



Emma Browning

Founder & Managing Director of Meraki HR Solutions

MERAKI HR

## Executive Summary – What Makes a High Performing Team?

One of the phrases that I will often be heard saying is;



*“You don’t have a great business without great people”.*

A High Performing Team (HPT) is created by building a high-performance team and a high-performance team is created by studying, building, and expecting excellence from all your staff, all of the time.

I have had the opportunity to lead several high performing teams over the years at a number of SME’s and some other well-known brands like Porsche Cars and Harley-Davidson. It’s not easy though – it takes hard work, patience, and a lot of time to create these teams. But what I can say, is that it is so much easier and less time consuming in the end to spend the time and money to build a high performance team than it is to limp along just settling for “the best of a bad bunch.”

So, it’s important that you have the right people in your business, first and foremost, because you don’t have a great business without great people, but there are a few other things that will also help you to achieve a HPT.

- ✓ Being or having a great leader with a plan that is shared with all the team and ensuring your team understand how they contribute to this plan in their roles.
- ✓ Having a great management team and employee team behind that great leader.
- ✓ Expert help and support in the right areas of the business – HR being one of the areas you need expert help and support.
- ✓ Time to work on the business and make it work – it won’t happen otherwise!
- ✓ A commitment to learn and be open and willing to take advice from the experts you work with, following or implementing their advice being key to your success.

Here’s our top tips to help you create a High Performing Team.

## 1. Leaders create and live the culture

*“Organisational or corporate culture is the pattern of values, norms, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions that may not have been articulated but shape the ways in which people behave and get things done.”*

(Armstrong, 2006)

Here are some surprising statistics that show the importance of workplace culture and how adding this to your agenda this year, will make sure you are a HPT.

*47% of people seeking a new job cite company culture as the main reason for doing so.*

*75% of employees say they'll stay longer at a company that listens to their feedback and acts on it.*

*78% of senior executives said culture is among the top five things that add value to their company.*



A positive workplace culture is what attracts talent, drives engagement, impacts happiness and satisfaction, and affects productivity and performance – all of which directly feed your profit pipeline. A happier workforce makes for a more productive workforce. Fact.

It is widely acknowledged by business leaders that corporate culture influences productivity, creativity, profitability, business value, and growth rates. In a Columbia Business School research study, 78% of executives said that improving their culture was among the top five things that added value to their company.

The culture of your business is what makes your business unique and gives it its character and personality – it is the sum of its values, traditions, beliefs, interactions, behaviours, and attitudes. So, how exactly do you go about achieving that workplace nirvana?

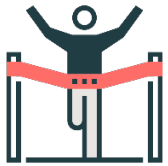
Here's our top tips for you to work on:

### Increase employee engagement



Having employees who are “emotionally” attached to their work and workplace is crucial to creating positive employee relationships. Highly engaged employees are less likely to be absent.

### Increase employee retention



Job tenure has been steadily declining over the years and in order to change this, you need ensure that you pay people fairly, provide development and growth opportunities and above all, ensure that your staff feel safe at work and give them stability and security, particularly important after the Pandemic.

### Give the gift of trust and flexibility



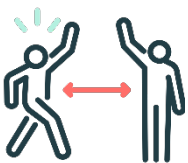
Today's employees want more than a set five-day workweek from the office or the bog standard eight-hour workday. The job benefits that employees currently care about most are those that provide them with greater flexibility including working from home/from the office, three or four-day workweeks, and/or flexible hours where they can complete their work flexibly as long as the work is completed on time.

### Improve communication with employees



While once-yearly performance reviews used to be the standard, a more progressive form of employee communication/feedback on performance is now required. What today's workers want is ongoing feedback, clearly communicated goals, and a collaborative work environment which they feel is fair, relevant, and encouraging.

### Build a strong employer brand



Companies today need their employer brand, which is their reputation as an employer, to be as strong as their customer brand. Think of your employees like your customer! A strong employer brand attracts and retains workers, just like you need to attract and retain loyal customers, you need to do exactly the same with your employees. It turns them into advocates for your company and it differentiates you from the competition.

