

Your Management Team Must “Face the FACTS”

Much of my experience over the years has been assisting organizations that have had successful growth, but then struggle with managing the more complex organization. They often say, “It’s just not the same organization it used to be” or “I feel like I’m losing control.” My typical response is that they are likely right on both counts. It’s *not* the same organization as when it was smaller – and if they still manage as they did then, they probably are losing some control. One of the biggest challenges at this stage is to establish a healthy, productive management *team*. A team that will “Face the FACTS.”

“FACTS” is an acronym I’ve used over the years when personally establishing teams, or assisting others in developing their management teams. “Facing the FACTS” simply means that a new (or current) management team must understand and practice the following:

- (F)ocus:** There needs to be a unified and unwavering focus on the bigger purpose or organizational mission. Team members must stay true to that mission, and to plans and actions that ensure ongoing progress toward their agreed upon vision.
- (A)bility:** It’s essential that members are open to continually improving their personal abilities. Often, that means learning new skills around teamwork and implementing plans. They must also learn how to play to each other’s strengths for the success of the team.
- (C)ommit:** Each member must then commit to “making it happen.” Only their dedicated *action* moves the organization forward. Action plans must be developed and the members held accountable for their part, while also supporting each other along the way.
- (T)each:** Leaders lead the way, both by their example and by teaching others. Their actions set the tone, and they should mentor others on leadership, effective teamwork, and accountability. What they value, do, and teach drives the organization’s culture.
- (S)erve:** All of the above are to be approached with a serving heart. Effective leaders should be serving the organization and their team, above themselves. Trust among team members is imperative as they all serve the mission and work together toward their shared vision.

Sounds easy enough, right? Not exactly. The reason there are many ineffective teams is because too many believe teamwork comes naturally. A group of managers working together in the same room is not a “team”. Like any type of team, being effective requires *practice*. We will take a deeper look into what it means for a management team to truly “Face the FACTS”.

Focus

Everyone comes to a job, a role, or team with their particular perspective. They have experiences and skills that differ from others. They make decisions based on that experience and their unique values or worldview. Becoming part of a leadership team does *not* mean leaving those at the door. Yet it also doesn't mean your perspective should always prevail. A primary goal of the team leader is to ensure that members have clarity on the big picture, and how each can uniquely contribute to that desired future.

In my experience, this is frequently the reason for a dysfunctional team. When digging deep, it's often apparent that members are not all clear, or not all in agreement, on the desired future and how to get there. This causes them to remain working within their own silos, and not as a unified team. The objective is to ensure that all members develop an unwavering focus on the bigger purpose or mission of the organization. Of course, that trait is critical when seeking the right people for the team. Team members should be selected who are willing and able to step back and keep the big picture in mind. They are on the team to align their unique experiences toward achieving their shared vision, as they stay true to the organization's mission.

Ability

My wife and I joke that when we meet God, one of the first questions will be, "What's up with this *opposites attract* thing?" We are attracted to someone because they are *different* than us – then spend the rest of our lives trying to get them to be more like us! Actually, we already know the answer. *Ideally*, we are to complement each other. Together, we should complete the "team" by utilizing the unique strengths of each, for the best of the family. If we were the same, critical skills/perspectives would be missing. Easy to understand, hard to do.

The same is true for effective teams. The reason you form a team is because no individual has all the necessary skills and experiences needed for organizational success. *Ideally*, the team members bring their unique perspectives and abilities that help complete the whole team. The challenge is respecting those views that are different from yours, rather than getting everyone to agree with you. Why? Because it's not about you. It's about the success of the organization.

Members should be open to continually improving their abilities. Developing teams and successfully executing plans may be new skills for some, and it takes practice. A deep *trust* is required among members that each has the best interest of the organization, and each other at heart. When disagreements occur, members need the skills to constructively debate, respect another's views, and how to play to each other's strengths. But no one is saying it's easy. Thus, the need for members to be open to learning and practicing new skills.

Commit

A plan with no action is just a dream. Often, there are nodding heads around the management table as if everyone is on the same page. But that does not represent real commitment. The rubber meets the road when team members take *action* on their plans. Together, they work to overcome the obstacles and make progress on their goals. Even with the proper focus and diverse abilities, the team only moves the organization forward when action plans are established and members hold each other accountable for progress. Member must be committed to the plans and in supporting each other to achieve *results*. Commitment doesn't merely mean agreement. It means taking *action*.

Teach

Much has been written in recent years about organizational leaders being coaches and mentors. They should also lead by example. It is the leaders that drive the culture of the organization (see my earlier article: *Value to Customers, Begins With The Values of Leaders*). Exemplary leaders inspire, model the way, and enable others (Kouzes & Posner). People will follow your lead. Are your employees working on the same priorities your leadership team is focused on? Are you behaving in a manner that you wish all staff would behave?

Your managers and employees will understand what's most important to the organization, and how to best behave in certain situations, when you've taught them. Making time to actually coach and mentor others about the business, management, and teamwork is a key responsibility for leadership team members. Then practice what you preach.

Serve

Having a serving heart is the glue that holds it all together. That's how leaders are able to sincerely: focus on the greater good; humbly learn new skills; commit to doing what they say; and to mentor other staff. As Collins writes in *Good to Great*, a management team should first be concerned about the Who, before addressing the What. Get the right people on the team, those with complementary skills that are willing to "Face the FACTS" described above. Then the team will be poised for success in establishing the best What, or plans for the organization.

Effective leaders should be serving the organization and their team, above themselves (see my earlier article on *Servant Leadership*). A serving heart goes a long way in achieving the high trust necessary for team members to work together in serving the higher purpose of the organization.

In Summary

When establishing a new leadership team, or seeking to improve a current team, there is a reality that must be faced. Team members must "Face the FACTS," that they will only become a truly productive *team* when they:

- Maintain a clear, unified *Focus* on their organization's mission and shared vision
- Are open to improving their own *Abilities*, while respecting and playing to each other's strengths
- *Commit* to personally taking action and hold each other accountable for progress
- Set the example and *Teach* or mentor others, honing an organizational culture of teamwork
- Have a heart for *Serving* the organization - its mission, recipients, and its people

PS: Take away a unified (F)ocus on the same mission, and a personal wiring to (S)erve others, and teamwork only becomes an "ACT". The (A)bilities, (C)ommitment to action, and (T)eaching others will be disjointed among the members, and often self-centered.

Michael Wilkes & Company specializes in management consulting and leadership team development for closely-held businesses, churches, and nonprofit organizations challenged by the necessary leadership transitions due to growth or strategic change. For further information: www.michaelwilkesco.com