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## RYP QUARTERLY

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### Excellence - A Habit of Leadership

#### ***Creating The Environment for Excellence to Occur Is the Role of A Leader***

*By David Stewart Principal RYP International*

*In any team or organisation, it is the responsibility of the leadership team to create an atmosphere and environment for excellence.*

*What follows is an exploration of the factors required to create the right environment for excellence. By the way unfortunately there is no single silver bullet!*

#### **THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

This may well be the subject of another article. However to put it simply, our view is

*Management is about **PERFORMANCE***

*Leadership is about **CHANGE***

A Leader can be a **Manager**, but it does not necessarily follow that a Manager can be a **Leader**. In fact, many people with senior Management Positions are really just people in charge – they are not Leaders – no matter what their title says.

***Management comes from the HEAD,  
but Leadership comes from the HEART.***

#### **CREATING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR EXCELLENCE TO OCCUR**

**This is the task of every Leader and Manager of every team / organisation.** It is often spoken about but rarely achieved. How come? The answer is simple usually. The leader / manager lacks credibility! No team has ever achieved great success where the leadership is toxic, lacks unity, is bureaucratic or conformist, or is just plain incompetent. What kills any team culture and personal enthusiasm is where the team has a poor regard for their management / leadership team. Credibility is everything.



## WHAT ARE THE INGREDIENTS FOR EXCELLENCE TO OCCUR?

**Put into a nutshell, it is confidence, unity of commitment by the entire team and a shared passion to achieve.** Sound easy? You wish! So how is this achieved? What follows are some of the prerequisites to create a culture of excellence in any team:

### 1) The Leader Is the Conductor:

**Just when you get sick of saying it, some people are just starting to get it.** What a leader tolerates is what is accepted. What gets measured gets done (both formally and informally). The questions a leader asks symbolises to others what is considered important. What a Leader praises, rewards, and recognises symbolises what it is they value. Having a balanced approach is key. The leader must be a role model for the desired behaviours. The trust and credibility of the Leader is central to the pursuit of excellence.

### 2) The Manager Must Be the Coach:

**A coach or manager must role model behaviours and act on behavioural issues as and when they occur, rather than just allow things to fester.** There must be a recognised mechanism to gain the feedback and pulse of any team (this can be formal or informal). Managing by walking around (MBWA), observing, and talking to people is a great way to gauge where a team feeling is. It also ensures accessibility to the team. Key is to learn what motivates team members. This can only be done by building familiarity.

#### **THE 4 C'S CRITICAL TO EXCELLENCE:**

**Confidence:** *How do they feel? The old adage is correct "If they think they can they are absolutely right, if they think they can't they are absolutely right!"*

**Competence:** *In pressure situations people default to what they know, not what they learnt on a course six months ago. Competence requires people to apply and practice what they have learnt.*

**Consequences:** *What are the repercussions for good or poor performance? How safe do people feel to have a go and possibly make a mistake? If the normal response is to be admonished or sanctioned, then almost invariably they will stop trying. If they do an excellent job, is this noticed and praised, or just accepted as the status quo? People respond to recognition of achievement, always have, and always will.*

**Commitment:** *This is a two-way emotion that is built up over the course of time. The way a person is treated, recognised, rewarded, and made to feel a valued and respected member of the team is all part of building commitment. People usually start with great intentions, and if their commitment starts to fall away it is usually a reflection of how they are being managed and coached.*



### 3) Excellence Has to Be Defined and Coached Up Continuously

**If excellence cannot be defined, then quite simply it cannot be achieved.** Any definition needs to be understood within the context, circumstances, and the environment of the team itself. Creating an unrealistic expectation for a team may overwhelm or deflate people's enthusiasm and commitment. Excellence always has different perspectives; thus it needs to be an ongoing journey with a series of milestones and levels. Excellence is not just a financial result or scoreboard; it is the whole package and pursued day in and day out. Key is to reward and recognise the champions and ambassadors who are role modelling or personifying the pursuit or intent of excellence. Equally critical is to act on those people who are spoilers or not aligned by their attitude, actions, and behaviours. Coach them up or out.

### 4) It Is All About Feedback and Progress

**Building a Growth Mindset of continuously improving through and with all the team is key.** Without genuine timely feedback no progress can take place. Praise publicly and coach privately. Near enough is never good enough, excellence requires a continuous learning cycle. The simple quality framework of PLAN - DO - CHECK - ACT is as good as any approach, but what is essential is that a framework is being used for continual application. Key for any manager is to continually coach people up on the need to make GOOD JUDGEMENTS as a key behaviour of all team members. Giving them permission to practice and apply the making of good judgement is essential.

### 5) Build Confidence Through Positive Shaping

**Role calling and constant criticising a default position will just ensure high team turnover (people leave poor managers and coaches but rarely their team).** A good policy is to hire on enthusiasm and a positive team attitude.

### 6) It Is the Unwritten Team Rules That Make the Difference

**As a leader there is always one rule which will impact hugely on a team atmosphere. *Silence is acceptance!*** Leaving things unstated means a leader is accepting of whatever just occurred which includes breaches of team behaviours, disciplines or promises, or indeed observing someone ignoring something or failing to act. What a leader acts on or ignores are equally important. What is measured or valued by any leader is then what is imitated by their team.

### 7) Good / Better / Best Thinking

**Drive progress not change!** All teams have good and poor cycles; teams need to experience winter to appreciate summer. It is important to not only define but to also experience what excellence looks and feels like so teams can then define for themselves what needs to be developed, preserved, and protected. Hence what good performance looks like in poor and good cycles needs to be defined and agreed, as this will put into context expectations of excellence and milestones to achieve.



## 8) Clearly Define Excellence and What You As A Team Are Aspiring To Be.

**The journey FROM and TO a particular outcome must be clearly defined and understood.** It should have no more than three success indicators, anymore and you get something that cannot be attained. It needs to be explored, defined, debated, and personally linked regularly, so it is understood. There must be a common language that everyone uses, which then allows for everyone to look for the symptoms or early warning signs of when teams are on and off track. Seek feedback as without feedback no improvement can take place. Any feedback is good feedback. Teams need to feel part of the ownership of where the leader is heading.

## 9) Celebrate Wins and Milestones Regularly

**Excellence requires one key attribute and that is hard work.** Doing the hard yards in lean or poor times requires effort, and it is important to celebrate any small continuous steps in the journey to excellence. Avoid "Yes Buts".... Focus on well done and commit to what is next. Celebrate each milestone and then use that as leverage to pursue the next one. This must be done in a genuine and meaningful manner and is a key ingredient for developing a "winning mindset."

## 10) Maintain The Rage

**If you are positive, resilient, and enthusiastic for a sustained period you will be successful.** Look to the people who are enthusiastic and committed as they are the ones who will help you move to the next level. Don't ignore people who give negative or hard feedback, all feedback is important, provided you ACT on it:

- Define what success looks like and have a measure / metric!
- Celebrate each milestone and achievement.
- Use feedback to help review performance and set an agenda for progress.

***We Are Repeatedly What We Do***

***Excellence then is a Habit – Not an Act***

*Aristotle*

## **FINALLY:**

**A positive team atmosphere is the NUMBER ONE ingredient for creating a culture for excellence.** Without this, everything else becomes an academic debate. Creating a positive Team Environment is the challenge for Managers, Coaches and Leaders - and it is their first and fundamental critical success factor.



Good luck and remember *Have some fun along the way.*



### ***Facta Non Verba – Deeds Not Words***

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