



As seen in *Training + Development Magazine*

# Check the Temperature, Your Pulse, and Your Team

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*As far as painful memories are concerned, most of the extremely difficult decisions we, as leaders, had to make after the Fall of 2008 will remain, indelibly, with us forever.*

The world was changing, and we had to change in order to stay afloat.

Resources were limited everywhere we turned. Time was tight, and we were stretched thin. And for those of us who prevailed, there are lessons. We learned much about our surroundings, about ourselves, and about our teams. While most of us have emerged smaller, we have come through it all stronger, with a renewed understanding of who we are and what is possible.

We have learned that while we need to adapt to the changing tides, our principles remain steadfast.

And now, with the wind blowing ever so

softly at our backs, we sense that we can finally breathe a sigh of relief. At least, we can breathe a bit easier. As we feel the breeze, and, for a fleeting moment, reflect on what we've all been through, let's consider the wall. The wall we've all had our backs against. What happens as we start to move away from that wall? How do we feel? Uncomfortable? Finally released? Unsure? Hesitant? Ready for the next challenge?

As we start to move away from the wall we've had our backs against, the question looms: Where are we going? Which direction do we take? As we sense a glimmer of hope, there is that strange feeling in the back of our heads: When the wall was against our backs, at least we knew where we were.

## So where do we go from here?

We are getting mixed signals, daily, from the forecasters. That light at the end of the tunnel seems bright. Yet way too many are still unemployed.

So where do we stand? How do we take what we have learned and apply it moving forward?

When we're challenged, we end up learning about ourselves—about our natural strengths and limitations.

We've certainly learned to work harder, hopefully smarter. And we've learned to worry less about what we don't have and focus more on how to maximize what we've got.

From there, our true leadership emerges.

The first thing we, as leaders, have to do is to understand ourselves—and equally to understand how we connect with those around us.

Self-awareness is the stepping stone to successful leadership. Can we honestly evaluate what sets us apart? And what might be holding us back?

Do we have the confidence to surround ourselves with others who are far better than us in certain areas?

Do we know when to rely upon ourselves? And when we need insights from others? Are we able to create an environment where collaboration, honesty, and open communication fill the airwaves?

As leaders, we don't need to have all the answers ourselves. But we do need to recognize them when we hear the right answers. And know when to ask the right questions. Can we create an environment where the best ideas can be heard freely?

As leaders, we need to foster an environment of genuine openness in which ideas, opinions, observations, and disagreements are encouraged. It is up to us to set that tone. And to stay in touch with top performers inside and outside our organization. To listen to their take on what is happening and their forecast for what is around the corner.

How do they feel things are going? What are they confident about? And what are they concerned about?

As leaders, we have to have our antenna up at all times—to encourage conversation and debate. And, most importantly, to be able to distinguish between random background noises and those significant messages, however faint, that need our attention.

To check the temperature, we need to be aware of our own pulse.

Are we encouraging those around us to step up and speak their minds? Or are we looking for people to agree with us? Are we trying to uncover the truth? Or are we more interested in having the final word?

Only by trusting ourselves can we trust others. And that's when others will find trust in us.

Skip Cimino, the Chief Executive Officer of Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, has learned this by leading in business and government, before coming to health care. "Clearly, the issue of having to do more with less is paramount for all hospital administrators in the country," Cimino says. "The way I look at this is not from a command and control perspective. Instead, we have invited input from all of our employees, from every level of the organization, to determine how we can reduce our resources while still improving the delivery of services that we need to effectively run a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week, 365-day-a-year organization."

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He adds, “Our belief is that in economic times like this, or in point of fact, in dealing with any times, that the people closest to the source of the work potentially have the best ideas about how to do the work more efficiently.” He pauses, then adds, “My job is to listen to them and to implement the best ideas.”

How does he create a formal way of identifying and recognizing the people on his staff who have the talent and the potential to contribute valuable ideas?

“First and foremost, I sincerely believe that people come to work every day to give you an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay. I do not believe that people come into the workplace with the intention of not doing a good job. I also believe, inherently, that people bring enormous value to an organization and, therefore, I believe you have to place real trust in your interaction with people,” he says.

Cimino adds, “I also believe that leading is about delegating, which implies a measure of allowing risk taking, and not have risk taking be penalized. If we all think about it, we all have to keep learning. As I look back over my career, I learned from failures and mistakes probably more than I did from the positive outcomes.”

“In the end,” he notes, “it’s all about teamwork. It’s not about the leader standing in front of the pack. Sure, your responsibility is to help lead, shape, guide, and direct. But you can’t do that as an individual to move any organization, particularly an organization of size. It takes lots of people working together in a harmonious fashion to create progress. So, in my view, teamwork is essential to any successful organization. Helping to create those teams is one of the most important things a leader can do.”

As a leader, who are you surrounding yourself with? Are they a talented group of individuals? Or a cohesive, collaborative team?

“We are continually striving to create a better, more cohesive team,” Cimino concludes. “The hope is for all of us, including myself, to understand that we have strengths and that there are opportunities for us to improve ourselves. And that together, as a more cohesive unit, we will be able to function more efficiently and understand what our strengths and opportunities are among each other. And in doing so, we will then be able to guide the organization more effectively as its leadership team.”

Developing an effective team out of a group of talented individuals can be very challenging because the executive team is usually comprised of people who are at the heart of the organization, but who view it through different lenses. Often conflicts can arise simply because they either speak a different language or come at a problem from a different perspective. So as the leader, what you’re trying to do is create more of a collaborative approach where people understand that they are all coming at the situation for the right reasons. The balancing act involves helping them understand the reasons each of them are coming to the table and appreciating each other’s strengths and perspectives in order to truly collaborate.

Creating such a team is where true leadership emerges.

Teamwork is about the willingness of individuals to step up, take responsibility, become accountable, accept risk, and move forward.

As a leader, you have to create an environment in which each team member feels that he or she can do the things that need to be done for the organization—recognizing that organizations do not succeed because of a single individual, but because everybody is in alignment and everyone understands the strategic vision and the tactical plan as to how to move that organization forward.



It is all about setting a very positive, optimistic tone. It is about believing in the people you surround yourself with, allowing them to make mistakes from time to time, and creating an environment where they know that you believe in them and that there is trust.

For only when there is trust can teamwork and true collaboration come about.

How do your teams work together?

Do the members of the team know you believe in them?

Molson Coors has developed an integrated process that enables leadership teams to work together most effectively and collaborate in productive ways. Bree Ranieri, the Director of Human Resources at Molson Coors, explains, “We’ve undergone some basic team assimilation. We want team members to understand each other—specifically what strengths each individual brings to the team. Then we also want them to understand how they complement one another or where there might be some groupthink or some gaps around where the team might need to bring in other team members, or bring in outside constituents to enhance the decision-making process.”

“We focus significantly on people development,” says Ranieri. “And part of bringing out the best in people is really thinking differently and being an organization that can encourage a truly creative element in all of us.”

## How does a group of talented individuals become a team?

“Certainly we had some larger goals that the team ultimately must be working towards,” she explains. “But we decided up front that we really needed to make sure that we had a core level of trust amongst the team, a level of respect amongst the team, and that we also established some operating norms with the team.”

As the leader, it is up to you to set the tone for what will happen—then to help drive the organization to its potential success.

The message, as we emerge from these tough times, is to focus at least as much on developing the potential of the people working for us as we do on the results we are trying to achieve.

Then, if we listen carefully to the signals around us, develop our own capabilities, believe in the people we surround ourselves with, and develop true teams—our expectations will be exceeded.

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