MINDSET MONTHLY

Create a Culture of Independent Thinkers

Adapted from Gary B. Cohen

"If you're a leader with all the answers, that means you don't listen to your staff".

Hugh Arnold

We watched movies that often gave us the impression that in order to succeed, the boss must always give all the answers to any questions, issues and challenges that confront the team.

Some of us may have come across bosses who seem to have all the answers and always know exactly what to do.

In reality, leaders do not have all the answers and people today are not looking to their leaders to have all the answers. They are looking for a boss who is genuine, who values the team members, respects their ideas and expertise and who is willing to listen to suggestions before making the final decisions that affect the team.

Leaders have to put their ego aside and focus on being facilitators, in order to create a culture of independent thinkers rather than approval-seekers. In this way, leaders can leverage on their collective creativity to improve the quality of decision-making. Some pointers on how to make this work:

1. Challenge beliefs and assumptions

Resist acting instinctively on your own beliefs and assumptions, which are usually skewed by personal biases. Allow your beliefs and assumptions to be challenged as new information is gathered. The goal is to share the load and get everyone to feel that they have a part in arriving at the solution.

2. Encourage ownership

Communicate trust in your staff's ability in decision-making. The best answer usually comes from the people responsible for executing it. Ownership of an idea creates engagement, drive and efficiency.

3. Build confidence

Trust your staff to make sound decisions. Set realistic expectations and provide your staff with increasingly important tasks and decision-making opportunities.

4. Encourage growth

Resist the need to provide the answers, although it may appear that everyone would benefit from your answer-providing habits. Create opportunities for your staff to take more risks, receive more credits and learn more. The good people will stick around and grow with you.

5. Ask open-ended questions

Avoid asking leading questions so as to save time in the decision-making process. Open-ended questions harness the intellectual power of the organisation and motivate staff to achieve at their best.

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