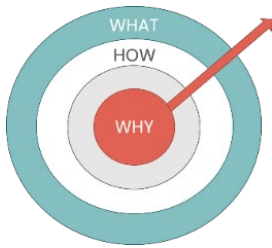
Now you have your easy five step plan, next on your agenda is **HOW** to implement that plan into your business.

### Your checklist

- If you've not defined your culture yet, and this hasn't been translated into your own set of values and behaviours, make sure you involve your employees in this important task
- Although the Leader owns the job of creating the company culture, the Leader, your managers and employees all have to live and breathe your culture, values and behaviours
- Make sure that you match your people policies and practices to your culture and values – don't go policy mad to manage the minority!



## 2. Know your What, How and Why



Simon Sinek wrote an amazing book called “It starts with why”, and if you haven’t read it yet, then it’s a great and easy read. In a 10 minute Ted Talk, Simon Sinek explains the premise of his book which you can watch [here](#)

Meraki HR follow Simon Sinek’s principles of “Start with Why” when we work with our clients to improve employee engagement and culture. Your Why is also sometimes known as your Purpose. This is your emotional “why” you are in business and your people really need to connect with your why, to be truly engaged in your business.

Your Mission is your “WHAT” and should tell everyone WHAT it is you do. It should be simple and easy for everyone to understand. No jargon, no explanations needed.

Your how, is how you do it – again this should be simple and clear for all to understand.

Sounds easy right? However, I know when I sit with leadership teams and employee teams and ask them what they think the “why” is of the business, people often say, “its to make money” and this isn’t and shouldn’t be the real why of the business!

### Some brilliant examples of Why’s or Purpose Statements

#### Harley-Davidson

- What they do – is make motor bikes
- How they do it – is in America using only American parts
- Why they do it is to “fulfil dreams of personal freedom”.

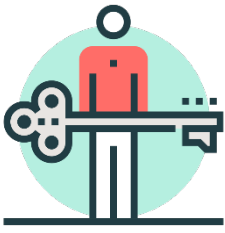


#### Apple

- What they do – is make computers/phones/tablets
- How they do it – make them look great and be user friendly
- Why they do it – is to “make a contribution to the world by making tools for the mind that advance humankind”.



### 3. Only recruit the best people .... and don't settle for anything less!



If you've tried to recruit recently, it's pretty tough isn't it? I've been doing my role for over 20 years and this is certainly the toughest recruitment market that I have ever seen, so you need to be at the top of your game if you want to attract the best people to your business, and whatever you do – don't settle for less!

Here are the key considerations to make when you look at recruitment.

#### Write a clear job description.

It is so important that you are transparent about what you expect your employee to do, so Key Responsibility Area's (KRA's) of the role, detailing Key Competencies or Skills needed to perform in the role effectively are very important to include.

Ask someone else to read it just as a sense check, and if they can tell you what the person will be doing in their role and what skills they need, then you have written a good Job Description.

The Job Description will also help you write a good advert for attracting the right candidates to apply for the role or if you are briefing a recruiter.

Make sure when you advertise the role, that you do not indirectly or directly discriminate against any protected groups as outlined by the Equality Act 2010.

A discrimination claim can be brought against an employer, not just by an employee, but also by prospective employees' if you are seen to discriminate in the recruitment process.

Finally, the Job Description will also help you to set objectives for the new person right from Day 1 – start as you mean to go on.

#### Prepare for the interview process

Remember the interview is a two-way process, and if you want to attract good quality candidates prepare for the interview and here's what to think about.

Think about the questions you can ask at interview that will allow the candidate to demonstrate their skills and abilities needed to do the job and make a list of effective and open questions. Ask open, competency based questions, such as;

- Tell me about a time when you've had to work to a tight deadline,
- When was this?
- What work was it that you had to do?
- Why was it important to be delivered by a certain date and what was the outcome?"

Ask each candidate the same questions to ensure you demonstrate a fair, unbiased, non-discriminatory recruitment process. You can then score each question, and then create a shortlist of the best candidates to invite back to the second stage interview.

