

***The Leadership Star* by Brian Hartzel Book Review**

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The Leadership Star by Brian Hartzler discusses employee engagement and how leaders can improve engagement in their staff. The book goes over a five-point system that Hartzler has put together to engage the staff, keep a great work environment, and to help prevent turnover. I am currently a General Manager of a restaurant, and I feel like engagement is something that can be difficult in the restaurant business. I choose this book to read to help relate to the staff more and hopefully help with turnover rates and create a more well rounded team. Throughout the book, Metzger goes over the five key points to his theory, which include care, context, clarity, clear the way, and celebrate (Hartzler xviii). He also includes chapters on how to use the framework in real life and adds points for leaders to reflect on their own leadership style and engagement. The book starts off with an introduction where Hartzler explains what engagement is and why it is important. He explains that business with high engagement can have higher profitability, more productivity, better customer stratification, and overall better environments (xvi). This paper will go over key parts of the book and break down the leadership star and how I believe that it will help in my career as a leader.

The first section of the book focuses on the point of the star for care. Hartzler mentions that there are three main components to care for; care as individual human beings, care for their development and growth, and care for results (5). This seems like something that should be easy but is something that quite a few leaders struggle with. Care is the foundation of any leadership. If employees feel like a leader does not care for them as individuals and workers, they will not want to put their best work forward for them. Hertzler states that “Care is an action verb. It is not a state of being” (6). I thought that this statement was really true. Care is something that you need to work on and foster. You can say that you care about your employees and team, but if you

do not work to show it and actively take an interest, then it will not come across. Hartzler also describes care as not just for the individual person, but for the work they produce and the results that they are giving. Part of being a leader is finding good people and helping them to produce great work. Obviously, leaders need to be sympathetic to people and give workers a chance and coaching, but if the results are not there it might be time to move on. Not only will this help you to have better results, but it will also show the rest of the team that you do care about the results. “When you show people that you care about the results, you send a message that the work your organization does is important, and that what your people do matters” (Hartzler 24).

The next section of the star is context. Context is something that a leader needs to define and emphasize to all employees. It is the reason for the business and the reason they are there. It is the company’s big picture and defines the organizations’ purpose, priorities, and looks at the individuals' roles to make things happen (Hartzler 29). This section talks a lot about creating purpose statements, both for the workers and for the customers. Purpose statements help the employees know exactly why they are there. They set clear expectations about the top priorities of the company and help them to align their work priorities to match. Purpose statements can also help the potential customers to know exactly what they are going to get and if they want to do business with a certain company. Purpose statements need to be something that the leader believes in and should not be something with just a bunch of cliché buzz words (Hartzler 32,34). Having something that you believe in will not only help you feel more connected to the work, but it will also help to inspire others to follow it as well. If even the leader does not believe in what they are trying to preach then the worker will not either.

Hartzler also discusses how important each individual role in a company is. He talks about how each role has a direct purpose and needs to be treated as such. The job of a leader is to make

sure everyone knows their role and how it connects to the bigger picture (40). If the staff feels like they are the true part of the team then they are going to produce more work that they are truly passionate about. There will also be better work relations. If everyone knows that everyone is important then there will not be as much infighting or confrontation. I see this at work a lot. In the restaurant business everyone is just as important as everyone is. Sometimes you need to remind some of the less glamorous positions they are still just as valuable, or sometimes you need to remind others that the other roles are equally important. Even down to the dishwashers, who without we could not run a fast and efficient shift, everyone has their role.

After context comes clarity. Clarity is about going over expectations and having reasons for your actions. Clarity is broken down into three key aspects, role clarity, goal clarity, and behavioral clarity (Hartzler 50). Role clarity ties back into the previous section and making sure that everyone know exactly what they are supposed to be doing. It is giving people a formal job title that is accurate, letting them know who they are reporting to, and their responsibilities and skills required. (Hartzler 51). These kind of clarification will make sure that everyone is working on what they need to and not spending time on tasks that are not assigned to them. I also believe that it will help the staff to set some boundaries and keep a better work life balance. If the leader has done the first part correctly, then the worker should have a clear idea of exactly what they should be doing and if it is outside of their capability to finish it in the allowed time. If this is the case then they can let the leader know early and something can be worked out. This also prevents work from being piled on them that is outside of the job description that was agreed upon. If the leader is constantly trying to pile on work on to their plate, then they will become less productive on the other work, or disgruntled all together and not want to produce anything. This is why clarifying up front what the expectations are is crucial to operations. Goal clarity is going over

