

7 leadership habits to make your IT teams

By Stephen Morris, Founder and Director, Open Square

ROCK

Introduction

There's a massive difference between teams that **rock** and those that just don't. Not only do the teams that **rock** deliver some phenomenal, off-the-page results, they are a joy to work with and be part of. These teams act like magnets for more amazing people, deliver remarkable value for customers and inspire action in others. How do you build, develop and grow teams like this?

In this short article we're going to share seven key leadership habits that make teams **rock**, something that's becoming even more essential as the fourth industrial revolution bites.

Habit 1: Cultivate yourself

As a leader you should already be acting to improve your team, but never neglect yourself. We all have more to learn, and none of us are 'finished'. As a leader, taking visible steps to develop your own skills, experience and attributes can have a wonderful effect. Intrinsically you will become a better leader as you move through ideas, methods and the edges of your comfort zone. Extrinsically you will inspire your teams and colleagues to do something about their own development too.

Habit 2: Cultivate your team

Whatever the destination that you're trying to reach, your team are everything. As a leader you may have clearly set the destination (or helped the team interpret the Customer's destination), but your team are the engine, the wheels and the navigation system. You must invest and maintain that team in tip-top condition to get the best results. Act to make sure that everyone in that team – new, old, temporary, permanent, flexible, student – have what they need and feel an equal part of the team. This focus needs to also include hiring, where a strong link and partnership with recruitment teams will help you maintain and improve standards. And a tip on who to hire? A great yardstick is: "People that are meaningfully better than you". That is, they hold an expertise or have a capability above your own.

Habit 3: Make information open and accessible

Would you like to speed up your delivery, decision making and fault resolution? People will provide faster, higher quality answers when expertise and knowledge are open and accessible. In an increasingly technical workplace, or as we're delivering complex projects, making information flow freely gives you significantly more opportunities to learn, spot problems or mistakes and change direction quickly. In the most complex deliveries, or those that are cutting new ground, it's the only way to succeed. To harness that power, encourage communities (of similar minded, skilled or targeted people), strengthen networks between teams and reward sharing/collaborative behaviour. It works.

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Habit 4: Orient teams with unifying measures

Measurements of people, teams and businesses are essential, but often misunderstood and badly applied. When setting measures and targets, think about how people could approach them and spend time checking that if they're met, you've got what you want. A focus on call-answer time may be important for you, but will that impact quality of work or individual stress, and therefore retention? Get your measures right and you can watch not only your results, but behaviours and culture shift up.

Habit 5: Use visible thinking to cut waste

How do you get to great answers quickly when we're in an ocean of information? Answering this question will pay back immensely in project teams and operations teams alike. Fortunately, there are methods, frameworks and tools available that do just that – they organise and present quality, refined data in a systemised way to teams. Systemising isn't about restricting or controlling creativity, it's about freeing it. Think of a firefighter – their equipment is organised and maintained so that when needed there's no distraction from the goal. Information for you and your teams can be the same.

Habit 6: Lead openly

Would you like an accountable team that takes real ownership? Assigning accountability might work in the very short term, but it builds resentment, tension and a fear of failure. Don't do that. Instead, relentlessly share information about the team's purpose, spend time providing context that links individuals to their related responsibilities, and then leave space for people to *take* accountability. Doing this builds trust, commitment and an unemotional platform from which feedback can be given and received, something that you must be doing every single day.

Habit 7: Trust and serve

If you act on nothing else, act on this. You've invested time in hiring great people, given them tools and a target to hit. Your job now is three things: First, get out of the way of the actual work being done and believe in your team's ability to deliver (you're going to need to give away control to achieve that. Don't stop until you're uncomfortable!). Second, be available and responsive to the needs of your team – you're accountable for the result, so if you need to coach, mentor or remove a roadblock, do it and then step back again. Finally, get feedback on your own performance – are your inputs and behaviours helping, hindering or annoying your team?

About Open Square

We develop IT leaders who want to grow, build amazing teams and deliver better results. We provide skills workshops, coaching and a unique leadership development programme designed specifically for leaders in IT: The Open Leader Method™.

If you would like to find out how we can help you build teams that take more ownership and deliver when everything around them is changing, give us a call or drop us an email for a no-obligation discussion.