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HIGH PERFORMANCE

AND

THE HUMAN TOUCH

THE PRAGMATIC
CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP FOR HEALTHY
TOP PERFORMANCE

GABAL

For Edith Breckwoldt († August 2013), the love of my life

Frank Breckwoldt

HIGH PERFORMANCE AND THE HUMAN TOUCH

The pragmatic concept of leadership for healthy top performance

Translation from German by Penelope Pohlner

The German Way

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Preliminary

There are always people in a business who actuate everything – or who do not! This is one of the main discoveries which I have made over the years I have been as entrepreneur. By this I mean everybody in a business, from management level up to a temporary worker. Every input towards the final effort, whatever the level, is important for the complete effort in a business – if it is done on a high level. This is a pre-requisite.

The main question: how does an achievement climate arise?

From this arises the fascinating question: Why does one person achieve and the other does not? Or put in another way: Under which conditions are people normally prepared to really engage themselves in a business and bring in their performance potential?

This is the question which is behind the leadership training programme I have been carrying out successfully for many years. The success of the sustainability achieved with the participants is assessed as well, i.e. putting the training into action within their own team leadership on a long term basis.

My own situation however limits my training work quite clearly as two colleagues and I are managing an international hairdressing company founded by myself with about one hundred salons and one thousand employees. And therefore I would like to pass on the training in book-form too. The sustainable effect is important for me as well, as with the training, by pragmatism and clarity, not face to face, but black on white for checking purposes.

You, as the reader, can judge as to how far this is successful. I would be very happy if you would let me know of your experiences in the use and implementation of the book contents, with critical judgement as well. At the end of the book, there is an email address for contact.

Feedback on the effects of the training is important for me too; as I benefit from your experiences as I benefit from each of my trainings because I always learn from these as well.

My trainings and this book have not developed from the assessment of my own splendour as entrepreneur and executive. On the contrary, I have taken on many risks in my life as entrepreneur and have not always won, but sometimes lost seriously. The sum of these positive and negative experiences adds up to the essence of the training and this book.

Pay attention to the contents which you react against

Back to the contents: There are surely many points which you agree with, which you today as a manager live with. This is then confirmation and tailwind for you but you ought to be very vigilant especially on those contents with which you are not totally in agreement with, where maybe you feel opposed to or where you are not in any kind of agreement at all. For where it hurts most, is, as a rule, where you can get the most for your own development. Therefore deal with it.

It is not my aim for you to change your opinion or conviction. The important thing is more so the reflection on the particular contents, the intensive analysis, your contemplation on your

role as manager and your own fundamental managerial manner. The read will then be worthwhile for you.

Shaped by experiences in my youth I am a convinced team sportsman – individual kinds of sports have never been of interest to me. Many years of playing soccer and later on hockey have had an effect on my insight of management and teamwork.

As with soccer, in business it definitely comes down to the effort of the individual. It comes down to each person doing his job on the highest possible level. However an individual alone cannot win, for lasting success teamwork is necessary.

Transition from the employer market to the employee market

In the interaction of employers and employees there has in recent past been a vast change: namely the change in the labour market. Up to a short time ago a whole managerial generation only knew the situation of a labour market with relatively available workforce, thus rather the employer market. This has in the meantime changed. This development started in 2010 in the apprentice market; for the first time for many years there were more apprenticeship vacancies offered than applications. This then carries on very quickly into the general labour market. Just think of the expression “skilled worker shortage” which we hear about in the media all the time. And that only describes part of the situation.

This changeover to employee market makes high demands on a business. Excellent leadership culture and the business’s reputation on the labour market are becoming more and more the key question for future capability of businesses. Excellent leadership quality is becoming the competitive advantage. The conception HIGH PERFORMANCE AND THE HUMAN TOUCH is becoming more and more up to date because it shows a pragmatic way how businesses can master this challenge successfully.

Wherever there is talk of employees, colleagues or other persons or groups, women are of course meant just as men are. I am foregoing using both forms to make reading flow easier. My esteem towards women is manifested not only in the fact that I myself have a business with 90 percent women employees, among which are many managerial personnel. I highly regard and experience women’s high performance quality on all hierarchical levels.

1 GROUNDWORK

Key question for leadership

We are on our way! The question of all questions as mentioned is the golden thread regarding leadership: Under which conditions are people in the business venture as a rule prepared to incorporate their potential on a high level long term? The answer to this and its consequential implementation leads businesses to the top.

Definition of the league

Everything begins with an entrepreneurial decision: In which performance league do I want to play in with my business?

My aspiration as an entrepreneur and the aspiration of this book are geared towards Champions League. All businesses like to play here but only a few in each branch manage to get the necessary pre-requisites. It is hard to get there and then hard to keep up to that level. And that is when the fun stops in many businesses.

It must be clear and made clear time and time again to all participants, managerial staff and employees what a top performance aspiration means. What can managerial staff and employees expect from their business in such a case? What must the business expect from them as well? He who wants to reach something extraordinary must perform extraordinarily too.