specific goals and ideas targets for a certain time period. It is important to set goals in order to gain motivation from people. If there is no goals set it might feel like there is no purpose to the work, however if the goal is unachievable then it out too much pressure on everyone and also will dampen the environment. Hartzler describes many goal “traps” that people often fall into including adding too many measures, too high of targets, too low of targets, or too generic of targets (55). For too many measures he states that if the scorecard is too long then no one will want to read it and it will be ignored. I have found that this is true especially with the more inexperienced and younger crowd. If there is too much to focus on then they will not focus on anything. For the targets, Hartzler's states that there must be a sweet spot. If the target is too high then it will feel unachievable and therefore employees will feel like there is no point. If it is too low then there is nothing to push and strive for. If the target is too generic then it might be able to apply to more then one task and it could get confusing, or the employees could take advantage and not complete both tasks.

One main reason to set clear goals to definine what good performance is vs great performance (Hartzler 57). Good performance is about meeting all deadlines and targets. It is about meeting all expectations of the role. Great performance is a little more subjective, but it about going beyond the goals and expectations and “stretching” it (58). Hartzler also explains though, that not everything needs to be a goal and sometimes not having specific goals is also important (61). People want to feel like they can work without having targets hung over their head, or looming deadlines. The last of clarity is behavioral clarity. Behavior clarity is about setting boundaries and guidelines for how you want your employees to act and treat each other. It is about setting a code of conduct and making sure that it is followed, and setting what your values as a company are (Hartzler 66-67). There needs to be clear definitions of what is

acceptable and what is not, and it needs to be discussed early and should have check-ins and reminders every so often. These are all practices that will help the company's morale and keep everyone on the same page. Hartzler states that the lack of clarity can often be the reason for underperformance and or poor execution (51).

The fourth point of the triangle is to clear the way. Clearing the way is about getting rid of any obstacles that are in the employees' way to success. One major point of that is simply just asking people "what is blocking you?" (Hartzler 84). This simple question can provide a lot of insight into problems. I know from experience that sometimes people will not want to tell you exactly what is wrong or what is going on until you ask. Asking this tells people that you do care, and you want to fix problems. In addition to asking the questions, the next step is to identify the barriers. One of the best ways to do this is to just go and look. Also talking to the staff who are actually doing the tasks and asking them how exactly they do things to see if it is efficient. I know for the restaurant business this part is huge. When you ask them how they complete a task sometimes it is in a super weird way or not efficient at all, so we look at our policies and change things. Barriers can also be invisible barriers like intellectual, cultural, emotional, or political (Hartzler 99). These can be harder to remedy but are important to note and to take into consideration. I know recently I have worked with a food runner who was celebrating Ramadan, so he had to leave every shift around 7 to go break his fast. This was something that he did not know if it would be ok, because it is usually the busiest time of the restaurant, but it is just something that we need to cover for, and the manager just might need to run food for 5-10 minutes. It is something small, but it was a barrier that we tried to clear for him. Sometimes, however, the leader needs to not clear the way. Hartzler explains that constraints and pressure can be a valuable tool for success (93). Deadlines and other pressures like budgets can help to boost

productivity and show that you actually are serious and want to get things done. If you are constantly making things too easy for people, then there will be nothing to push for and improvements.

The last topic is celebrate. Recognition is important. It keeps morale up and lets people know that the work they are doing is appreciated. Recognition though is something that should have some guidelines to it. Hartzler describes it as something that has a sweet spot. It should be frequent and periodic, formal, and informal, individual and team, and so on (112-113). If you give recognition too much then it will not feel as meaningful, but if you do not give it enough then they will feel undervalued. Formal recognition is really nice and should be done. Employee of the month or other formal programs are a great idea, but sometimes a simple “you’re doing a great job” while passing in the hallway is nice too. There also needs to be team and individual celebrations. In the restaurant, sometimes we shout out an entire team or address everyone who was working one night, while other times, we shout out a specific person.

