
THE

**PERFECT
LEADERSHIP
TRIAD**

HOW TOP EXECUTIVES MAXIMIZE
PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH PEOPLE,
COACHING, AND PERFORMANCE

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Good leaders know what to do.

Great leaders know how to do things in a way that inspires people.

The greatest leaders are people-focused, coaching-centered, and performance-driven. These are the leaders who consistently shine above other leaders. They put people first and coach them so their people can grow, develop, and perform. These leaders are more than inspirational; they care about and respect their people.

I wrote this book for those who want to become the greatest leaders so they can transform how leaders impact employees and organizations. These are the leaders who leave an inspiring legacy.

*For my mom, Barbara, who taught me to be a kind person
and an avid learner; my inspiring wife, Randa; and my
awesome children and energetic grandchildren. You inspire
me and make me want to be better!*

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Introduction

Why People, Coaching, and Performance Matter

“Satisfied employees mean satisfied customers, which leads to profitability.”

–**Anne M. Mulcahy**, *CEO of Xerox*

Based on my experience as a Fortune 500 executive and an executive coach, I believe that leaders must be people-focused, coaching-centered, and performance-driven. At the heart of leadership is caring about and respecting your employees. When leaders care about and respect their people, the employees will buy into the leader’s vision, be more engaged, and work harder for them.

Leaders who truly put people first will find that business success will follow. Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group, said, “Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients.” Your employees come before the business. They *are* your business. Without them you cannot create a great customer experience.

Great leaders are great coaches. They invest the time in coaching their people in order to inspire and mobilize them to achieve goals. The act of coaching people demonstrates the leader’s commitment to help people grow and develop.

Coaching engenders trust and confidence between the leader and the employee she is coaching.

If leaders truly care about their people, they will hold them accountable. Leaders are responsible for the performance of their team. When leaders define and focus on the process of being successful, they will meet or exceed their goals. Great leaders set clear expectations and coach for performance. Leadership entails holding people accountable to meet expectations. At the core of performance-driven leadership is a company-wide culture of coaching and performance.

All organizations have a culture, whether positive or negative, and it is senior leadership's responsibility to be purposeful about creating and living it. Leaders shape the culture and the culture shapes the employees. When senior leaders purposefully create, develop, and nourish a positive culture, employees at all levels of the organization are affected. When leaders are not purposeful, a culture by default will be created. And this default culture may not be what you want it to be!

How would your people describe your culture? Do they even know you *have* a culture? As a leader, can you articulate that culture? Do you share this information with potential and current employees?

The first step in defining your culture is to go to the people who live it every day. Encourage your employees to tell you about the culture. If your employees cannot clearly articulate your culture, you have a problem.

People want to work for companies that have engaging leaders and cultures. They want to fit into the organization and wish to feel recognized and fulfilled when they work. At the end of the day, employees want to feel good about the work they do.

When I begin coaching an executive, the first thing I want to know is how she would describe the organization's culture. This gives me insight into the challenges I will face as a coach. The organizational culture, and the alignment of the executive's values with the organization's values, impacts how successful the executive and I will be in the coaching engagement.

We have all heard about great corporate cultures that have had a significant impact on employees, customers, and the business. We think about Disney, Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, and the Virgin Group. These companies have consistently created cultures that attract top talent because people love to work there.

At the center of these companies is a focus on the employees and consequently on the customers. The companies have created a customer experience that makes the employees feel great about their work. They feel great because they are treated respectfully and their employers care about them.

Now, more about becoming a people-focused, coaching-centered, and performance-driven leader....

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The Perfect Leadership Triad

What are the biggest challenges that executives face in today's evolving business environment? According to a recent survey of CEOs, the failure to attract and retain top talent is the number one issue facing organizations.

So, how can leaders and organizations address this challenge? They can attract, engage, and retain key talent and then can maximize performance by establishing a people-focused culture that leverages high-impact coaching. They can establish a culture that hires and promotes leaders who value employees, coach their people to perform at high levels, and establish clear, high expectations of their teams.

At the heart of great leadership lies a people-focused, coaching-centered, and performance-driven approach. When leaders follow these three principles, they will develop a high-performing organization with a clear competitive advantage.

Three Questions Leaders Ask

A leader asks herself three vital questions:

1. Which comes first—my business, our customers, or my employees?
2. What is the most productive thing I can do to retain key employees and keep them engaged and motivated?
3. How can I maximize performance, profits, and productivity, all the while ensuring long-term success in a rapidly changing, dynamic marketplace?

You will find the answers to these important questions in the pages of this book.

