

From Subject Matter Experts to Business Leaders

A case study

Introduction

A large organisation within one of the biggest Global Software Businesses in the world, appointed a new VP of EMEA to take over from the current VP. The current VP had successfully built this organisation from the bottom up and had led the organisation through a tough culture change programme following an acquisition.

This group's culture had developed faster than the rest of the company and had created a committed and powerful team that were technically brilliant, internally focused and driven to succeed.

The primary challenge facing the new VP EMEA upon arrival was harnessing this culture and developing three key priorities within the organisation:

1. To become more business focused, blending commercial and technical expertise
2. To create greater alignment and become an indispensable weapon to the business
3. To drive productivity and do more with less

As a result of a facilitated and structured approach, this new VP now leaves behind a proactive, business focused and integrated organisation. In this case study, we identify the critical steps that were taken to ensure the journey was a success.

The One Page Plan

In order to create focus across the business, the new VP created a One Page Plan that would concentrate the team's activities and resources on achieving their key priorities. However just creating the One Page Plan and its measures with their Directors was not enough to make it happen; he needed people to believe in it. They soon realised that just because he had told his managers the plan and explained what was behind it, didn't mean they bought into it or believed in it.

Frustrated by the feeling that the team was 50 paces behind him and with the help of consulting partner Excellence In Leadership, this VP went through a process of allowing first their Directors, then the 40 managers to work through the plan, voice opinions, debate meaning and measurement, and take part in further creating the plan to make it feel real for them.



Although time-consuming and frustrating at times, allowing the team to be involved in the development of the plan and reach their own conclusions about the content and measurements had huge rewards. All of a sudden the VP had great commitment and energy to achieve the goals and people were prepared to be measured against it.

This became even more powerful when, they repeated the exercise with all 450 people in the organisation. Whilst colleagues in other parts of the company were sitting in presentation after presentation, the scene in the conference room where this group were convening was a hive of activity, discussion and flip-chart mania!

The feedback from the whole of the organisation on the One Page Plan was fed into a new version with a page of notes clarifying the measurements and meaning of the one page plan. Everyone owned this document and had truly bought into it and had been given an opportunity to shape it.

Managing brand



The VP was clear that one of the key challenges for the organisation was to become recognised by their customers, the rest of the company and the industry as business people, not just technical specialists. Feedback from their customer survey, conducted by Excellence In Leadership, showed that their customers wanted them to understand more about their business challenges and environment.

Although the One Page Plan enabled the organisation to think commercially, this was still very internally focused. Through a structured process facilitated by Excellence in Leadership, the team agreed what they needed to do differently to impact how they were viewed externally.

As the team aligned behind the change, they made a number of key decisions. The VP and the Directors decided to start to consistently wear a shirt and tie to work. They wanted to create a sense of identity that would influence how others perceived them and needed their image to reflect their emerging commercial focus.

They developed a competencies matrix that incorporated technical and business skills to assess and develop the right talent in the team and measured potential as well as performance.

In addition the team, started to up their game in the PR world by delivering conference presentations, pursuing public speaking opportunities and even getting onto CNN. In fact they were so successful at one point that the marketing team commented that they were doing their job for them!

Through the team's own experience of working in this very engaging way, including people and getting them involved, they became very aware of the need to engage people at an emotional level to create real buy-in, ownership and accountability. They found this worked for them within their own teams and with teams they were working with and other internal partners as well as customers. This emotionally engaging way of working allowed the team to create an environment where people would connect with them readily and really helped them to achieve results.

Creating the Disney Effect

As a result of the how the team had worked together to define their new culture, create the One Page Plan and establish their brand, it was clear to the rest of the broader organisation that something very special/different was happening in this organisation.

Through externally facilitated sessions by Excellence In Leadership, members of the team had learned how to work together effectively to discuss their challenges; encourage differing opinions; create a transparent and consultative process; develop their thinking and affect change. They had grown as people and as leaders, become comfortable with their emotions, and learnt how to communicate with each other through powerful story telling.

Coaching others because they were coached



The team had learnt how to create lasting transformational change – not just change. Through the engaging framework they had experienced they understood the need to have those difficult conversations with each other, to break through barriers and achieve success. They had also experienced real high-performance coaching from Excellence in Leadership, what they had learnt from being coached themselves, role modelled into their own ways of working with their teams as leaders and had become good coaches themselves.

Actively give feedback

The team now actively seek out feedback and are aware of the impact they have on others at a behavioural level. They are aware of their impact and work at an emotional level with people demonstrating EQ – Emotional Intelligence. They can turn difficult conversations into productive sessions and have become adept at coaching team members in this environment.

This organisation has created some of the best change agents in the company and is now evolving to impact on other teams across the wider organisation.

The results

The organisation is now renamed and expanded. They successfully added six new technologies whilst reducing headcount by 11% and increasing the span of control by 20%. They boast a retention rate of 97%, the highest across the organisation, and have pioneered practices that are now being used globally within the company.

The team are now closely aligned to their Business Partner Leaders and are helping to drive strategies at the highest level. They also work with the Quality teams to review products and find cost savings.

The annual conference this year was rated the best experience ever and more and more partners from this team are involved and invited to these events.

The business is now run through quarterly reviews of the One Page Plan, constantly updating the metrics and removing or adding new measures. They are seeking more feedback and challenging themselves to do better.

Leaders journey

Reflecting on his leadership journey over the last three years, the new VP had just a few pieces of advice for other leaders:

1. **You have what you need**
Limit how many leadership books you read - read them at an IQ and EQ level. Work out how to apply what you have read to your own situation using your emotional intelligence. Get to know yourself, build your own self-awareness and make the connections
2. **Surround yourself with people who complement you**
Seek out people who do well at those things you don't. Ensure you have people who complement your style and who will make things happen
3. **Ask yourself if you are good or just lucky?**
Good leaders know how to repeat what they have achieved; lucky leaders do it and move on none the wiser
4. **Have patience and trust the process**
Bringing others with you and creating a powerful team takes time and dedication. Find a good coach and facilitator that you trust and be patient. Taking shortcuts won't deliver you the best results in the end
5. **The job of a leader is to attend to the small things that make a big difference**
Touch everyone in some way. Take the time to meet with all new hires and build self-esteem in those around you
6. **Be aware of your executive presence**
Your words and actions are magnified because of the position you hold and your behaviour speaks volumes. If there's one thing I've learnt, it's to manage my highs and lows and remember who's watching me!

