

BOOK REVIEW: Olympics coach shows managers how to win

Turning every experience into a learning opportunity

The Winning Factor: Inspire Gold-Medal Performance In Your Employees. By Peter Jensen. Amacom, 221 pp.

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After reading this book, most tenured branch managers will wish they had read it in their first year of managing. Author Peter Jensen has nailed it.

In The Winning Factor Jensen, a veteran Olympic and corporate coach, details means of increasing

levels of performance in the workplace. The Winning Factor has much validity in that it helps leaders and managers to win with their employees by inspiring and empowering them.

Six steps to being a better manager

There are six practices to increase levels of performance in the workplace and they are as follows.

Now at first one would think "I do all of these on a daily basis," if they just read the basic list. But read on.

1. Communication. Jensen considers this the most important of the six practices. And in communicating asking questions is the first and best way to start.

"The questions and their answers give the employees influence over their own actions and ownership of the issues they are dealing with," says Jensen. Never asking why, but instead, what helps to uncover a block, solve a problem, and implement solutions, according to Jensen. Asking why is not effective because it pushes the person into defensiveness.

The second and third part to communication is being an effective listener and giving good feedback.

Listening, as the author describes, "is the act of being present to another human being with the intent of truly understanding what is being said." A powerful point, I believe, because effectively listening and giving good feedback brings on self-awareness and in turn builds trust.

2. Managing yourself. It is important to manage yourself because that is the only way you can manage someone else. I found this quote in the book to be helpful:

"If calmness is required, you need to use certain techniques to manage your own energy level while simultaneously encouraging the development of the same skill and techniques in the other person."

In other words, a leader/manager needs to be able to manage employees by managing their own expectations, personal tendencies, and the ability to make good decisions and communicate clearly and effectively, in order for them to evoke the same in any member of their staff.

3. Building trust. The author puts much emphasis on how to gain trust and explains why trust is an integral part of increasing performance.

"Trust leads to commitment and committed people outperform others," Jensen explains. "Without trust one cannot confront and deal with difficult and challenging issues."

A decrease in trust, on the other hand, leads to an increase in cost and time.

Jensen presents three key steps to obtaining trust. The leader/manager must be the first to extend trust. Second, the leader/manager needs to understand progression. "This lets your employees know that you know where they are 'at' developmentally and that you have an understanding of the next steps," he writes.

Last, there is a need to involve the performer. The performer will understand that you want to make the most of what you both know.

4. Encourage and use imagery. According to Albert Einstein, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." Jensen maintains that since because people cannot do things they can't imagine, then imagery is critical to help them see where to go.

He cites three ways to encourage and use imagery.

First, paint a clear picture, then create a line of sight from individual action to the end goal. And finally, encourage employees to

translate.

In summary, a leader/manager should aim to eliminate frustration by not harping on the end goal, which will help to reduce stress, giving the performer a way to visualize what success looks like.

5. Uncover and work through road blocks.

Here the author emphasizes that a leader/manager "should never block a block with a block."

His point is that when someone is frustrated that something is not going well, the leader/manager should never add to the frustration by compounding the problem.

Jensen maintains that the good leader/manager finds out what's in the employee's way and focuses on that. The three components to uncovering and working through blocks are debriefing every performance; asking effective questions; and actively listening.

Based on my own experience, I agree with a quote from the author that basically sums up why debriefing every performance is important.

"If we do not debrief and evaluate every performance, we are in no position to evaluate and learn from the disasters."

More broadly, if a leader/manager does not take the time to debrief their employees' performance, then how will their people know specifically how they are doing? And what needs to happen next?

Asking effective questions was mentioned earlier when the author detailed communication and its importance. He states the importance of asking effective questions, but in this section dives more deeply into the types of questions that should be asked and the potential positive results.

The final means of uncovering--to uncover and work through road blocks--is actively listening.

"You're helping that person develop clarity around the true nature of the issue with which the person is dealing, and because you are also gaining that clarity yourself," he writes, "once the person has exhausted his

or her own ideas, you are in a position to help with your own input."

Listening provides clues to unravel the mysteries and put the leader/manager in a position to be a good coach.

6. Embrace adversity. This may not sound appealing, but go with it.

The author gives three suggestions when helping employees to embrace adversity.

First, anticipate and lay the groundwork for recovery.

Then reframe ASAP--which means, move your thoughts away from seeing something as an obstacle or roadblock and look for the opportunity for development.

And then create adversity to test resiliency.

There are big wins to be had in helping others deal effectively with life's challenges. The author states that "you can accelerate the development in performers by helping them change their perception in adverse situations and overcome obstacles, thereby increasing their level of confidence."

Planning is a great way to anticipate and lay groundwork for recovery because it reduces the impact of adversity.

In "reframing ASAP," the author feels a leader/manager must decipher the nature of the situation and what is needed. Or sit down with the individual or team and let them talk about the worst-case scenario and outcome of reframing. Or just simply state the situation and say, "We don't want to go through this and we don't like having to go through it, but seeing we have no choice, where do you see the opportunities?"

Now, creating adversity, to test resiliency, may seem mean.

But the author advises that "it is about being developmental. We have to assist people to move out of their comfort zone if we are to develop them."

As an example, he tells the story of a coach who built up a track and field athlete's abilities by making noises of various kinds just before the athlete attempted a move, such as a broad jump. They had to learn to overcome the distraction.

Putting Winning Factor into practice

This book should be considered a bible or "go to" book for new and experienced leaders/managers because it encompasses all facets of how to win in the workplace with your employees.

I cannot believe all the takeaways that can inject from Winning Factor into my daily branch life while managing my staff. After reading the book I had to question, had I read this book in my first year of managing, how much more effective I would be, and would have been, in my efforts to inspire and empower.

Luckily, it is never too late to be a better leader/manager.

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