

PAPER

LEADING EXPERTS

5 TIPS TO DRIVE
PERFORMANCE WITHOUT
AUTHORITY OR EXPERTISE

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EXPERTISE FALLACY

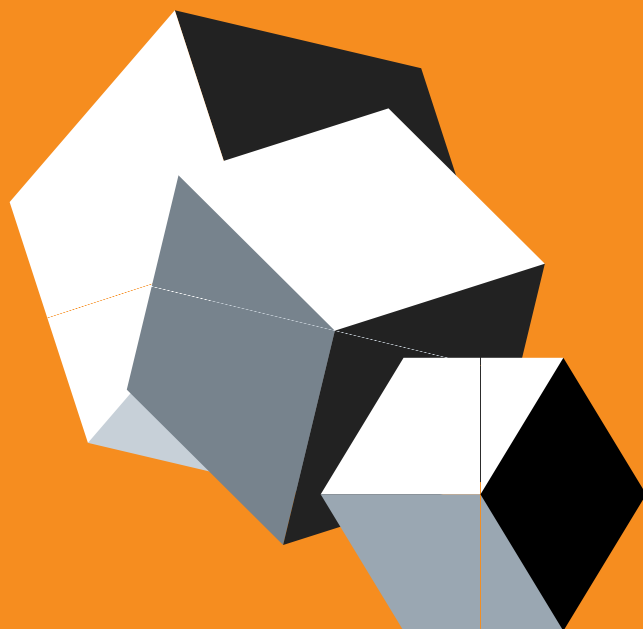
As a young boy, I went to a small primary school in Queensland. It was made up of old buildings, concrete assembly areas and large grassy sporting ovals. It was a pretty simple place and not unlike the typical Australian primary school.

I remember one day, when I was 8 year old, we were given a test to complete. It was my first ever test. I'm not sure how I felt while completing it, but the memory of the aftermath is burned into my mind.

After the spelling test, we were sent to lunch and I played as the happy child I was for an hour. When we all returned, the teacher walked through the class handing back our scores. She handed one out to the girl in front of me and gave her a little 'well done' as she moved on. That seemed nice, I could see the red pen on her paper, I thought it said 10/10.

She kept moving around the class handing out paper and making small comments, most of which were not audible to the rest of the class. I could hardly wait!

As she neared my desk, I was excited. She handed me my paper and huffed: "we've got some work to do with you". I didn't understand, I looked at my paper. There in bright red pen: 2/10.



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This experience pretty much sums up the rest of my schooling. We were given information then asked questions to test our memory or understanding. The best students got the most right answers. The low scores indicated the dumb ones. Top of the class for lots of right answers and bottom of the class if you got them wrong.

It is really not surprising that this type of educational system has produced generations of people who overvalue experts, those who know all the right answers. If you recognise this, you too will know the goal of many people in business is to be considered the top of your field, to have expertise.

Expertise is a powerful tool. Having a deep understanding of a specific area gives you the ability to make sense of complicated situations. To be prepared with a memory full of experiences and a knowledge of how things work. It enables you to make decisions more efficiently, to navigate and lead others through the tangled jungles they encounter.

Experts are highly valued, particularly in cases where the issues faced are narrow but deep. Who understands the complicated nature of thermodynamics in industrial machines or the precise places to make incisions to remove a gall bladder?

These people are critical in their specific field, but experts are not always good leaders.

This is because skills are highly valued in a complicated world, but we don't live in a complicated world, our world is much more complex.



COMPLICATED VS COMPLEX

This difference between complicated and complex is an important one. Complicated systems have many moving parts and knowledge is most useful to understand the rules of the machine, the powerful forces and known pitfalls.

A complex world provides a whole new set of challenges. Complex means that the interwoven forces and drivers are near impossible to fully understand.

Tiny things can create a massive change, or no change at all. Massive things can create massive change or no change at all.

Everything in between is possible, it is seemingly chaotic and unpredictable. No deep well of knowledge can prepare us for the chaos of a future world.

Today, consumer trends can be totally reversed within mere minutes. One day, movies were rented from a store, the next Block Buster became an extinct business model. One day, Almond milk is in, the next it is out. Computers kill typewriters, iPads provide beautiful digital writing options, yet Moleskin still sell paper books at incredible margins.

Expertise is not the only answer to the modern world of innovation. Nor is it effective in the realm of leadership. This is why we need leaders skilled at **Leading Experts**.