My Leadership Journey

I spent 25 years as a leader and executive in the healthcare industry. I started leading teams in my twenties at a large, global healthcare conglomerate. I was a young leader with responsibilities over employees much older and more experienced than I. I learned early in my career that I did not have all the answers. I needed to listen to people who were much smarter and more knowledgeable than I.

I now realize that the most important lesson that I learned was that employees come before the business and shareholders. My approach was not always popular with my managers. I was accused of being soft and caring too much about my people, even though my teams were always top performers.

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I had one manager tell me that I would never make it to the executive level because I “cared too much” about my people! Unfortunately, this is a typical response from business-focused leaders.

I want to be crystal clear about what I mean about “putting people first.” Being a people-focused leader does not mean that you are best friends with your employees or that you do not hold them accountable for performance. In fact, if you *do* put your people first, you expect them to exceed expectations, and accordingly you help them along the path to success.

As a certified and credentialed executive coach and former executive, I have learned the importance of developing employees through coaching. Without effective coaching, employees will flounder and will not grow and progress. Both people development and performance coaching are critical to a leader’s success. You cannot have long-term success without learning to be an effective coach.

Why I Decided to Be a Formal Leader

Have you ever worked for a manager who was so bad that you wanted to go into management yourself, as a way to block people like him from being promoted into management? Well, I have! Now, don’t get me wrong. I have had a lot of great leaders in my career, but one particularly poor leader really stands out and affected my career path.

My initial motivation to become a formal leader and manager came from one of my first managers, who unfortunately stood out

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as a horrible example of someone trying to provide people-focused leadership. While I recognized some good leadership qualities in him, I learned more from the things I felt he did wrong.

His first mistake was focusing only on the business. This was obvious, because he never talked about anything *but* the business. He showed no interest in his subordinates, either personally or professionally. This caused the team to distrust him, because we felt that he didn't care about us.

The irony is that, while all he did was focus on the business, he was in fact not performance driven. He rarely spoke about our individual performance, and he never recognized or rewarded us for exceeding expectations. He had zero process to achieve the lofty goals that he set for our team. He just told us vague things like "go out there and get it done!"

He offered no coaching to help us improve. A day in the field or office with him was dreadful. When we were with customers, he simply watched. He never contributed anything to the conversation. After the customer meeting, he only focused on the negative things that happened. He offered no help to coach and develop us so that we could become more competent. As a result, over time we felt trapped and did not believe that we could grow and develop, primarily because we lacked his support.

We had to be careful, because if we shared ideas or thoughts with him, he took credit for them with his boss. This created an environment of distrust. There was no candor or sharing of ideas. He never acknowledged our contributions to the company

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or team. He was self-serving. He clearly loved himself, but we didn't feel the same way about him.

If you were one of his favorites, you were golden. If you were not—and I for one was not—you could count on even less support and help from him. Of course, those of us who were not his favorites could never trust him. Working under him was like having a bad experience with Santa Claus, where you wonder if he thinks you have been naughty or nice. I often pondered how I could get on my boss's nice list.

His one good quality was that he was a great motivator. In fact, he motivated me to get into management, principally because of all the management qualities that he lacked. I figured that if I myself became a leader, there would be one less leader who didn't care about or appreciate people. As I look back on that difficult year under his management, I am grateful for the lessons that I learned. I absorbed more from him about leadership do's and don'ts than from any other manager in my entire career. I learned that adverse experiences are *growing* experiences! And I learned that you must experience the bad to appreciate the good. Most importantly, I decided to become a people-focused leader.

Why Did *You* Become a Leader?

As I have spoken to leaders across many industries, I commonly hear that they typically get into management because they enjoy seeing people grow and develop. They love to help people reach their career and personal goals.

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If this is the case, why are there so many leaders who fail to focus on this? Why do many of them care more about the business than their people? After all, it is not the business that grows the people; it is the people who grow the business.

One of the paradoxes of leadership is that the more you give to your people, the more you gain in return. When a leader develops talent, she gets increased employee productivity, builds trust, and creates a loyal employee.

So, why did *you* become a leader? This is an important question that you need to answer. The answer dictates your priorities and determines how you go about leading people. If you became a leader to develop and grow people, then do the things I will talk about in this book!

What Kind of Leader Are You?

For many years, those of us in the business world have heard about the importance of focusing on our employees' strengths. Hundreds of books have been published on focusing on employees, coaching them to success, and driving their performance. To my knowledge, no single leadership book has brought these principles together in one source. I will attempt to do so in these pages.

Many of the principles in this book will appear to be common sense. Unfortunately, as Voltaire said, "Common sense is not so common." Most leaders know "what to do." Great leaders know how to do it effectively and in ways that motivate people.

