

thinking

What Your Managers are Missing:

The surprising truth that's holding you back

You want your managers to deliver results. Not just any results – you're looking for breakthrough results. In order to get that done, they must be viewed by their teams as smart, likable, hard working, and caring. But there's another quality that can make or break a manager's pursuit of success. Let's consider Ben.

Ben was the kind of manager that everyone wanted to work for: charismatic, connected well with his people, and most importantly he really cared about them. He understood that his role as a manager was to coach, develop, and advocate for his team. He delegated very well and embraced that *his job was to achieve results through his team*. From the outside looking in, Ben was exactly the kind of manager that people clamored to work for – until they actually began reporting to him.



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While at face value he was the perfect manager, his team members' day-to-day experience was entirely different. He was a good guy who had their best interests at heart, but he lacked a critical and important skill that managers and their teams need to thrive. Ben didn't really understand the business beyond his function, and he didn't know how to navigate the organization to get things done for his team. Ultimately, his team was underperforming, but through no real fault of their own. After all, how could they feel connected to the organization if they weren't aware of the strategy? How could they step up as individual contributors and present new and innovative ideas if they didn't understand the objectives they should be working toward? And how could his people move forward in their career development if they worked in a silo because Ben didn't have an understanding of the company goals or how to collaborate with other functions or teams? Simply put, they couldn't.

According to the America's Workforce Survey conducted in 2013, only 40 percent of U.S. workers believe their managers understand the company's strategy or goals. What this tells us is that Ben is not an anomaly. Managers like him are prevalent, hindering their teams' performance – and your results.

Ben's Point of View



If your managers don't properly understand the strategy and their team's role in delivering it, you can be sure every individual on the team is also working in the dark. When managers don't understand the big picture:

1. Teams lack context for the work they do every day, leading to employees feeling frustrated and disengaged. Their careers stall when their efforts don't ladder up to business goals – all because their managers aren't educating them on the big picture. And that can lead to unhappy, disengaged employees.
2. Individuals don't feel supported when issues arise. When a manager lacks an understanding of how the organization functions or doesn't have relationships across the business, they are unable to clear barriers for their team members when needed. This can directly erode trust.

3. Individuals may inadvertently be making poor decisions or making decisions that only benefit their particular business unit, not the company as a whole. Imagine their frustration when effort is put into a project that is disconnected from the strategy and is eventually discarded or has to be redone.

Invest in manager capabilities and knowledge. Managers need to have the right skills to successfully lead a team. It takes more than just a “people person” to get a group of individuals engaged and motivated.

For individuals to succeed, they must be engaged in their work. To be engaged, they need to understand how the business operates and how their particular role has an impact on the operation as a whole. Too often, employees have little idea of how they contribute to meeting the corporate business goals. In a recent global study from Strategy&, more than half (53%) of the C-Suite executives surveyed reported that they don’t believe their strategy is understood by employees. Ultimately, this responsibility falls on the manager. Your managers are the linchpins of your organization. They must be accountable to know and understand the strategy from the leadership team and filter it down to the front line. If your managers aren’t executing on the company strategy, it might be because they just don’t know it, they don’t understand it, or they simply don’t realize the critical role they play in it.

Managers must know their business

Managers can only get their teams to execute the strategy successfully if they start with themselves. They must understand the strategy itself and see how internal/external forces and trends impact the business. They must know the customer needs and requirements, as well as be a role model of the culture, behaviors, and values of the organization. Once they have this knowledge for themselves, their next step is to map out and articulate how their team impacts and supports all of these elements. So, what can you do to help make sure your managers know the mission and goals of your business?

- **Engage in a two-way dialogue with managers to help them FOCUS on what matters most.** Leaders need to make it a priority to disseminate the strategy – and any changes to it – on a consistent basis. However, you need to go beyond simply sharing the information. If you want to ensure your managers and their teams achieve the results you are after, take the time to engage with them one-on-one to align on how their function connects to the overall strategy and any key priorities you are driving. Give them a chance to ask questions and clarify details to ensure they clearly understand what is expected of them and their team. Creating focus and alignment with all of your managers can have a powerful impact. Consider what’s possible when all of your managers are pulling on the right levers of your business.
- **Invest in manager capabilities and knowledge.** Managers need to have the right skills to successfully lead a team. It takes more than just a “people person” to get a group of individuals engaged and motivated. The business has a responsibility to educate its managers and provide them with the right capabilities to effectively communicate with their teams about the big picture and strategy.

Managers should be introducing their team members to experts from other parts of the business. Establishing relationships across sectors is a smart way to leverage an organization's talent and allows managers to bring information, ideas, and skills from other areas to their teams.

- **Encourage managers to take ownership of their role and develop a mindset of continuous learning.** It's the responsibility of the manager to understand the company's big picture and the roles their teams play. Encourage your managers to challenge themselves to say, "Here's what I understand today. Here's what I'm unsure about. And here's what I'm going to do about it." They should have the opportunity to take advantage of each and every resource accessible, such as annual reports, strategy decks, town hall meetings, webinars, and more, and be motivated to use these tools to educate themselves.

Managers must share their knowledge

Once you've armed your managers with the organization's strategic vision and game plan for achieving it, they must now go back and translate the information for their teams. It can't be just a one-time briefing. Managers should seek every opportunity to connect the dots for their team members. At every one-on-one session, every team meeting, even at the watercooler, they need to be talking about why the teams' activities are critical in executing the strategy.

Want to empower your managers with skills to talk about new strategies with their teams? Here are four ways to help managers help their teams be a part of the big picture:

1. **Be transparent.** It is critical that your managers share information as soon as it's available. Nothing impacts engagement more than team members who feel they are purposefully being kept in the dark. Even if details are still evolving, your managers should share what they know and what is still in question.
2. **Be vulnerable.** Let managers know it is okay to admit when they don't know the answers. There's no fault in that. But, they also must commit to finding the answers and following up with the team.
3. **Encourage questions.** Hold your managers accountable for talking about the business with team members. They should be discussing the vision, strategy, competition, etc. – giving teams the opportunity to process and internalize the information. Managers should make it a focus to help their team members feel confident in their grasp of the big picture.
4. **Use experts.** Managers should be introducing their team members to experts from other parts of the business. Establishing relationships across sectors is a smart way to leverage an organization's talent and allows managers to bring information, ideas, and skills from other areas to their teams.

So no matter how charismatic, caring, and good at mentoring your manager might be, he or she needs to make it a priority to also know the business and share the information with the team. If individual contributors understand how their business function impacts the whole, they can see why their work is important and are likely to put in the discretionary effort that drives an organization's success and the breakthrough results you seek.

It all boils down to this: What are your managers doing, and what are they talking about with their teams? When managers successfully keep their people informed of and in support of the organization's strategic vision and the plan to get there, employee engagement thrives, teams across business units support each other, and organizations head toward new levels of success.

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About Root

Root is a strategy execution company that helps organizations engage people as a catalyst for change using a proven framework that consistently achieves clarity, ownership, and results.

