



BARRIERS

TO HIGH PERFORMANCE

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INTRODUCTION

What is holding you back from your best?

Have you given it much thought? I have. On a recent Friday afternoon, I found myself driving through Atlanta traffic. Actually, I wasn't driving; I was basically stuck, the six lanes of the freeway barely moving. After creeping forward for almost an hour and a mere two miles, I was stunned at the problem. An old-school Volkswagen Beetle had stalled in the left lane. The smallest car on the road had the entire city paralyzed in gridlock. Once I got past the obstacle, the freeway opened up and I was able to quickly get to where I wanted to go.

When it comes to high performance, there are often impediments that can slow, or even stall, an organization from making progress. If you've been leading for long, you know what I'm talking about.

Do you sense there is another level for your organization? If so, consider the nine common barriers that follow and evaluate if they might be holding you back. Take comfort: the news is not all bad. You have the ability to remove them and be back on your way.

Let's get started...



1

BAD LEADERSHIP

The number one barrier to results within an organization or team is a leader who fails to lead.

I recently read a statement, “There are no bad teams, only bad leaders.” The reality is, when leaders get better, everything gets better. But when they don’t do what they’re supposed to do, their work and their people suffer.

There are no bad teams, only bad leaders.

Admittedly, it is easy to become bogged down in the day-to-day quicksand of emails, needless meetings, and the daily grind of the business. The best leaders do not get sucked down into the details of the day-to-day. Instead, they work **ON** the business more than **IN** the business, staying focused on what they’re trying to accomplish. They live above the quicksand and remain on the high ground of leadership.

If you truly plan on building a high-performance organization, start by looking in the mirror. People always watch the leader, and the leader’s voice is the loudest voice. If you are in charge, then lead. You and your people will be on the way to winning.

2

FUZZY LEADERSHIP

I used to wear corrective lenses – both glasses and contacts.

I remember visiting the eye doctor many times and being asked the question, “Which looks better: one or two, three or four?” as the doc flipped the lenses. His job was to dial me in so I could clearly see the world. Thankfully, I was eventually a great candidate for LASIK surgery and with a couple of zaps, my vision problem was cured. Don’t you wish you could zap your people with some kind of “leadership LASIK” and they would be locked in on your vision? Dream on!

Great leaders show up every day with a picture of a preferred future. They are crystal clear on the destination and keep it in front of their people. However, because of the busyness of the business, it is easy for vision to leak, or at least become fuzzy. Let me remind you: if the vision is fuzzy to you, it will be blurry to your people.

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Where are you really trying to take your people? Can you see it? Better yet, can your people see it? If you want to accomplish something great, give your people the gift of clarity. Keep the vision in front of everyone.

It is the number one job of a leader!

3 POOR COMMUNICATION

Communication is the oxygen of any relationship.

Years ago, my family had the opportunity to visit the Himalayas. It is an amazing place to climb – only, we didn't climb. We took a cable car two miles up Jade Dragon Snow Mountain and ended at over 15,000 feet. It was breathtaking – literally. There was no air up there at all. At the bottom of the mountain, they were selling canisters of optional oxygen. Unfortunately, we passed on the extra expense. I learned a valuable lesson that day: Always listen to your wife! I also learned the higher you go, the more you need oxygen.

The same is true in your organization. The higher you climb, the more you will need to communicate with your people. Poor communication is a massive barrier to high-performance. The best leaders communicate tirelessly by listening and talking to their people. A lack of communication causes a team to drift, and no team drifts to greatness. Dreams and goals can easily evaporate in the midst of busyness. However, leaders that create an environment where their teams talk about vision, metrics, problems, strategies, and goals (to name a few) position themselves to dominate their market.

Remember, communication is the oxygen of your organization. If you expect to reach your potential, you must ensure key messages cascade from top to bottom and back up. Facilitate the flow of vision (see barrier #2) and information, and soon everyone you lead will be seeing and saying the same thing. Breathe life into your people by ensuring constant communication is taking place at every level.

Communication is the oxygen of your organization.

4

MEDIOCRE MEETINGS

While bad meetings may not be number one on my list, they may be the biggest barrier to high-performance.