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How you do things with your own people will determine your success as a leader.

If you know what you need to do as a leader, you are already 10 percent there! When you learn how to do it effectively, you begin the leadership journey. Leadership is an iterative process. No one has perfected this process. The best you can do as a leader is to improve every single day. As a former Fortune 500 executive, I am here to help you on this journey.

The first question you should ask yourself is: “What am I doing to build and maintain a high-performing team?” It is not enough to set aspirational goals and expectations to win. Leaders find, hire, coach, inspire, and reward the right people. They set clear and high expectations. Leaders ask great questions that will help them to develop the competencies and skills of each and every employee.

The second question you should ask yourself is: “How can I get to the next level and perform better and more effectively than I am doing now?” Leadership is all about people, coaching, and performance. If you take care of these three things, you will maximize performance and increase profits.

The third question you should ask yourself is: “Do I believe the business comes before the employee?” I have watched leaders and organizations struggle with this quandary throughout my entire career. Even companies that say they believe employees come first tend to fail to live by this principle. Wall Street and investors typically drive a short-term leadership mentality that demands that the business come before the employees.

This breeds organizational cultures where leaders are not trusted, employee engagement and retention are low, and performance is not sustained.

The final question leaders ask is: “What is the single most effective activity that I can do to build trust and develop a high-performing team?” Certainly, building trust by being a transparent and candid leader will help you along the path. The hard reality is that coaching and developing your people is the single most effective activity to drive performance. As you give back to each of your employees by coaching him, he will respond by trusting you, and will soon follow you and eventually perform at a higher level because he knows you care about him.

Are You a Dog-Kicking Boss?

I remember the first few months of my initial leadership position. After I got my feet wet by meeting my team, starting to know them individually, and beginning the process of developing mutual trust, my company sent me to an American Management Association first-line management course.

We did the usual activities, as we received all the pearls of wisdom that our instructor had learned in his career. I still recall the question that he asked all the new managers in the room: “What has been your greatest learning so far as a leader?”

As I pondered that question, I had an epiphany! It was a simple lesson. I had learned that as a leader I needed to recognize the

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power I had over my employees' lives. I do not mean this in an egotistical way, but rather as a practical principle. When I spent time with my people, how did they feel at the end of the day? Did I build trust with them? Did they feel inspired? Did I coach them? Did I clarify expectations so they could focus on the right things? Did I mobilize them to accomplish their goals? Or did they go home and just want to “kick the dog”?

As a leader, you must recognize the power you have over your employees' personal and professional lives. I am not talking about authority or position. Nor am I talking about ego. I am referring to the impact, either positive or negative, that a leader can have on her people.

I often ask other leaders if they think they are a “dog-kicking boss.” Their answer to that question creates a greater understanding of their impact as a leader. Remember that every interaction you have with your people is an opportunity for you to build trust (by being people-focused), to coach and inspire them to become better (by acting as if they were coaching-centered), and to help them perform their job more effectively (by being performance-driven).

Three Elements of The Perfect Leadership Triad

■ *“Triad” is defined as “a group or set of three connected things.”*

Leadership, you'll recall, is all about people, coaching, and performance. Establishing and living a people-focused, coaching-centered, and performance-driven leadership approach comprises

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what I call the Perfect Leadership Triad. All three elements are required if you wish to create a strong leadership culture. The culture is far less effective if you leave out even one of these elements.

I have had the opportunity to lead teams, some small and others large, for over 25 years. I have learned that the highest-performing leaders combine three elements of leadership that drives the business: they put employees before their customers and shareholders, they focus their efforts on coaching employees, and they consistently drive performance.

When your employees know that you care about and respect them, they will buy in to your vision, become more engaged, and work harder for you. Happy employees mean happy customers. Leaders *must* be people-focused if they want to experience long-term success.

Great leaders are coaching-centered. They recognize that coaching is the best way to gain trust and demonstrate their commitment to employees. It is also the most effective way to grow and develop their people. When leaders coach employees, they receive more in return than the employees do. The result is a more competent, more engaged, and happier employee—*and* a successful leader.

High-performing leaders care enough about their employees to hold them accountable. Performance-driven leadership stands at the heart of all high-performing organizations. Organizations that actively maintain coaching cultures are twice as likely to be high-performing.

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Senior leaders like you determine whether a company is good or great. One of their principal responsibilities is to create a leadership culture that believes in, trusts, coaches, and also sets high, clear expectations of every employee. There is no substitute for a people-focused, coaching-centered, and performance-driven leader!