5 KEYS TO LEADING EXPERTS

There is no easy way to lead a team of experts, but there are a number of important skills every leader needs to consider when they are faced with the task of leading a team with expert knowledge.

From working with leaders from Financial Services, Engineering, Technology and Medical Professions, we have compiled 5 keys to leading a group of experts.

#1 FOCUS WHY NOT WHAT

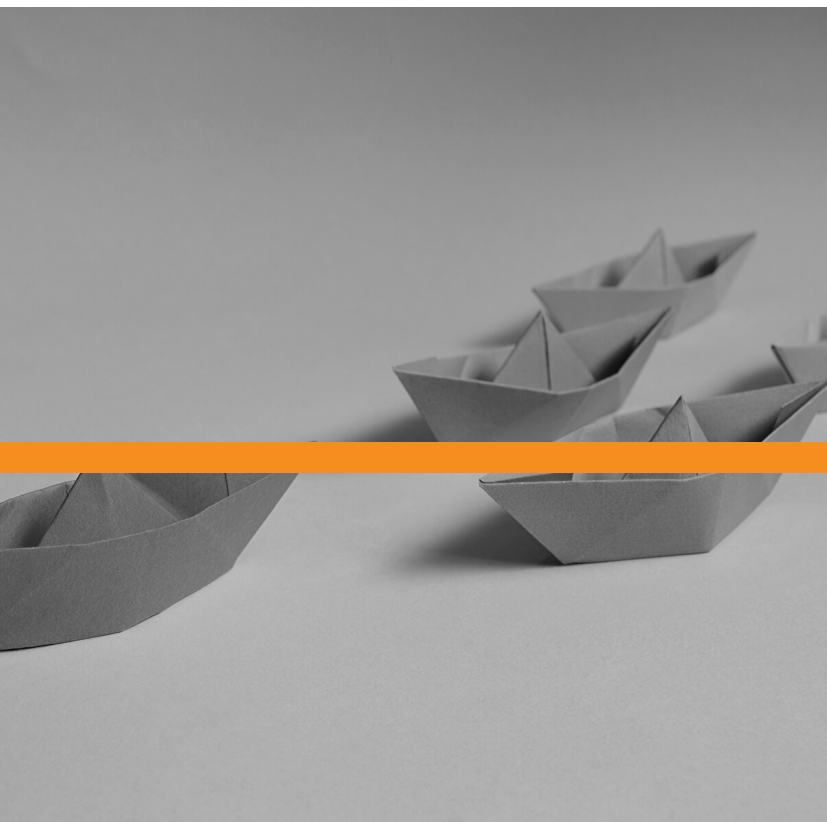
Innovation is of the most powerful of all human phenomena. Since the early days of tool making, our breadth and depth of knowledge has exploded. Keeping across everything is not a feasible option for anyone.

This presents each of us with a challenge. Will we be the master an instrument or conduct the orchestra?

To be an effective Conductor you do not need to be an expert at all the instruments. This is not your job.

Conductors need to not focus on each note or instrument, they must listen for the overall feel of the music.

As a leader, focus on what you are achieving broadly and let the experts play their instruments.



This means being clear on what the overall objective of the organisation is; the strategy, culture, customer and financial impacts of decisions.

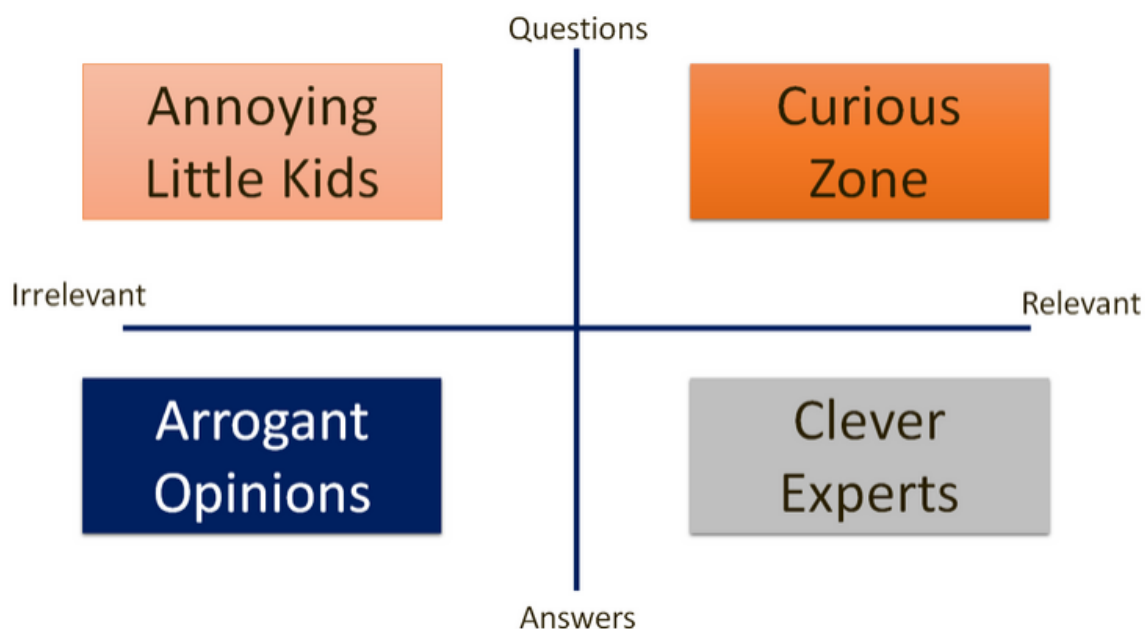
Leaders who focus on what people are doing can be lost in the detail. They micromanage and disengage the experts.

