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Unleashing the Potential Of Pride Builders



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Unleashing the Potential of Pride Builders

Nearly all companies have some master motivators—or what we call “pride builders”—at the front line—those who are able to achieve exceptional performance with their teams by fostering pride in the work each team member does. Pride builders develop deep and insightful knowledge of their people as individuals; they know what matters to them and why it matters. They use this knowledge to create powerful personal connections to the work. They go beyond building pride in the larger purpose and values of the company. They create exceptional performance by building pride directly in what their people must do each day.

Many pride builders are good managers, but they are very different from other good managers. For example, while good managers link the work to the larger mission and vision of the company, pride builders create emotional connections between the work and what matters most at personal level to their people. While good managers set a clear direction and create momentum by focusing on results, pride builders create momentum for results that becomes self-reinforcing. They focus on the behaviors required for results (i.e., the journey) as well as the results themselves (i.e., the destination). While good managers help those with strong potential progress along their development paths, pride builders act as powerful agents for each one of their people’s development needs and opportunities. Essentially, they enable people to be the “best they can be”.

Pride builders are valuable to an organization in a number of ways. First and foremost is the far-reaching impact they can have on performance. In addition, pride builders are in a unique position to spot roadblocks and provide potential solutions along the way. When necessary, pride builders will find creative ways to work around roadblocks in formal systems and processes to meet their performance goals. Given their position at or near the front line, they also often see opportunities that go unnoticed at higher levels in the organization. On a broader level, pride builders have the ability to foster alignment around company priorities and strategic goals by finding ways to connect those priorities and goals to the day-to-day work of their teams. By using pride builders as a source for ideas and solutions and using them to inspire behavioral changes, corporate leaders can have a significantly higher impact on frontline performance that would otherwise be impossible.

Understanding What Pride Builders Do

To unleash the potential of pride builders, you must first identify a handful of them and understand what they are doing differently. Although all pride builders create strong connections between what individuals care about on a deep personal level and the work they do, pride builders differ among themselves in the details of how they operate. This is true for a number of reasons: e.g., the actual work tasks vary in different parts of the company and the circumstances, skills, and preferences of pride builders and their teams differ. As a result, it is critical to understand how pride builders operate within your company. The “best practices” of pride-builders in other companies are much less useful.

Identifying pride builders is a two step process. The first step is to develop an initial short list of potential pride builders. The second is to select a few true pride builders on the list and understand how they operate.

Step One: Develop a Short List

Creating an initial list of potential pride builders is often surprisingly easy. A good place to start is simply to ask for nominations from teams, peers, and other managers. A simple set of criteria that focuses on how their people feel about doing demanding work for them is usually enough to guide the selection. Often, many people in the organization intuitively know who the best pride building managers are. Because pride builders tend to manage groups that are both highly engaged and performing above expectations, it is usually possible to confirm executive judgment of the likely candidates through performance metrics and engagement surveys.

It is important, however, to look beyond the “usual suspects” for pride builders. Focus on those on or close to the front line. Remember that while many pride builders will be recognized as being very good managers, many good or excellent managers doing the recognized things that good managers do are not pride builders. Conversely, some pride builders will not be particularly regarded as “high potential” managers. And, somewhat surprisingly, many pride-builders are not in formal managerial positions. In fact, most will not be on a fast track—long tenure in their current position often helps them develop into pride builders. If your initial list of candidates looks just like other lists of effective managers or high-potential superstars, you probably are not casting a wide enough net.

Once several pride builders have been identified, they will likely be the best source for additional referrals. Given their deep commitment to instilling pride in the work, pride builders themselves tend to be the best at identifying this passion in others.

Step Two: Probe a Select Few

With a short list of potential pride builders in hand, the next step is to conduct a “probe” of several to understand and document their concrete behaviors. The purpose of these probes is to identify specific behaviors and tactics that pride builders are using to instill emotional commitment in their people. These probes consist of separate interviews with the pride builder and with his or her direct reports. Whenever possible, the probes should also include direct observations of the pride builder’s work.

It is almost always the case that the best description of pride builder behaviors and the most useful insights come not from the pride builders themselves, but from their people. Pride builders often operate intuitively, behaving in the only way that makes sense to them. Unlike hi-pots, they are also often very unassuming people who are not comfortable talking about themselves. On the other hand, their people have often worked for a number of different managers and can provide valuable and specific insight into pride building behavior.

