everyone. And don't forget to ask your people what they expect of you – what do they need from you as a leader in order to be successful in their roles?

### **4. Pay your people well.**

Salaries are increasing because it is difficult to find and keep good staff. Consult some reputable salary surveys, (e.g. Hays) and ensure your staffs are remunerated in the upper quartile. Or risk losing your good people to companies that pay better. While many people are not motivated by money alone, approaching your valued staff (first) with a salary increase is saying to them, "You are valued."

### **5. Work environment**

Provide a good, professional work environment - it says, "We are professional and we care." It's amazing what even a new coat of paint will do.

### **6. Openess**

No secrets. Tell the truth. Nothing builds trust and relationships like transparency. Most people have a good inbuilt 'lie detector'. The best leaders are transparent even if it makes them vulnerable.

### **7. Make it fun**

Can you stop and have a good laugh in your business? Can you burst into song? (I can't, but some people can and it changes the energy in a place!). There is nothing like a good laugh or some uplifting singing or games to make the seemingly dreary repetitive task of many roles seem easy and a pleasure. And it brings people together. Shared experiences help develop lasting relationships.

### **Your next step**

You may roll your eyes at what I've suggested above and mutter, 'Idealist!' under your breath: I am an idealist and I am also a business pragmatist. I know and constantly see business evidence that great ideals make great business sense.

Put aside time to rate your business out of 10 against each of the seven criteria above. If you want to really make this exercise work for you ask some of your people for their opinions too. Acknowledge what you are doing well and also the opportunities for improvement. Most importantly, think about the key relationships in and outside of your business and take action to build the 'X' factor in your business. Your investment will pay off in many ways.

### **Finally**

I do need to address an area that many of my clients grapple with: despite ideals and the best work environments, there are still some people who won't respond the way your business needs them to. Don't sweep this under the carpet – you have to make choices here. You can talk to them, try different ways of approaching them and show them how they can fit into and progress within the company. Endeavour to find something that will drive them to another level, (ask them questions and explore their interests). However, if you have tried different avenues and there is still little change, you will have to explain the consequences and that other, better performing team members will progress past them in the organisation. If in some way their 'stuckness' is destructive for your business, then show them the door. Doing it sooner rather than later will be the best for your business and for them.

*"Leadership is all about achieving breakthrough performance. It is not about consolidating the status quo. It's all about maximising potential and driving successful outcomes". Grant Thomas (commentator and former AFL coach)*

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