

Enabling High Performance – It's all in the Mind

Introduction

Why do the best sports people in the world have psychological coaches? How is it that people perform differently on different occasions? If the talent and competence has not changed between one occasion and the next why is it that we do not all perform to our potential every time?

The answer is that – it's all in the mind. Our thinking and mood determine our performance on the day. Top coaches help people to manage and control their thinking so that they can perform to their potential more consistently. It is the responsibility of everyone to be aware of their thinking and exercise control over it. It is the responsibility of coaches (in business we call them leaders) to understand and influence the thinking of each member of their team.

This paper is not about attracting and developing “the right people”, but on **getting the best from the people you already have both individually and collectively**. Performance is not something that has to be “managed”. A coach does not direct a top sports person to “get into the zone and achieve a personal best”. Instead, they help them to get into the right mind set, which makes great and consistent performances possible.

If this thinking applies to the top professional sports people in the world then surely it also applies to each individual's performance in every organisation. Leadership is about “leading people” and this is about influencing their thinking, so that, they want to and can perform more consistently to their potential.

Our perceptions and interpretations of what is done and how it is done and our relationships with our team and leaders determines our thinking which in turn determines our behaviours and performance. Our thinking determines our levels of confidence, self-esteem and intrinsic motivation and these are critical in determining performance. However, is this recognised and prioritised by organisations and leaders? Do leaders fully appreciate the importance of people's thinking and are the practices and competencies there to allow leaders to be more effective in influencing “thinking” which is the real performance driver?

What and How

Leaders can invest time and effort in ensuring they make good decisions. Why is it that even though the decision is logical that it does not get support or can negatively impact on thinking, mood and performance?

How things are done can have a significant impact on perceptions and interpretations and influence thinking. This is why time and effort has to be put into the “how”; how do we do this (implement the decision) so that people buy in and are motivated to make it work?

People do not react to reality and certainly do not react based on your intentions. Our thinking is invented within our minds, it's not real, and is dependent on our previous perceptions and interpretations. However, **our thinking determines every single decision we make and every action we take, including our behaviours and our performance.**

“The world is what we think it is. If we can change our thoughts, we can change the world”, H.M. Tomlinson.

“How” leaders show up and the impact this has on the perceptions and interpretations of their teams determines their success as leaders. Leadership is about understanding and leading the thinking of others. Thinking determines mood, behavior and performance. Leaders must align thinking so that their people are aligned, energised, intrinsically motivated and driven to succeed.

The two critical “how” questions that every leader needs to know in order to successfully lead thinking are;

- **How do I show up at the moment and what impact is that currently having?**
- **How do I improve my impact?**

The answers to these questions will give leaders the opportunity of being more effective. The only way of getting this information (which is critical to successful leadership) is to ask each member of your team in a way that gets them to share their perceptions and interpretations honestly with you. A leader who accepts their responsibility for the thinking of their team has a core understanding of their role in leading people.

Leadership, like most initiatives associated with people, should be based on desired outcomes. What it is that we want to achieve rather than inputs or box ticking exercises. If something is working (achieving the desired outcome) then we should do more of it and if it's not working (regardless of how good or logical we think it is) we need to stop doing it and do something else.

Working Together – Team Working

“e pluribus unum” – out of many, one.

Like the human body every single aspect has to function properly for the body to work as a whole, so too with the business. How people work together is critical to the functioning of any organisation. Do people, and especially leaders, multiply the energy of each other or do they sap it? How well does the organisation encourage multipliers and deal with the energy sappers?

The more organisations are co-ordinated and work together for a single purpose the more effective they can be.

Let us consider the human body and what we can learn from it. Humans think of themselves as

ONE. A single entity comprised of one body but, in reality, are made up of over 50 trillion cells (that form over 200 different cell types that each perform diverse functions) and 200 trillion microbes. In effect a colony all working together for the overall good of the body. The underlining principles that make the human body successful are;

- Unity comprising diversity, every complex unit requires diversity where differences are valued and fully utilised.
- A central nervous system that coordinates all of the body's physiologic systems with the needs of individual cells. Effective communications and sharing of learning.
- A healthy balance between beneficial growth systems and occasionally necessary protection systems both of which consume energy resources. Shifting priorities between what's important and what is urgent.

Organisations need to review and develop the practices and competencies that will allow them to operate better as one team all pulling in the same direction. A successful organisation will focus on reviewing and improving interactions and relationships.

How people view their colleagues and the nature of the interventions between them seriously impacts thinking, behaviours and performance. Organisations cannot afford to leave this to chance, it must be prioritised and done by design.

Intrinsic Motivation – Individual Performance

Intrinsic motivation is the desire and drive, one has within themselves, to really want to do something to a certain standard. Energy and excitement are key to intrinsic motivation and there is focus and a level of enjoyment attached. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is giving someone an extra reward for doing something. It should be obvious, which produces the better results.

Intrinsic motivation comes from our thinking. The fundamental goal of leadership is to influence thinking so as to increase levels of intrinsic motivation. Leaders must be adept at understanding and influencing people's thinking.

Our beliefs, values and drive all come from our thinking (which is invested by us) which is heavily influenced by our environments and associations. All beliefs operate in the present tense, regardless of when and how they were formed, and because of this each individual needs to be aware of their beliefs and decide if they are still appropriate and aligned with where they are in life. Self-awareness gives us choice and is the catalyst for change.

The Foundation

Here is a simple model for improving individual, team and organisation performance.

1. Clarify and agree the outcome based goals that are the means to achieving sustainable success.
2. Identify and institutionalise the practices that directly contribute to the desired outcome

based goals. In the context of people it is about getting them to where they need to be, the thinking, to ensure they behave and perform as needed.

3. Develop leadership competencies around the above practices so that the outcome based goals are achieved. Ensure leadership goals are measured based on impact and reporting and management meeting agendas reflect their importance.

4. Do all of the above in a way that ensure buy in and commitment.

Having an intrinsically motivated workforce acting as one is a **source of competitive advantage**. Organisations need to better understand what is involved in this and develop their competencies to become more effective.

A top sportsperson who does not believe in themselves, or is worried about failing, is unlikely to succeed. The coach (substitute leader within the organisation) is there to prevent this and ensure the mindset is right to deliver more consistent top performances. Afterall, outstanding and consistent performance is all in the mind.

Change your mind and you change everything.

Finally, how important is it for each of us to understand our minds and align our minds to where we are and where we want to be? We have one body and one mind. Most of us look after our bodies to ensure they are fit and healthy, how about doing the same with the mind?

If you would like to talk to us about any of the above issues or about engaging your people through the period ahead, please get in touch with me at brendan.mccarthy@stratis.ie or any one of our Partners.

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