The scoring system will help you to give constructive feedback to candidates that have been unsuccessful.

And keep all interview notes for at least six months as candidates can take up to 3 months to make any employment tribunal claims for discrimination, but the tribunal backlog of cases may mean it takes up to 6 months to reach you!

### Top Tips for First Interviews

**Have two people from the business in the interview process.** One of you to concentrate on making notes and one can focus on asking the questions. The note taker is simply writing down what they hear from the candidate, thus keeping the notes factual and unbiased.

**Try to make the candidate feel relaxed.** You want the candidate to be relaxed and at ease so that you see the “real” person, so use the start of the interview to help them feel welcome.

**Take the time to explain at the start what is going to happen to the candidate.** Tell them how long the interview will take, and that you are looking for them to give you real life examples of work and experiences rather than talk theoretically about them. It’s also important that you explain the next steps after the first interview.

You can include how many people you are seeing for first interview and what date you will get back to them by to tell them the outcome of the first interview.

If you know what date the second or third interviews, then ask them if they would be available if they were selected.

**What do they understand the role they are applying for to be?** This can be a very telling first question and ensures that the candidate fully understands the role and what will be expected of them? Once you have asked your prepared questions, again ask the candidate if they have any questions for you.

**Finally check on the following . . .** check what salary they currently earn, and if they receive any benefits and lastly what their notice period is. These are all really important questions to ask at first interview to ensure that you can match their expectations should you wish to offer them a role.



A final scoring process you can apply for each candidate will help you to create your shortlist for 2nd or 3rd stage interview follows:

1 = Little or no evidence shown of the skill required

2 = Some evidence shown of the skill required

3 = Good evidence shown of the skill required

4 = Excellent evidence shown of the skill required

### Some things to think about

- How will you stand out from the crowd in amongst the many job ads online?
- Why would people want to work for you?
- What's your brand story?
- Careers page on Company website
- Company Values
- Employee Testimonials
- Career Path examples
- Benefit details
- Make sure your Company LinkedIn Page/profiles of interviewers is up to scratch!



#### 4. Know how your employees feel 😊😞😐

Let's start with what employee engagement is **not**!

X It's not about employee happiness!

X It's not about employee satisfaction.

*“Employee engagement is the emotional commitment the employee has to the organisation and its goals.”*

*Kevon Kruse – Author*



Employee Engagement is about how your employees think, act, and feel, and you need to be able to measure this and then act on the information you receive. By acting upon this feedback, you are likely to address any minor issues before they become bigger, more time-consuming problems to deal with, so ignore it at your peril!

Consider for a moment, the findings of research conducted by employee services provider Personal Group, which revealed that almost half of UK workers are unhappy with their job. The same survey showed that happy employees are a massive 12 per cent more productive than those unhappy with their work situation. Hands up anybody who would like to see a 12% increase in productivity in their business this month?!

So, if your employees feel unhappy or unappreciated, you can be sure as eggs is eggs that they won't be giving their all to the business that employs them.

When you take the time to show your people you care - in a variety of ways - they are going to be happier, more engaged in their jobs, and more productive. The bonus is that when your staff are happy, this typically leads to better customer service, too. And who doesn't want that? Here are a few low-cost ideas to boost your employee engagement and productivity.

#### Give more than is expected

Think outside the standard wage and benefits box you provide to your employees. Observe them at work and see what you can do to improve their work environment either in the office or at home and make it a more welcoming and pleasant place to be.

Ask your employees what their career goals are and help them achieve them. If your company has the budget, reward outstanding performance with extra perks such as gift cards, dinner at a local restaurant, or a surprise paid day off. It needn't be expensive, and the small gestures are often the most impactful. If cost really is an inhibitor here, why not consider ad hoc personally handwritten thank you notes? They can be a highly valued, lovely touch.

### Get the welcome mat out

Make sure that new employees feel welcomed. Have an existing staff member mentor the newbies until they get on their feet and ensure that they get a full and thorough induction into their role and the company to make them effective in their role asap. Arrange a lunch with people whether that's in the office or virtually and make it happen, so that people get to know their new teammate.