Who goes before what

The right people in the right place

The principle “Who goes before what” is my focal point when it concerns long lasting top performance. Make sure therefore that you have the right hand-picked team playing for you. Make sure you have the right people in the right places. For it is possible to have the right people in the wrong place. In such a case, it is our job as managerial staff to make sure they get to the right place – and there is always a right place for right people.

Practical example: The manager of an electronics retailer store told me of an employee working in the department for “white goods” (appliances for household work, for example, washing machines) that it had been noticed that for nearly a year he had shown poor performance and was unreliable. The manager then had the “sacking” discussion with him and asked the employee irritably “You have annoyed me for a year now and you obviously don’t want to work here anymore. But what do you want?” The employee then answered “Seeing as you are asking me, I’d like to work in EDP and new media.”

The manager then reported that he would never have dreamt of putting that employee in the EDP department. He gave the man the option and saw how, within a few weeks, he had become an important top performer.

I can only recommend you not to give up on employees too quickly, especially under the current circumstances on the labour market. If you are not satisfied with an employee's performance, have a clarifying talk to see whether the person concerned may be the 'right person' in another job position.

However take care: there are wrong people too, and they are wrong in every job in a business. It is indeed the unpleasant and uncomfortable job of managerial staff to recognise the wrong people who are fundamentally not prepared to really become committed and to join in at a high level. And then to ensure that such employees either change their performance - that doesn't happen very often – or leave the business very soon, as they are extremely dangerous for the performance of the whole team.

To raise the who-question when such problems occur

"Who goes before what" also means however: If things are not working out at some place in the business, if there is always something going wrong, if business aims are not being met, then as a rule there are the who-questions to be met, and not what-questions. This is also part of the unpleasant and uncomfortable managerial tasks leading to controversy.

The reality is often different: There are some managerial staff who try very hard to bypass the who-question and proceed to the what-level. A working group or a project group is then formed, a seminar is offered, all people concerned turn round in circles and are then surprised that they land where they began: the problem not solved.

I maintain: Problems in business are in the finish always who-problems. If you face up to the problem consequentially, then you are on the way to top performance.

With the right salon-management we will then have the right salon team sooner or later which will delight customers with their input and good atmosphere and thereby achieve first class results for the branch. If the salon is not doing well, this always has something to do with the salon's management – which is often difficult to see in detail from the outside. But we have often experienced "spontaneous improvements" when there has been a switch-over in salon management, and this too with the same team.

The leadership rank

For me is clear: If the basic business idea is fair enough and is pursued in an economically realistic manner, then the leadership quality in the business is the most decisive factor for long-term business success. And yet it is not only the quality of leadership at the executive level; just as important is the quality of the following managerial levels, especially on the basic managerial level.

Focal point for the daily routine: the lowest managerial level

Why? Because on this level in all businesses about ninety percent of all employees are managed. Employees on the spot see their direct manager daily – not the executive – and register daily: We are well dealt with, we are led well.....or not.

It's easy to imagine what an impact these daily experiences have on the employees' dedication, work enthusiasm and on the team's morale. It is at the point that the employee (if he is the right one) contributes his real potential. This is the reason why the basic managerial level is for me the most important in my company.

The leadership skills of my salon management have a decisive influence on the dedication and morale on the staff basis. A much stronger influence than I myself could give! I can ensure the framework circumstances in the business are fair enough, that on the senior managerial level there are suitable people and I can further the quality of salon management through training – if they are the right people. However the daily leadership work and everything which reaches the employees, is the achievement of the salon manager himself. And has to be.

Professional qualification is not the same as leadership qualification

This aspect, the question of leadership quality especially on the basic managerial level is often seriously neglected. The best sales assistant is promoted to areal sales manager, the best hairdresser is promoted to salon manager, the best worker to group leader. Often in cases like this, the technical qualification and performance are only seen, and the question of leadership quality which is of significant importance in the new position, is hardly taken into consideration or only looked on from a distance. And then the drama begins, the end of which is not only having to look for a new manager but also having lost a good salesman. And the team's performance has become less.

I recommend when looking for managerial personnel to be very careful and apart from the essential technical competence to put leadership quality on a high level.

Look at this aspect with newly appointed managerial personnel if you are a superior manager. Use a trial period and may be time limits to get a picture of the leadership work – talk to employees too!

In my enterprise new salon managers from outside only get temporary contracts – at the most for one year. During this time there is comprehensive coaching: Next to leadership training there are regular – at the minimum every three months – managerial talks with the senior management.

Up-and-coming salon managers from the business get a temporary contract to begin with for their new function as in spite of their training beforehand the leadership quality can only be seen in the position itself. This temporary contract makes a return to the employee position easier, maybe in another salon, if the salon management function does not work out successfully. This at least keeps a good hairdresser for us.

The concept HIGH PERFORMANCE AND THE HUMAN TOUCH