Leaders who focus on why people are doing what they do are able to provide purpose and meaning for work. They motivate by connecting the detailed work to the purposeful outcome and inspire performance, not demand actions.

#2 STAY IN THE CURIOUS ZONE

Anyone who has been around a 5 year old will be familiar with word: Why? At this age, our curious minds are busy trying to make meaning of the crazy world. What we learn from adults in this critical phase of life, is that asking lots of irrelevant questions is annoying! Many of us as children were told at some point to stop asking why.

This was the beginning of our training. Next we went to school and were told that success is really about knowing all the right answers. This is how we developed the Curious Leader Model. We can focus on **Questions** or **Answers**, and these can be **Relevant** or **Irrelevant**.



As a leader of experts, it is unwise to play the Clever Expert. Trying to have all the relevant answers will leave you vulnerable to becoming the person who always thinks they have an answer. These are the Arrogant Opinions that disengage and frustrate experts. Instead, your job as a leader of experts is to stay in the Curious Zone.

Focus on asking relevant questions and leaving the experts to find the answers. They will feel more empowered and you will add more value as a leader.

#3 COMMUNICATE WITH CLARITY & SIMPLICITY

Mark Twain famously said "I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead."

Leaders must take great care to communicate messages with the required level of clarity and simplicity in today's complex world. The need to rapidly transfer incredibly complex, and sometimes abstract, concepts to large numbers of people creates a great opportunity for misunderstanding.

When communicating with people who are proficient in our area of expertise, we too often fall into short-hand. The rampant use of acronyms and buzz words might see like a time saver, but when leading teams of experts, it can also cause animosity and confusion.

Leaders of experts should instead look to be the role model of clear and simple communication. Here are 3 Always tips:

Always be the person who takes the time to listen to other people speak and be unafraid to ask seemingly 'dumb questions' if you aren't sure everyone understands. Most of the time if you are unsure, others are silently unsure too. Leaders need to break this silence.

Always take the time to fully explain what you are talking about. Assumptions are breeding grounds for uncertainty and paranoia. There are few things a highly intelligent person hates more than feeling like they are being deceived. Over explaining is better than over assuming.



Always be generous when answering any questions. No matter how masterful you are as a communicator, misunderstanding is always possible.

The constant distractions of technology accompanied by the stresses of modern life mean we can all lose track of a key point here and there.

Too often when people feel embarrassed asking for someone to repeat a point or explain something in more detail.

On top of you being the person to always ask questions, you need to be

the most generous when it comes to answering them.

This kindness and generosity will be repaid in trust, openness and authenticity that will transform the team's culture and performance.



#3 TRUST, AGREE, MEASURE, REPEAT

When under pressure, many people leaders become Bossy. The stress of missing deadlines or challenging workloads causes them to look to personally ensure the job gets done. They pull out their figurative magnifying scope and start to examine every little detail.

For leaders of trainees, this might be appropriate. You might know more than them and your fine toothed comb approach may well find the problems. But for leaders of experts, this is nothing more than a signal of mistrust. Especially if you really don't have the knowledge to know what you are looking for.

Few things demotivate an expert more than an unskilled person reviewing their work and looking for mistakes. This is why leaders of experts must always start from a position of trust.