### Work in the Cloud

Many SME's have had to embrace this way of working since the pandemic and we know that many SME's just like you are currently considering how they work in the future, whether that's totally from home, a hybrid model of home and office or bringing everyone back to the office full time.

We all know that a work-from-home day is always useful for employees waiting on deliveries or with childcare issues. By putting as much of your company's shared content in the cloud as possible, it frees up your staff by offering more flexibility. This will also show your staff you trust them to work well, without you having to look over their shoulders. From a productivity point of view this is a win-win

Making your work systems available remotely, means work does not have to grind to a halt should another lockdown need to happen, or a good old fashioned flurry of snow make commuting impossible!

### Safety and Wellness

Don't forget the little things that make life liveable. Onsite minor vehicle maintenance and other machinery/equipment repairs can go a long way towards keeping your employees happy. Who else hates it if their laptop or printer isn't working? It can take up tons of time trying to sort out these issues but will also cause a massive frustration for your employees if they simply don't have the tools to do a good job!

Likewise, offering basic medical assistance, basic medications, access to health-based time off, company sponsored flu jabs – can all be helpful, particularly for those companies that don't offer healthcare to their employees. Incentives keep

employees productive. Productive employees help a company succeed. And the double win here is that some health and safety incentives even lower the costs of keeping your employees employed – think of the sheer number of employee sick days that get taken by the dreaded flu virus every year, and possibly going forwards, Covid vaccinations will become an annual event too.

### Be on your employees' side

It is always important to have your employees' backs, even if an issue has something to do with a customer. The customer is not always right. Show the members of your team that you respect and care about them by defending and supporting them when needed and justified. And yes, sometimes that may mean losing a customer.

### Employee Wellbeing

So, we know that healthy, happy workers lead to healthy, happy and successful organisations. If you want to increase productivity and boost your profits employee wellbeing needs to be at the top of your agenda.

A wellbeing strategy and policy is a good place to start and we can provide you with a wellbeing policy that is right for your business and give you loads of creative ideas for a wellbeing strategy to get you started.

## 5. Make sure people know what's expected of them

*79% of candidates stated that a Job Description was most important information received from their prospective employer.*

Total Jobs recruitment survey 2020.

### Job Descriptions



A Job Description is fundamental to your success when recruiting a new role as having a good job description will mean you are assessing the right skills and behaviours to get the right person into the business in the first place!

Objectives or Expectations need to be set for all employees, including new starters. Make sure that Job Descriptions are clear and in writing for all employees whether they are in their probation period or have been with you for many years. A good Job Description helps people understand what's expected of them and avoids any potential misunderstanding about their areas of focus.

Every business owner knows that improving performance is key to having a HPT, but you'll need some solid strategies to make this happen. So, let's take a look at three ways to rocket your team's performance this year.

#### Provide challenges that are stretching but achievable

No one ever achieved great things by just coasting along without a challenge or two. Your staff should be stretched, but there's a fine balance to strike. Give them too much to handle, and you're not going to get the desired outcome. It might be a good time to assess your staff's performance objectives and consider whether they're really fit for purpose.

Your line managers will play a big part in making this a success. They'll know their team members best, so you need to make sure that they are capable of helping them set goals, and just as importantly, ensuring your people believe that they can achieve them.

#### Outline the value of the work outside the context of the business

If you've done any reading or research into best practice when it comes to managing a team, then you'll know that it makes sense to encourage everyone to realise how their work helps the business to grow and meet its objectives. In other words, your staff should understand how what they're doing fits into the bigger picture.

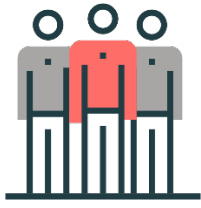
Are your staff aware of how their role makes a worthwhile contribution to the business, profits and growth? Most businesses have some kind of social impact, and this can often be a great motivator for staff. Does your organisation make a positive contribution to the community? Are you changing the lives of your customers and clients? If so, make sure your employees know about any of these things as it makes people feel good about what they are doing!