It is usually most productive to interview the direct reports as a group. This will not only allow them to hear and build upon each others’ insights, but it will also highlight the extent to which a pride builder tailors his or her approach to the different individuals on their teams. This individual “tailoring” is the key to their motivational success. The interviews should focus on soliciting stories about the pride builder’s management behaviors and methods of motivation and recognition.

It is typically valuable to conduct a dozen or so of these pride builder probes. Probes are usually more successful when conducted by people seen as “outsiders.” Often an important part of what pride builders do is reduce and manage frustrations with formal policies and procedures or difficult relationships with others in the company. For this reason, pride builders, and especially their front-line people, will be more open and honest when talking to someone perceived as being outside their part of the organization and without a threatening role in the formal hierarchy.

Through the probes, it will often become clear that a few of the managers originally selected are good managers, but are not pride builders. These interviews are not wasted. Interviewing a few good managers in a set of pride builder probes can be helpful to understanding the differences between good management and pride building, and to highlight what it is that pride builders do that is unique. *Again, the key is to find out what pride-builders in your environment do that most good managers do not do.*

Pride builder probes will reveal a wide variety of motivational tactics and strategies. Despite this diversity, there are a number of characteristics that typically distinguish pride builders in any organization. These themes will usually emerge quickly in the interviews and observations. For example, pride builders:

- **Are demanding and therefore not easy to work for.** However, they generate a “do your very best” kind of emotional commitment from their people. In that sense they are analogous to “Marine drill sergeants.” Nonetheless, they are always viewed with a positive connotation—the sense will be “tough, but fair” or “has high expectations, but helps you meet them.” Pride builders are often described as consistently enabling their people to reach higher than they thought possible.
- **Inspire trust.** Their people will use words like “trust,” “integrity,” “honesty,” and “courage” frequently and will often use them in surprising contexts.

- **Invest in their teams.** They dedicate what will usually be described as surprisingly large quantities of their own time to understanding what motivates each individual. They also provide important opportunities to each person, even when that appears costly or risky in the near term. Their focus is on developing each person for the longer term.
- **Make their team members stakeholders in the work.** As a result each individual feels a deep responsibility for the team's performance and takes considerable pride in the team's achievements as well as in their individual results.
- **Focus on one or two key metrics to help motivate their teams.** Sometimes these are quantitative, but sometimes not. Whether or not they are quantitatively measurable, the goals are clear as is the method of "assessment". These goals are linked to individual development goals, interests, and definitions of success. Importantly, the pride-builder recognizes and takes full advantage of the fact that each person's definition of "success" is unique to that individual.

These themes emerge consistently across pride builders in a wide variety of different companies ranging from high-flyers like SWA and Microsoft, to troubled situations like Aetna. Their relative importance will differ in different companies as will the way pride builders achieve their motivational imperatives. An important point of the probes is to document how pride builders do these things in your organization and what barriers they (and those who are not yet pride builders) must overcome.

Depending on the challenges and opportunities pride builders and their people face in a particular company or location, other themes will emerge as well. The picture of pride builders and of pride building techniques that emerges is quite specific to the context of any given company.

Performance Pilots: Connecting Pride to Performance

One thing that pride builders have in common is their relentless focus on performance, and their ability to use their motivation and managerial skills to motivate behaviors that lead to superior performance for the company. The most useful way to take advantage of this ability is to conduct a "performance pilot," wherein pride builders can influence particular performance objectives.

