Morale is Never a Team Issue

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Team morale is a perennial issue that's raised regularly when I have a conversation with managers and corporate leaders. It is almost like an "accepted" disease i.e. – "yeah, the morale is poor but what to do? Guess we just have to live with it." There is an air of fatalism in the grunt. We know we have it but we just have to put up with it.

Team morale is never a team issue.

All morale starts and ends with the individual – in the case of a team, the morale originates and emanates from the *team leader.* Team member comes and goes, the mood of the members may fluctuate but the character of the team leader must be stable and rock-solid.

Without consistency, there is no basis for leadership.

So, for the one who complains about team morale may very well be the one who holds the key! Just as poor morale can be contagious, enthusiasm is also contagious but it requires a whole lot more effort – effort that cannot be expected from followers, this is expected only from *leaders.* The leader must always be one notch above their followers when it comes to morale.

Effective leadership is always about personal effectiveness.

It's simple to find out the state of a family – talk to the parents. It's simple to find out the state of a class – talk to the teacher. It's simple to find out the state of the team at work – talk to the supervisor or the manager. There are three powerful principles at work when it comes to improving team morale.

The "One-Up" Principle
When it comes to behavioral change, we are influenced by our authorities. For example, whenever I conduct character training, inevitably someone would ask – "Has my boss attended this training yet?" Unlike technical training, when it comes to matter of character development, we are inspired by role models – especially those who are above us. So, if the team morale is ever to improve, then the leader's morale must first be in line. This is the "one-up" principle – the one above must lead the way.

The Principle of Personal Accountability
We may not be able to initiate world peace but we certainly can befriend the person who lives down the street. The team's morale is a *cumulative* "pool" of individuals who take accountability for what they can do in their own "neighbourhood". If others do not change and the company culture remains the same, well – I can still be accountable for my own "personal culture" i.e. how I carry myself, the words I speak and the attitude I display. When each individual embraces *personal* accountability, then improvement in morale becomes a natural by-product. Accountability is the cause, morale is the effect.

The Principle of Clear Visioning
Without a clear vision, the team has no motivation to exercise self-restraint and self-control. Human nature is such that, in the absence of a motivating vision from the leaders, the default mode is *convenience,* not *conviction.* The decline in team morale can often be traced to a leader who fails to communicate clear goals and measurable objectives. Communicate, communicate and communicate – so far, I have not heard complaints about leaders who over-communicate. On the other hand, the complaints are usually about the lack of communication.

As you can see, team morale is not the real issue – it is *symptomatic* of the real cause – which is the lack of personal leadership effectiveness in the area of personal example, personal accountability and personal communication. Think about it.

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