### Recognise achievements as part of day-to-day business

Most of us take huge amounts of personal satisfaction from simply knowing that we've done a good job. Often, this alone can encourage us to strive to be even better. But let's be completely honest here. Most of us also enjoy being suitably rewarded for our efforts too!

It's easy to think this is all about financial incentives, but this isn't necessarily the case. It's about rewards that are proportionate to the achievement. It's about applying the same principles across the board. It's about considering your reward processes as a whole, rather than just worrying about budget restraints. And ultimately, it's about getting to the stage where 'end-of-year performance reviews' aren't a one-off activity, but part of an ongoing dialogue.

## 6. Managers create great teams



Managers are made not born, and they need training and development to help them become great managers. Once they have had the right development and support, then you can make them accountable for the performance of their teams. Here's some ideas for your managers to help them create great teams;

### Encourage healthy debate and challenge

I have worked at many companies where conflict is not part of the culture. Instead, people will nod their heads in agreement in a meeting and then rant to their colleagues later about the ridiculous ideas/frustrations with their boss in the meeting.

It's important that managers create an environment where people feel they can talk openly and honestly and challenge things when perhaps they aren't the right way to do things. A great way to do this is to say something along the lines of:

"I don't wake up in the morning and plan to make mistakes. If you hear me say something in a meeting that is incorrect or something you don't think makes sense, I want you to challenge me. I want you to do it with some tact, but don't let me continue to go down a path you believe is incorrect without a discussion."

This sets the stage for open, honest communications where people can offer conflicting opinions without being emotional. And it is emotion that creates tension.

### Hire people who are better than you

I am often surprised to see managers surround themselves with mediocre talent. This is probably due to their lack of self confidence.

I remember a time earlier in my career, when I had a direct report, who I thought was better than me. I worried that my boss might come to the conclusion that when times were tough, they would keep them on, and make me redundant, and I worried about this for months! However, my boss ended up congratulating me on building such a strong team as I had done a huge amount of work to get them to this level, and he said "Hiring great people will help your team achieve more and, no matter how much you praise the efforts of your team, it's us in the senior management team who will give you much of the credit for the results"

I've never forgotten this, so my advice to your managers is to hire the best people they can and don't ever feel threatened by them, but it may take experience and coaching with them to help them realise this and not feel threatened by people in their team who are great performers.

### Make sure the people they hire have complementary skills

I like to think of teams in two dimensions: some people are very good at producing results; and other people are very good at strategic thinking. It is extremely rare to find a person who is exceptional at both.

The problem we often see with managers is that they hire people much like themselves. So, if the manager is good at producing results, they hire others who produce results and you then end up with a team that executes well but may not push the envelope of innovation.

Alternatively, if the manager is a strategic thinker, they will hire others who think great thoughts and you end up with amazing plans but have difficulty executing on the vision. If your managers hire a mix of both types of people, it will allow your organisation to achieve far greater results than having a predominance of one type of person.

### Don't let groups operate in silos

Unfortunately, many organisations operate as if they were a collection of disparate groups. Not only don't they collaborate with one another, they often are antagonistic towards each other – think of Sales and Production or example. It is critical that managers understand and demonstrate to their teams that the goals of the organisation trump everything else.

### Know your organisation isn't as strong as you think

Jack Welch; Chairman and CEO of General Electric between 1981 and 2001, famously said that *“managers should fire 10 percent of their organisations every year, because their replacements would result in an annual increase in performance of the workforce”*

One day, I saw an interview with him, and the interviewer asked him the question I wanted to ask: *“Once you have done this for a few years, haven't you eliminated your performance problems so there is no longer a need to do it?”*

Welch's answer was really thought provoking. He said that, over time, we tend to *“overlook the warts of our employees”*. He suggested that if a new manager came in to take over the group, he or she would easily find 10 percent of the organisation that should be upgraded.

I don't personally agree with the concept of firing 10 percent of an organisation every year, because I believe the resulting turmoil is not worth the benefits! However, I do agree that managers can become comfortable with their teams over time, and this can result in a couple of issues.