This of course can't be blind trust. Indeed, a major challenge for leaders of experts is that the complexity can mean the productivity and output of those you are leading seems like a black box. Leaders need to work with the experts to develop and agree, practical checkpoints to monitor progress.

Once agreed, leaders can then measure the performance of experts against these agreed milestones and monitor progress in their own terms. If working with groups of experts, this should process should be agreed early and repeated often.

The more your performance monitoring is founded on trust and measured against agreed, the better opportunity you will have to build an understanding of the progress of your team. This allows greater exploration of areas of weakness, opportunities for development and confidence in the capabilities of your team.

#5 YOU ARE THE CUSTODIAN OF CULTURE

The old saying states, if you are the smartest person in the room, you are in the wrong room. But for leaders of experts, you can sometimes feel like you are the dumbest in the room. Are you still in the wrong room?

The reality is, as a leader, the team don't need you to have the answers. They don't need you to share the secrets to life or impart your divine wisdom. But they do need you to take ownership for the most powerful force of all, the team culture.

It is an old cliché that a champion team will beat a team of champions, but the key here is the secret sauce that binds the champion team. This is the culture. The way we do things around here. The spirit in which we act and the values we all uphold.

As the leader, you are the custodian of this culture. As an leader of experts, you are responsible for maintaining the environment that keep the team functioning.

There are three key considerations for maintaining a healthy culture in an expert team:

KEY ONE - Every little thing counts.

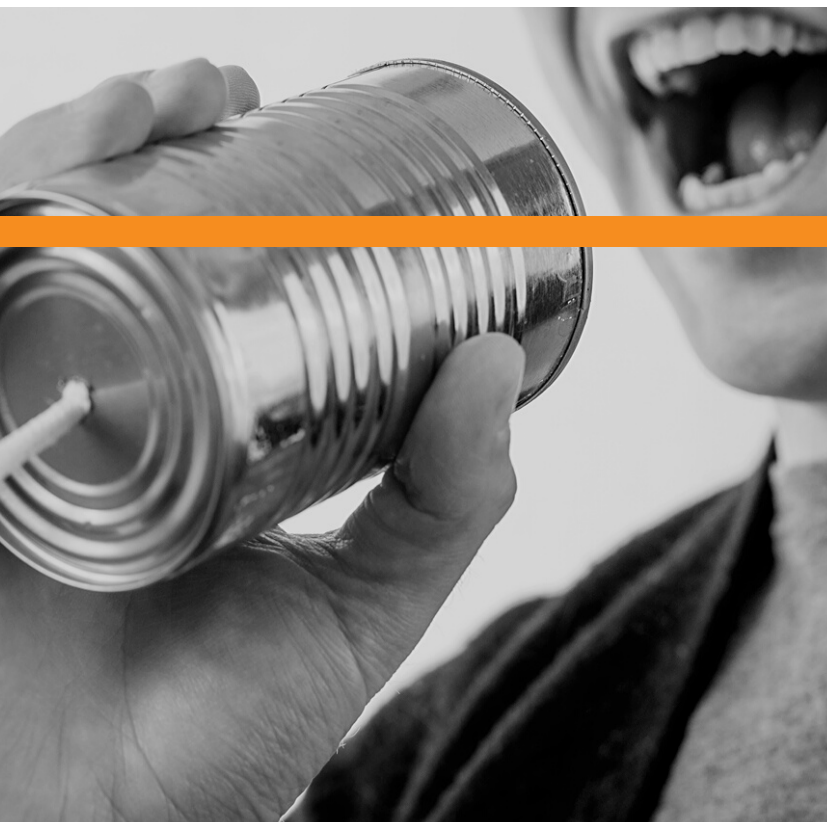
Culture is the sum of the past million and next million tiny interactions that happen in the workplace. Every email, phone call, smile or frown is picked up by our hyper sensitive social brains and is collated to determine how things are around here. Be on the look out.

KEY TWO - Feedback for everyone

It can seem petty to speak with a high paid surgeon or a technically brilliant artist about their language or minor behaviours. It is not petty, it is important. Everything counts and everyone is responsible. It is your job to have the hard conversations.

KEY THREE - Standouts need change

It is not uncommon in teams of experts to find one person who wants to be the standout. They think they can play by their own rules and don't need to fit in. They think that you need them more than they need you. You don't! If you have people who are disrupting the team culture, it is your job to help them change behaviour or help them change jobs.



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- Rochelle Eldridge, Executive Manager, CBA

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