

YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 97

Sometimes even successful endeavours can hit a bump, just when success seems certain. Creative leaders can deal with this...

Facilitate Teams Through Difficult Times

"How my achievements mock me!" William Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida



"Definitely not Warwickshire!"

How might you motivate a team that thinks it has succeeded, only to hit an obstacle?

Two weekends ago I cycled a 100km around Warwickshire (or Shakespeare County as the PR people like to describe it!) for charity. It was a bitterly cold day, my gears kept slipping on hills and I lost the route four times, ending up cycling on my own for most of the day.

About three hours in to the ride, tired and a bit miserable, I was riding up a hill. I kept going, seeing the top get ever closer until at last I breasted the hill... and found it was what I call a false peak, an optical illusion; there was yet more of the hill to climb.

After some choice words I chewed an energy bar, drank water, focused on two metres of road to make the hill seem flatter and inched my way up to the top.

I was reminded of this scenario last week, when facilitating a group to revise their strategy.

I had worked with most of them two years before, to set their strategy and whilst they had not achieved everything, they had done well with minimal resources.

In particular, they had recently received confirmation of substantial funding to recruit more people, which greatly boosted morale ... until they realised that they would not actually receive the funding and the new people for some months. At that point, their energy started to falter. They had hit a false peak.

SO

You have probably experienced examples of false peaks in your own work. Projects that hit obstacles just before the end; large contracts that seem to be clinched but are delayed by a change of client personnel; big events postponed a week before the scheduled date...

When this happens, how can the creative leader keep people motivated and striving?

Here are a few tips, the equivalent of my metaphorical energy bar, water and tunnel vision. I appreciate some may not apply in all situations and it is not exhaustive:

- Have the team list all the achievements to date – particularly if you have newer people who are not aware of them

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- Recognise and celebrate those achievements (it doesn't have to be a big celebration, do something different, e.g. take them to a non work related exhibition or have them do something novel and energising)
- If the team are negative, ask them what they need to get through this period of time – and ensure something happens to meet at least some of those needs
- Have the team list all the positive factors that are going to help you achieve the end goal e.g. the skills you have, support you have from other parts of the organisation, reminders of when the team overcame such issues before
- Ask “What’s gone well?” in team meetings, instead of “What issues do we have?”
- Find examples of teams that have been in similar situations and emulate what they did to get through them
- Be present, walk round and talk to people, provide encouragement
- Be pragmatic, if there are insufficient resources, cut back on tasks or stretch the lead times
- Give people time off if there is a lull in the urgent workload (ignore the non urgent tasks)

With these actions you are striving to alter the team’s state, by changing their mental focus or their physiology.

ACTION

Consider what else might you do to keep a team encouraged and motivated when you hit a false peak?

I have a talk on this topic Please contact me if interested.

TO CLOSE

Literally whilst writing this article I received a note from one of the team I worked with, telling me that he “really enjoyed the workshop...they have gained quite some momentum from it and important points are now high on everybody’s agenda, which would have been very difficult to achieve in a distributed setting.”

So, “Hold a workshop” is another point to add to the list. As a facilitator, perhaps that should have been first on my list!

Have a great week.

John Brooker | Facilitate, Innovate, Transform.



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