Meetings will make or break what you are trying to accomplish. I had a CEO tell me that meetings are where his company makes their money... and they make a lot of money.

Meetings are so critical because they give you a platform to coach, train, develop, challenge, encourage, create accountability, celebrate, strategize, and plan with your people. Bad meetings should never be allowed, and yet, haven't we all attended (or even led) our fair share of them? Author Patrick Lencioni writes, "The hard truth is, bad meetings almost always lead to bad decisions, which is the best recipe for mediocrity." If you're honest, what grade would you give yourself on the quality of your meetings? Better yet, what would your team say?

There is a big difference between gathering a group for information-sharing and having a high-performance meeting. The best meetings include a well-crafted agenda, have the right people around the table, solve real problems, and always document agreed-upon action items (to determine who will do what, by when).

As the leader, you get to decide how good your meetings will be. Over time and with practice, you and your team can learn to master meetings!

As the leader, you get to decide how good your meetings will be.

5

LACK OF FOCUS

There is a difference between a target and a bullseye.

I have a friend whose daughter is a competitive archer. My buddy explained to me the scoring. The different rings on the target all yield different levels of points. As the arrows hit closer to the center, it causes the points to go up. You do get points for the outside rings, but the winners are identified in the middle on the bullseye. “Aim small and miss small.”

The same is true in business. I meet so many leaders who have convinced themselves points here and there are enough. They are more sporadic than strategic in their thinking. While sporadic performance does yield points and might even keep you in business, it will never equal strategic execution. Does your team have a target or a bullseye? It is your job as a leader to identify the bullseye and keep your people consistently shooting at it, focused on the goals and objectives. Warning: this can be difficult to do because distractions are very real. There is a flurry of busyness usually knocking on the door. Do not confuse activity with accomplishment. A lack of focus will derail your vision.

If you have ever read the Bible, you have most likely run across the word “sin.” It comes from a Greek archery term which literally means, “to miss the mark.” I believe it is “business sin” when we allow our people to miss the bullseye because we never took the time to identify one.

If you will keep your people locked in on the bullseye, it can become a force multiplier for your results. Make your target as narrow as possible and challenge your people to execute with tunnel vision. Aim small and your best days are ahead.

Does your team have a target or a bullseye?

6

LOW ENGAGEMENT

Do your people care?

I know it sounds like a crazy question, but if they are like the rest of the American workforce, chances are, they don't as much as you think they do. The latest research from Gallup shows only 34% of American workers are engaged at work. What?! Shockingly, only one out of every three people give a rip about their work.

It is hard to find good people and even harder to keep them. But there is one thing worse than losing a good worker: losing them without them telling you. Every day, millions of good people show up having left their leader without letting them know they're gone. They stay on the payroll, sucking up valuable resources, spreading low morale, and holding back their best – sometimes for years.

Please don't let this happen on your watch. As a leader, you have the ability to win the hearts of your people and create a culture of engagement. You do this by validating those you lead. They need to be seen and heard, appreciated and affirmed, and trusted with meaningful work.

Engagement multiplies impact!

The greatest untapped resource in the world resides within the four walls of your organization: the virtually unlimited supply of passion, energy, and creativity resident in the hearts and minds of your employees. Win them over and watch them soar. Engagement multiplies impact!

7

COMPLACENCY

I spend a lot of my time on airplanes.

Because of my frequent flyer status, I often find myself in the comfort seats, in front of coach, but unfortunately not quite in the luxury of first class. Truthfully, every time I book my seats, the first-class seats are available. But like most people, I settle for comfort because I'm not willing to pay the price to be upfront in the section with the grapes, goblets, and thrones.

As you think about your business, I want to remind you that complacency is your biggest rival. Past successes or weak competition can lure you into thinking you are better than you really are. Great teams compete against a standard and judge themselves accordingly.

Complacency is your biggest rival.

Are there places where you have grown comfortable? Settling for less than your best? High performance leaders are never comfortable being comfortable. They are comfortable when they are courageously reaching for excellence. They always raise the bar!

How good do you want to be? Are you willing to pay the price that greatness requires? There is an old Latin word, *Quantuvis*. It means, "as great as you choose." Settling will never get you to your potential. Crush the barrier of complacency and choose greatness. If you will, your organization can be first class!