1. **Determine the specific behaviors that will improve performance results.** In a performance pilot, pride builders are aligned around a set of behaviors that determine performance improvement. While these behaviors might relate to pride building capability per se, it is often more valuable to focus on a specific business challenge. In either case, a critical component of the pilot is having a clear set of metrics by which success can be measured—both in terms of results, and in the behaviors that precede the results.
 2. **Carefully select the unit or units for the pilot.** It is important to pick the right challenge for the initial performance pilots, particularly if they are the first pilots. Initial pilots should be targeted at areas where success depends on the performance of a large number of people with similar jobs, and where it is possible to work directly with frontline pride builders to improve performance quickly. What "quickly" means will depend on the context and the challenge, but it usually makes sense to find something important that can begin to show real behavior change results in four to eight weeks after launch.
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3. **Choose a pilot design team.** An important early step is assembling a team to lead the pilot design and implementation. This pilot team will be accountable for launching and managing the pilot—it will be a team that does real work. Because it must do real work, the team should be small: i.e., 3-6 members is usually about right. Of course, it often makes sense for the team to draw on a relatively large number of people temporarily for specific and bounded pieces of work, for example, designing and testing solutions. When composing the pilot team, remember that its members will learn a lot about pride and pride-building capability in your company.
4. **Develop metrics and assessment mechanisms.** The first priority for the pilot team is defining or validating the metrics or assessment mechanisms whereby success will be determined. These mechanisms should be specific, compelling, and directly related to business priorities. In addition to the performance measures you chose, it is often valuable to track a reliable assessment mechanism of employee engagement or pride in the work itself. It is also important to include some indicators of behavior change—behavior change always precedes performance change.
5. **Determine the specific behaviors that need to change:** After settling on a small set of assessment mechanisms or metrics, the team must conduct interviews, surveys and/or observations to determine the small set of behaviors/ best practices that will be the focus of the pilot. After identifying a candidate set of behaviors, they can be refined and the list narrowed through a set of working sessions with pride builders. Most successful pilots focus on no more than 3 to 5 specific behaviors. The more directly proven pride-builders are involved in helping to determine these behaviors, the more credible they will be to others.
6. **Develop specific approaches for motivating behavior change:** The team must design and facilitate working sessions to enable the identified pride builders to disseminate these skills by connecting employees' sources of motivation to performance metrics or assessment mechanisms. Here too, the pride builders themselves will be an important asset. They can be very helpful in designing these sessions and they can often essentially transmit skills and approach to one another. The greatest value the pilot team often adds is simply ensuring that everyone stays focused on the specific behaviors that will produce improvements in the performance metrics.
7. **Launch and implement the pilot.** Once the pilot participants sessions have been completed, it is time to launch the pilot and track progress. Especially in the early days of the pilot, it is critical for the pilot team to monitor progress closely and debrief participants frequently. It will likely be necessary to continue refining the pilot behaviors after the pilot launches. The pilot team should even be ready to make significant changes if warranted—it is not unusual to put a pilot on hold to allow the team and key participants to rethink and redesign major parts of the pilot. Expect to continue refining behaviors over the entire course of the pilot to meet various demands and roadblocks that arise.

As the pilot nears its conclusion assemble participants to capture lessons learned, important insights, and ideas for future pilots or the rollout. Pay particular attention to unplanned impacts as they often reveal a lot about where future challenges or opportunities lie. For example, some of the piloted behaviors often spread virally beyond the pilot. In a factory that pilots behaviors aimed at increasing safety on one line, those successful behaviors may quickly spread informally to other lines. While this complicates the task of measuring the pilot's impact on performance, it provides valuable insight into how best to roll out the piloted behaviors more broadly.

A Case Example of a Performance Pilot

At Bell Canada, a leading Canadian telecommunications company, senior leadership decided to conduct a pilot in one of Bell's customer call centers. In this call center, staff morale was low, people felt removed from corporate culture, and they were highly skeptical of the formal recognition programs Bell had in place. The goal of the performance pilot was to increase productivity, improve the quality of service, and build employee pride and motivation. To do this, a team studied the behaviors of some of the top performers in the call center and constructed a behavior model that included examples of both good and extraordinary behaviors.

For example, one good behavior was "Rigorously follow standard process to complete accurate orders," while the matching extraordinary behavior was "take personal ownership of exceptional quality on every call." The team then coached the pride building managers in the organization to connect the work to the customer experience, using the high performing behaviors that had been identified. The results were impressive: productivity (measured in calls per hour) rose 28%, while pride and motivation (measured by employee engagement surveys) rose 45%.

Broadening Impact

There are a number of complementary ways to expand the scope of frontline pride building capabilities across the organization and to leverage pride builders to deliver results. Some selected opportunities include:

1. *Create more pride builders.* The first thing you may wish to do with newly identified pride builders is to grow that community. There are several ways to do this, e.g.:
 - Make specific connections: institute one-on-one connections between pride builders whose experience you believe may be relevant to one another. For example, at a large consumer packaged goods company, the pride building team discovered through probes that some pride builders had skills in managing large, remote teams which they believed would benefit other pride builders, who were more experienced at managing co-located teams. By making those deliberate, one-on-one connections, the team was able, where necessary, to spread knowledge quickly and efficiently.