Firstly, the development and performance of employees who have been with you a long time often get overlooked, and you just “*put up with them, because that’s the way they are.*” In addition, it is easy for managers to believe the team which has served them well in the past is still the right one today, but the challenges facing your business change and evolve all the time. Which means that Managers need to be open to the possibility that their teams may no longer possess the right mix of skills to be successful.

### Adopt a 'no \*\*\*\*holes' policy

Difficult people can do incalculable damage to a team. The sooner you decide you will not tolerate these people, the closer you will be to having a great team. Many difficult people have strong technical or specialist skills; it is why they are able to survive despite their poor behaviours and there is a temptation to keep such people because of their skills but trust me, this is really not a good approach to take!

I have never exited a difficult person and regretted the decision. Instead, I often found out after they’ve gone, that the damage being done by the person was far worse than I even knew about, and that the business with our support, should have been quicker to take action.

## 7. Know your legal obligations as an employer



Even in a limited company, as a Director, you might be held personally liable, made bankrupt or end up with a criminal conviction either as a result of your actions or other Director's decisions.

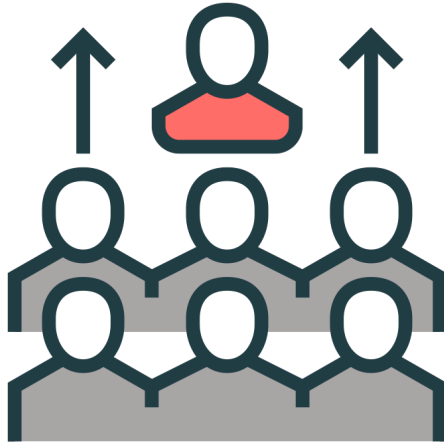
It's so important that you know your responsibilities either as an MD or as a Director and the IOD is a great source of information and their training courses for Directors are exceptional.

<https://www.iod.com/services/information-and-advice/business-information/information-resources>

It's also important that you and your management team have a good understanding of Employment Law – no one wants to end up in an Employment Tribunal because of something they've said or done as this is costly and time consuming, not to mention damaging to reputation and your bottom line, which isn't going to help you in your quest to becoming a HPT!

### Summary

- Define the culture you want for your business and create the values and associated behaviours that people need to uphold to maintain this culture.
- Know what you do, how you do it and **why** you do it – and make sure everyone that works for you knows this too!
- Only recruit the best people to work for you who have the right skills and values – don't settle for less and make sure you keep hold of them! Ensure that your pay and benefits are competitive and relevant to your industry.
- Make sure you know how your employees really feel about your business and working for you and design an HR strategy that addresses concerns/changes needed.
- Ensure people know what's expected of them in their roles and manage their performance – both good and bad.
- Develop and train your managers to create great teams as they need to manage and motivate exceptional performance from all your people.
- Know our legal obligations as a Director and make sure you have a good understanding of Company Law, Health and Safety Law and Employment Law and ensure that you are meeting your legal obligations.



*“Great Leaders know what they are good at  
and when to ask for help!”*

*Peter Bregman CEO of Bregman*

*“Weak Leaders hesitate to ask for help –  
fearing that others will see them as  
incapable”.*

*Diana Booher*

*“Communicate like a Leader”.*

## We are Meraki HR

We provide the perfect blend of practical and professional HR solutions that work for your business and for your bottom line.

If you need some help or support in developing a High Performing Team who are going to help you smash your business goals, then there are a number of ways we can work with you to achieve this.

1. You can book a call with us [here](#):
2. Come along to our next Masterclass on Friday 24<sup>th</sup> June where we will help you to create our 7 step plan to creating a High performing Team. You can book your place here; <http://merakihr.com/events/how-to-manage-and-motivate-your-people-to-create-high-performing-teams/>

## Your People | Our Passion | Your Success



[hello@merakihr.com](mailto:hello@merakihr.com)



01865 648548



[www.merakihr.com](http://www.merakihr.com)



[Book a call with us here](#)