NEGLECTING THE NUMBERS

People love to keep score.

From sports stats to grade books, metrics give us an idea of how well we are doing. Keeping score is simply a part of life. For sports teams, if you're not keeping score, you're not playing the game – you're practicing. In business, if you're not keeping score, you're not leading – you're lagging and you're leaving money on the table.

After all, what gets measured gets accomplished. But when a team undervalues the numbers, they never reach their potential.

If you're not keeping score, you're not leading – you're lagging.

If your team is not already keeping score, it's not too late to create a scorecard and align your behavior with the metrics that determine the health of your organization. While you can't measure everything and remain focused, you can give your people three to five key metrics to serve as grading scale. Your scorecard is meant to be a dynamic tool to measure the metrics that matter most. They may change over time, but you can start with what you are currently trying to do and begin valuing the numbers.

The score should cascade to the entire team, not just the chosen few at the top. It's hard to envision a football game where only the coach and quarterback are allowed to know the score. And yet, I've met leaders who know the numbers but don't bother to share them with the workers on the front line, or even their core team, only to be frustrated when their people don't perform. The numbers should occupy a prime spot in every meeting you have. They will tell you how you are doing, show what you need to do differently, give you a reason to celebrate, and reveal gaps as well as opportunities. If you will effectively create a scorecard tied to your purpose and goals, you can position your team to continually improve.

9

UNDERVALUING CHARACTER

Many leaders are skilled in their work.

They have an amazing ability to identify and cast a vision, assemble and mobilize a team, lead meetings, create resources, solve problems, and achieve goals. However, without the right leadership character, they can still fail to reach the summit. There is nothing worse than getting to the top of the mountain and realizing you are alone. It doesn't have to be lonely at the top. Loneliness is often a result of climbing over people rather than with them.

The best leaders I know are ones who others want to follow – not because of their skills, but usually because of their character. An iceberg gives us a good picture of this dichotomy, with what's above the waterline representing skills and what's below representing character. A leader needs both. If you can remember elementary science, you will recall about 90% of the iceberg is found below the waterline.

Similarly, there is a disproportionate value given to a leader's character. If you undervalue its importance, you can lose your team, and you'll have little chance of becoming a leader others are excited to take the hill with. People don't leave organizations. Typically, they leave leaders who undervalue the importance of character.

Leadership really does start with the heart. There's an old proverb that reads, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." Wise words indeed. Character-driven leaders are marked by humility, positivity, and integrity. They are teachable, caring, and desire to grow themselves as much as they do their work. Refuse to undervalue the importance of character; it is the foundation of all great leadership. Never forget, if your heart is not right, no one cares about your skills.

If your heart is not right, no one cares about your skills.

CONCLUSION

Obviously, there is no comprehensive list of the things that can stand in the way of how good you and your people can be.

Ultimately, as a leader, it is your responsibility to own the outcomes of everything and everyone you lead. Make the decision to identify and remove the barriers standing in the way of high performance. That's what leaders do.

Remember, you can be as great as you choose!





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Randy Gravitt is an author, speaker, and executive coach who encourages leaders to reach their potential.

In 2014, Randy founded InteGREAT Leadership where he currently serves as the CEO (Chief Encouragement Officer), leading a team of coaches and consultants who work with high-performance leaders, organizations, and teams all over the world.

As a speaker, Randy delivers keynotes and training workshops on the topics of leadership, team building, organizational effectiveness, and peak performance. Those he works with include Chick-fil-A, Grand Hyatt, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Kroger, and the Winshape Foundation. He has also served as one of the leadership coaches for the Pittsburgh Pirates and the Buffalo Bills.

Randy's writing includes two books he co-authored with Dan Webster, *Finding Your Way* and *Unstuck*. Both titles are aimed at helping leaders discover their passion and live fully engaged lives.

Outside of work, Randy enjoys playing golf, reading, fishing, and traveling. He and his wife Laura live in Sharpsburg, Georgia and they have four daughters. You can find Randy on social media @randygravitt or connect with him at randygravitt.com.

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