People-Focused Leadership

“Your employees come first. And if you treat your employees right, guess what? Your customers come back, and that makes your shareholders happy. Start with employees and the rest follows from that.”

—**Herb Kelleher**, former CEO and Cofounder of Southwest Airlines

“If we win the hearts and minds of employees, we’re going to have better business success.”

—**Mary Barra**, CEO of General Motors

The Perfect Leadership Triad starts with recognizing that your business is created by and maximized by your people. Without them, you are only an empty shell of a company.

When I speak of your need to be people-focused, I am not necessarily referring to being close to your employees. I am referring to genuinely caring about them enough to be candid with them in your management, to coach them regularly, and always to hold them accountable.

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Leaders should never be people-focused at the expense of customers and the company. Rather, leaders become customer-centric by being people-focused, so that the company reaps financial rewards.

Most companies and leaders do not put their people first. This may be because they do not actually believe in their people or have not trained and coached them to be effective. Maybe they believe that their product or service can sell itself on its own merits. Perhaps they think that as management they can get everything they need out of the people that they need to be successful. Maybe they imagine that they as leaders drive the business through their leadership, regardless of how they treat the employees. Or they believe that people will respond by simply being told what to do. Many leaders treat people like robots, expecting them to be programmed on how to execute their job responsibilities.

Many leaders and organizations do not even try to win the hearts and minds of their employees. People are not coached and developed, so eventually they will become disenchanted and leave. In fact, employees' loyalty to the company is not reciprocated by the company to the employee. This is one of the reasons that Gallup has found that about 70 percent of employees are disengaged at work; their hearts are simply not connected to their job. (Source: Jim Harter, "Employee Engagement on the Rise in the U.S.," gallup.com)

I will talk more about being a people-focused leader in chapter 2.

Coaching-Centered Leadership

Great leadership begins with effective coaching. Coaching is the single most impactful activity that a leader can do to improve performance and profits. It generates trust and learning between leaders and employees. Most leaders enjoy developing and growing employees. The best way to accomplish this is through effective, thoughtful coaching. Leaders perform best when they dedicate time to coaching their employees—and when they see the employees responding to that coaching.

Coaching is a two-way street between the leader and the employee. It takes both parties to ensure that coaching is effective. Both the leader and the employee *must* be coachable.

But why does coaching make such a positive difference? It happens because employees appreciate a leader's effort to help them. The goodwill creates a bond of trust between the leader and the employee. Employees reciprocate the efforts of the leader by working harder for her to ensure that she is successful.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are focused on coaching-centered leadership.

Performance-Driven Leadership

As a leader, I always cared enough about my employees to hold them accountable. I knew that my having high performance expectations of each employee would almost always lead to that higher performance.

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As discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, all great leaders set high, clear expectations, including the expectation that each employee will meet performance goals. They also ensure that every employee understands his contribution to the team. Metrics are set and measured for every key performance indicator. Everyone in the organization is expected to achieve their personal goals.

It is critical to remember that performance is driven through coaching. Coaching results in higher performance, especially when it is based on people-development.

I will talk more about performance-driven leadership in chapter 6.

The Perfect Leadership Triad Culture

“Culture is not the most important thing in the world. It’s the only thing. It is the thing that drives the business.”

–**Jim Sinegal**, founder and former CEO, Costco

Leadership happens within an organization’s culture. Leaders set the tone for the entire organization through their behaviors. Leaders determine the culture. Employees respond differently to each type of leadership approach. An organization’s performance is usually directly correlated with leaders’ behaviors.

When leaders combine all three elements of The Perfect Leadership Triad, they can create and build high-performing teams. The key to a great culture is making an ingrained commitment to the triad.

I will talk more about a company's culture in chapter 9.

Conclusion

As you will see in this book, the results of being people-focused, coaching-centered, and performance-driven are higher performance, increased employee engagement, and greater retention of key employees. Happy employees will help you develop and retain happy customers who are likely to use more of your products or services in the future.

New and experienced leaders are guided by these three elements of leadership if they are to sustain long-term success. At its base, leadership is about people, coaching, and performance.

Ask yourself these questions about your leadership values and style:

- » Why did I become a leader?
- » What motivates and inspires me as a leader?
- » What kind of leader do I want to be?
- » Do I believe that employees come before the customers?
- » If so, how do I demonstrate this to my people?
- » Am I a great coach?
- » How am I currently coaching my people so they can be more productive and successful?

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- » If I am not an effective coach, what can I do to become one?
- » What expectations do I have for my people?
- » How clearly am I communicating these expectations?
- » How am I holding my people accountable for their performance?