LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS ON A GLOBAL TEAM

Directions: If you are leading or managing a team, place a check mark by any behaviors you regularly engage in. If you are a team member, place a check mark beside any behaviors you regularly see. After you have finished, read the explanatory text for each numbered item.

_____  1. Demonstrate respect for all team members in ways that matter to each person.
   It is part of being human to want and need validation for making a contribution. On work groups, being treated respectfully is a sign of such validation and encourages more commitment and connection between team members, less defensiveness, and an increased ability to work through predictable differences. The caveat here, across borders, is that respectful treatment is defined differently by civilization, nation, country, organization, and individual. An effective team leader knows this and avoids having a one-size-fits-all definition of respect. It is suited to each individual.

_____  2. Be willing to change, grow, and develop new skills.
   An effective team leader models effective change management and helps others adapt as well. In today’s lightning-fast world, not being willing or able to adapt is the equivalent of consigning oneself to insignificance or irrelevance. Creating a norm where team members are fluid and not attached to a particular outcome is very helpful. Is lack of attachment and willingness to be flexible easier for those reared in a Buddhist culture, where detachment is a path to personal wholeness? Is it possible to make this norm work more easily on teams from more collectivist rather than individualist cultures because there might be a better sense of the whole? Whatever the predispositions or attitudes towards change might be, creating a feeling of ease and expectation around change is essential.

_____  3. Build relationships outside of work boundaries.
   Effective team leaders structure time together in informal surroundings. This reality on virtual teams is exceedingly difficult. In many parts of the world, people who work together like to socialize in off-work hours. Virtual teams are frequently brought together several times a year. At times like this, it is important to maximize the socialization after work, whether it means going out to dinner, a play, or taking in the local nightlife. The relationships built informally pay big dividends at work when each person is back at his or her own location. The one caveat here is that, in some locales, employees consider time after hours their own time. But when you bring people to a central location from many places, there is an expectation of hanging out together in the evenings. That is often a very successful strategy.

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4. **Have clear responsibilities and accountability.**
   A team leader who helps people understand their respective roles and tells them what they will be accountable for goes a long way toward setting individuals up to be successful and setting teams up to be productive. There is no substitute for clear expectations and parameters. On some teams those expectations may be arrived at autocratically, and on others the team itself may set up the roles and the measurements based on group objectives. How a team arrives at that clarity is part of its process, but an effective team leader does not miss the chance to set clear expectations.

5. **Demonstrate respect and appreciation for different cultural norms.**
   On global teams, having knowledge of cross-cultural norms and being able to switch style is essential. An effective team leader models this understanding and behavior. It also means helping team members see the advantage and disadvantage to different ways of doing things. Utilizing the variety of norms that will undoubtedly exist on a global team can go a long way toward helping everyone be more adaptive and find value in behaviors that previously might have seemed uncomfortable, strange, or just plain wrong.

6. **Set up clear communication and feedback systems.**
   Communication and feedback are usually difficult at various times on any team. Even in the closest relationships, communication faux pas or miscues are a part of life. A team leader can make a big difference by working with a group to agree on a process of how and when feedback will be given and set up systems for effective communication. On dispersed teams, having this structure in place is even more crucial. Clear communication systems can enhance the accomplishments of a team and the relationships within the team itself. Being the person who either facilitates the feedback and communication structures or actually provides a structure as a starting point for the team is an important leadership role.

7. **Do the prework.**
   A global team leader has complex logistics to deal with. Making sure resources such as technology, a budget to bring people together during the year, and communicating all the particulars of who, what, where, when, and why are especially important across language differences, time zones, national preferred styles, and geographic boundaries. The team leader in this situation must be so clear and precise with information, logistics, and operational concerns that these questions become a non-issue and offer no distraction. That way, team members can concentrate on the work at hand. Think of the team leader as an obstacle remover.

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8. **Set a tone of warmth, affiliation, and productivity.**

Any team leader, effective or ineffective, puts an imprint on the group. The team members will be a reflection of that leader. Feelings of comfort, security, risk taking, and collaboration, or feelings of competition, jealousy, confrontation, and rivalry are all influenced by the team leader. By paying attention to each team member’s unique skills, by utilizing those skills for the good of the group, by demonstrating interest in and appreciation for people individually and collectively, and by really listening to different ideas, a leader sets a productive tone. Very little good teamwork gets done in a hostile, low-trust environment.

9. **Teach the team self-maintenance.**

One goal of an effective team leader could be to legitimately take a background role and allow the individuals to demonstrate greater leadership. In individualistic cultures, this is done by grooming strong individuals. The challenge is different where some members may prefer a more hierarchical structure with a strong boss. Education has to accompany this type of shift and members must be sold on the advantages for the team effort. The idea is to create a team that functions like a self-cleaning oven, taking care of its own obstacles as they crop up. The leader can have a primary role in making this happen.

10. **Balance long-term and short-term goals, both the strategic and the operational.**

Depending on the team’s level, mission, goals, and reason for being, one group may be limited to strategic issues while another concerns itself with operations. Regardless, it is critical to manage the tug of war between long-term and short-term goals. Focusing on distant outcomes is essential to stay competitive. On the other hand, paying attention to long-term strategic issues to the exclusion of short-term operational goals and issues can be harmful in a world where change is constant. The leader needs to see both forest and trees.