The second section of the book focus on growing as a leader and ‘expanding the star.’ The middle of the star is you. Hartzler states that if you just go through the motions of the five points, it will work, but not for long (141). You need to be genuinely committed to the purpose and want to engage with people. You need to find your own purpose. It is great to find a purpose for the company and the employees, but why are you a leader? They need to look at themselves and ask why they are in the position, what principles they want to live by, and what changes they want to see (Hartzler 143). The leader needs to ask these questions to gain a more understanding of why they are there. If they are just going through the motions, then the rest of the staff will catch on and just go through the motions as well. This will also bring more self-awareness. Self-awareness is super important and will help a leader to learn what they need to work and improve.

People with good self-awareness know what strengths they have and how to use them and know the weakness and how to improve them. They are more able to connect with people and build relationships with staff and guests (Hartzler 144-145). The other aspect is bringing energy and empathy into the role. No one wants to work with someone who is always grumpy and does not want to be there. If you bring energy into a slower environment, it will help pump people up and want to be there. These are all parts that will help the team be more successful and for the leader to be more focused.

The outer part of the star is communication. Communication is huge to building good staff engagement. There are four main components to strong communication; making an effective communication plan that works, using obvious multiple methods to reach people, make messages that are meaningful, and to listen to feedback (Hartzler 159). There are many different methods of communication to reach an audience. A leader can use meetings, emails, announcements, or just face to face conversations to get points across. There should be more than one tool used to really get the point across. The messages also need to be meaningful and something that will stick (Hartzler 164). It needs to be clear and concise and to the point. If it is too wordy or too long people will zone out. If a meeting is too long and filled with insignificant things, then the significant stuff will get lost. The last point was about listening and making changes as needed. There is no point to communication if the person talking is not going to listen to the response. If you want people to listen to you then you need to listen back and take their feedback to heart.

The last section of the book covers how to practice engagement in times of crisis. A lot of these examples were given in a perfect world, which is obviously not real life. Leaders also need to know how to build engagement in unusual circumstances and hardships. This could be due to

a change in leadership, or financial hardship, or legal challenges, or other stressful situations (Hartzler 174). Leaders need to be able to still build engagement and relationships during challenging and changing times. Some ways to tackle this include the groundwork, recognizing the changing needs, communicating with empathy, and being decisive (Hartzler 175). Laying the groundwork will give with a plan for when things do go wrong. It can help to have back up plans and not leave people unprepared. Recognizing the changing needs is super important. If things are super tough, then the leaders might need to go a little easier on the staff. Deadlines might need to be pushed or accommodated. If there is major change in leadership, then maybe the sales need to be looked at and adjusted for a quarter to accommodate. The leader needs to be able to adjust plans accordingly. This also goes with empathy. Leaders need to be empathic to other situations and adjust their plans. They can also add more recognition into the engagement plant to help build morale. The last point was to be decisive. If there are major shifts, or crisis, then the staff will look to the leader for decision and to be firm. People will look to them to have a plan and to make it quickly. Poor execution can really undermine what the leader is doing and will make a team nervous about the leader and the direction the company is going (Hartzler 185). Most of these topics tie back into the original star, but during a time of uncertainty, a leader needs to pick and choose points to focus on to get back to where things should be.

Engagement is something that defiantly takes work, but it is something that all leaders should try and focus on to build a better team and work environment. I felt like Brian Hartzler did an excellent job in this book going over the concepts of engagement. It was done in a clear and engaging way. Each section also had a summary section and questions for reflection. This was helpful because it was a time to reflect on how the reader is as a leader and manager. Reading some of the reflection questions I really realized some ways that I need to improve and points

that I should work on. I can take the questions and the material I learned in the book and try to implement them into my daily work. I felt like this book could apply to multiple professions and defiantly applied to me in the restaurant business. There were many topics that I will try and implement with my staff and other managers. I enjoyed reading *The Leadership Star* and would recommend it to other leaders and aspiring leaders.

Reference List

Hartzer, B. (2021). *The Leadership Star: A practical guide to building engagement*. John Wiley & sons Australia, LTD