



(U.S. Army photo by Spc. Devron Bost)

By Richard Farnell

We all understand the importance of running an organization both effectively and efficiently. However, it is important to realize organizational [goals](#) have the potential to be jeopardized when leaders lose sight of how they are winning.

To win the right way, leaders must routinely instill the right [ethics](#), values, and practices for long-term success. Moreover, they must foster a productive and fruitful culture that nurtures individual contributions and encourages one to perform at their highest potential. For example, in a football game, it is possible to achieve a touchdown and players not perform at their highest potential. This can be misleading for those that do not understand the long-term effects of poor cohesion, integrity and shared understanding of the overall mission. In this example, the touchdown may have been executed, but it does not mean the team is winning the right way. The next time the team members need each other for a

particular play, they might fail due to a lack of trust and dysfunction. This is not surprising, but winning the right way starts with people, as they are the nucleus of the success of the organization.

However, well-intentioned people can be either stifled or nurtured by culture, making it essential to have people and culture aligned for success. Think about it. If you have the right people but the culture is toxic, those people will become de-energized, frustrated, and ultimately underutilized.

Leaders should assess team dynamics - how the team as a unit is winning and if the “how” is sustainable. For example, if a supervisor is heavily reliant on one person, the team can potentially win, but this is not optimizing talents, nor is it typically sustainable. In this situation, the supervisor is continuously framing an unrealistic expectation for the entire team and potentially devaluing other members. Frequently, this occurs when supervisors become comfortable depending on select team members and inevitably lose sight of talents offered by others on the team.

People like to feel valued, and how they feel determines how well they work together, their output, and, ultimately, the organization’s success. Winning the right way requires understanding each team member’s strengths and optimizing them. Doing so can produce exponential benefits that can translate to organizational results.

When all team members contribute to meeting objectives, they are metaphorically moving the football down the field to score a touchdown for the entire team. Those in positions of [leadership](#) and power are charged with identifying the team’s strengths and weaknesses in order for individuals to be encouraged and guided to reach their maximum potential. This type of positive energy and building of trust allows a team to remain and grow together through the inevitable turbulence of change and modernization.

Winning the right way also entails capturing and monitoring the right data and implementing it into the organization’s routine. This means once the desired results and behaviors have been identified, the organization must recognize the measures that need to be taken to achieve established goals. For example, surveys or feedback sessions that measure employee engagement, perceived leadership styles, and company culture helps leaders better understand the needs and wants of the team. Additionally, feedback affords management the opportunity to quickly identify unhealthy biases, ill-informed decisions, and unethical practices that have the potential to be costly and possibly irreversible.

Regardless of the objective, leaders should understand the criticality of keeping their people

and organization postured for success. This can only be done by pragmatically teaching and encouraging the appropriate behaviors that will support the team as they continually strive for success, which will enable better atmospherics and accountability in the workplace and increase employee satisfaction. Simply achieving goals is not a sufficient measure of organizational success. It is imperative that leaders optimize team members and build a culture that can sustain long-term positive results. Therefore, leaders should reflect on how their organization is winning with a focus on people and culture. The “how” is just as important as the win. It is what the team will remember when they collectively face their next challenge, and it is vital for leaders to ensure the team is winning the right way.

Richard Farnell is a U.S. Army officer with more than 18 years of experience; he has led and trained multiple organizations in the military and has written articles for Harvard Business Review, Association for Talent Development, and military publications. He is also a doctoral student in education at Northeastern University.

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