- Form communities of practice: A community of practice is a group bound together by shared expertise and passion for a common purpose that contributes to individual and collective success. It directs its own purpose and actions and shares resources and knowledge that its members have developed over time. It can create tools, training, and other documents, or it may simply develop a tacit understanding that its members share. To be a member in such a community, one need only be interested enough in pride to put effort into personal development and work with others to achieve business impact.
 - Take advantage of other elements of the informal organization: Work with the referring managers and identified pride builders to scale the program and identify more pride builders in order to begin to build critical mass across relevant parts of the organization. This group will act as an influential informal network that can change the behavior of leaders by example and peer interactions, strengthen the existing skills of members, and provide direct connections between executives and frontline leaders. For example, at a major telecom company, the pride building team started out by interviewing only 14 managers. Those 14 suggested 40 more, and the group eventually grew to 150 from internal nominations alone. They decided to form a community of practice to share ideas and best practices, and eventually even planned a conference for the company pride builders.
2. *Connect senior leadership with pride builders.* Use pride builders as a source of knowledge and expertise about what formal changes are needed in the organization, either by consulting with communities of practice or by requesting input from individual pride builders. This tactic may be very useful for getting bottom-up input into strategic communications initiatives.
 3. *Hold pride builder engagement events.* Introduce a series of events that bring pride builders together to share ideas and best practices, reinforce the link to your strategic objectives, and provide feedback to senior leaders about communication of strategy. At these events, pride builders should also be encouraged to share ideas about effective behaviors for different situations and about growing the community of pride builders. E.g., At a large health insurance company, pride builders were invited to workshops designed to recognize accomplishments and to provide the group with a range of ideas, approaches and tools to motivate people and foster pride in their divisions.
 4. *Use insights to drive acceptance of process or culture change.* Where new processes require people to change what they do at work, insights from pride builders about how to increase people's understanding and, more importantly, commitment to the new way of working, can significantly accelerate and increase the success of these new processes. Where appropriate, it is possible to integrate pride builder insights into the communication and rollout plan of any new process or initiative.

Common Pitfalls

While pride can be a powerful force in any organization, there are a number of potential pitfalls to keep in mind when embarking on any pride initiative.

The most common obstacle that any pride builder effort will encounter is the belief that pride building capability is not teachable. It is important to emphasize that studies conducted over many years show that pride building is a learnable capability just as “managing by the numbers” is a learnable capability. Like any other management technique or behavior change, it may be successfully taught as long as it is supported with management training and senior leadership commitment.

Although it is important to have senior leadership support for pride building initiatives, another common problem arises when people assume that instilling pride can be accomplished simply with communication from the top of the company. Since the most powerful pride is local, the most powerful motivation capability exists at the front line. Frontline pride builders must be included as stakeholders in developing programs to spread pride, in order for those programs to take root in the organization. Pride building must be learned, it must be felt, and it must be practiced. It cannot be imposed from the top.

Another common misconception that can act as a roadblock to success is the belief that pride building capability is the same across all organizations. While many behaviors are consistent across pride builders in many different organizations, those behaviors that are specific to the particular work of a team, division, or company are most powerful in building emotional commitment in the work itself.

Under- or miscommunication is another pitfall. It is important to take care in crafting communication about any pride builder effort. Communications should anticipate and address common misconceptions, as well as potential concerns, such as the belief that interviews may be evaluative, that senior leadership is “playing favorites” and that this is “just another program.”

Many of those new to pride building, including many very good managers, often believe that what motivates them is what motivates their people. This may cause them to reject motivational constructs based upon sources of pride that are unfamiliar to them. We have found that pride initiatives are most successful when they can help people understand the extent of the differences in sources of motivation among employees, and encourage them to tailor the initiative in a way that makes it relevant to the team.

More broadly, it is often a challenge to convince successful managers to adopt these new motivational strategies. It is important to emphasize that pride building is an additional tool good managers can use, not a replacement for proven approaches. It is also important to realize that 100% adoption of pride builder behaviors is neither attainable, nor, probably, desirable. The initiative will be successful even if some very good managers don't change.

Conclusion

Over many years of working with companies to motivate peak performance among their people, we have found pride that holds great power—particularly pride in the work itself. Realizing the potential of pride is not an “easy win”—it requires long-term discipline, dedication, and effort. However, when you properly identify and use pride builders in your organization, the power of pride is strong, and may have effects on performance that far exceed what can be achieved in any other way.

About the Author

Jon Katzenbach is a senior partner with Booz & Company in New York. He is one of the co-founders of Katzenbach Partners LLC and has expertise in helping clients mobilize their informal organization to realize performance advantages.

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