

# LEADERSHIP CASE STUDY

## Inspires and Motivates Others to High Performance

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### Leadership Case Study: Sally and David

MTCR is a leading company in the development and manufacturing of a broad range of custom hardware solutions. The company prides itself and is well known for being refreshingly honest and straightforward in its dealings with customers and employees, and in its ability to deliver difficult projects on time. Sally has been a senior manager at MTCR for four years and leads a team in the custom services area of the company. In a recent 360-degree survey, Sally scored above average (at the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile) in the competency, *Inspires and Motivates Others to High Performance*. Her report also indicated that her manager, peers, and direct reports saw this competency as a critical one for someone in her position. Some of the written comments in her survey indicated that if she demonstrated and applied this competency more often, it would have a significant positive impact on her success on the job. For these reasons, she's focusing her personal leadership development over the next year on this competency.

David is one of Sally's direct reports who has worked at MTCR for more than nine years and whose historical performance has been excellent. It's generally known among the team that David doesn't have as strong a technical background as most of his colleagues. At the same time it's also well known that he has a very efficient work style and puts in any extra hours needed to meet personal and team goals. He transferred from a different group and joined Sally's team almost two years ago.

Unfortunately, David has had several performance setbacks on the job over the last three months. One of them revolved around some critical missed assignments and late deliveries. Sally had assigned him two projects with some stretch goals that were not easy for David to hit, but had made those assignments specifically to give him development opportunities he had requested. This approach was typical for her, as she generally has a positive approach and displays confidence in her team members. She had worked together with him on his plans, and

had checked in regularly with him during the weeks leading up to the delivery dates. Each time she was assured by him that everything was on track. These were very visible failures that ended up impacting the performance of Sally's entire team. The other setbacks were related to workplace confrontations he had at different times with several of his teammates following the missed assignments.

Sally has met often with David during these last few months. She moved quickly to call out his missed responsibilities and improper behavior, wanting to be clear to him and the team that she was holding him accountable for his actions. She interviewed David's teammates to get their understanding of what happened and the impact these situations were having on them and the team. She's also spent a good deal of time with David to get his perspective, trying to understand what's been behind David's unusual behavior and to help him get back on track. During her meetings with him, she sometimes downplayed the seriousness of the situations in order to make him feel better about himself.

During Sally's coaching meetings with David over the last two weeks, she learned that there are several things that are likely contributing to David's recent performance issues. He shared some personal financial and family issues that clearly have him worried. He's also concerned about some process and role changes on the team that Sally instituted a few months ago that have caused changes in his day-to-day work responsibilities.

David has accepted Sally's feedback and recognized and taken responsibility for his actions. Although his personal issues are improving, they're still an obvious worry to him. He's also clearly stuck on how to handle the changes in his job. One of Sally's greatest concerns is how to get this formerly excellent performer back on track and contributing more, despite David's obvious discouragement and lack of confidence.

## Leadership Questions to Consider

1. Leaders who are seen as extraordinary at a particular competency regularly display some specific, associated behaviors. These are listed for each of the 16 differentiating competencies in the sections of your guide called, “Behaviors Defining This Competency.” To answer these first two questions, refer to the section in your guide for the competency, *Inspires and Motivates Others to High Performance*.

Although she generally followed most of the leadership behaviors shown there, which of them stand out because Sally was:

- a. clearly demonstrating them through her actions?
- b. not practicing them as effectively as she could have?

2. Your guide also provides lists of linear development ideas for those leaders wanting to fix a weakness or a fatal flaw in a particular competency. These ideas are shown for each of the 16 differentiating competencies in the sections of your guide called, “Developmental Suggestions.” To answer these next two questions, refer to the section in your guide for the competency, *Inspires and Motivates Others to High Performance*.

Even though Sally doesn’t appear to have a fatal flaw in the competency, *Inspires and Motivates Others to High Performance*, these linear suggestions can still offer her ideas about how she might evaluate and improve her own performance. As she considers her personal development as a leader, which of the Developmental Suggestions has Sally:

- a. been practicing effectively?
- b. not been demonstrating effectively?

3. For leaders with an existing strength in a competency that they want to develop further, the guide provides a list of Competency Companions for each of the 16 differentiating competencies. These “cross-training” ideas are behaviors that are highly statistically correlated with the competency the leader wants to develop into a profound strength. To answer these last two case study questions, refer to the Competency Companion section in your guide for the competency you’ve chosen to develop, *Inspires and Motivates Others to High Performance*.

Which of those companion behaviors shown:

- a. was Sally employing when dealing with David and his situation?
- b. was not specifically mentioned in the case study, but might be effectively employed by Sally as part of her leadership development plan?

## Possible Answers and Leadership Considerations

Following are some of the possible answers and leadership considerations surrounding Sally's leadership challenges. You will likely find others as you think more about how she might improve her effectiveness as a leader and build her personal development plan. Again, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers here or in your own leadership situations. The objective of this activity is to get you thinking more about how you might apply to your own challenges the leadership research and tools that are available in your Competency Companion Development Guide.

### *Question 1—Using the guide section, "Behaviors Defining This Competency"*

- a. Although she followed many of the leadership behaviors shown there, which of them stand out because Sally was clearly demonstrating them through her actions?
  - **Have a personal style that helps to positively motivate others** (her generally positive style and display of confidence in others)
  - **Energize people to go the extra mile** (displaying confidence and supporting David in his stretch assignments)
- b. Although she followed many of the leadership behaviors shown there, which of them stand out because Sally was not practicing them as effectively as she could have?
  - **Skillfully persuade others toward commitment to ideas or action** (although she may have done this, it's not clear from the case study how much effort she put into persuading David to fully commit to the stretch assignments)

### *Question 2—Using the guide section, "Developmental Suggestions"*

- a. As she considers her personal development as a leader, which of the Developmental Suggestions has Sally been practicing effectively?
  - **Making sure that goals are realistic, yet challenging** (her assigning David projects with stretch goals to help him in his development)
  - **Regularly ask people how they're progressing in reaching their goals and ask what you can do to help them achieve or exceed their goals** (her regular follow-up with David on the projects)
  - **Express confidence in the individual's ability to reach goals** (her willingness to give David stretch assignments on visible projects expressed confidence in his ability)

- b. As she considers her personal development as a leader, which of the Developmental Suggestions has Sally not been demonstrating effectively?
- It's not clear from the case study that she didn't demonstrate them, but clearly demonstrating the following behaviors would help her be more inspiring and motivating:
    - Reward "small victories" rather than waiting for one giant leap in improvement
    - Have people develop their own specific plans for how they will accomplish their goals
    - Focus on why goals can be achieved rather than on why they cannot

*Question 3—Using the guide section, "Competency Companions"*

- a. Which of those companion behaviors shown was Sally employing when dealing with David and his situation?
- **Making the Emotional Connection** (working personally with David to succeed in some stretch assignments, meeting David's request for development, taking the time to coach him after the failures)
  - **Establishes Stretch Goals** (to deliver on important projects and to help David develop)
  - **Develops others** (responding to David's request for development opportunities)
  - **Communicating Powerfully and Prolifically** (moving quickly to communicate her expectations around responsibility and accountability on the team)
- b. Which of those companion behaviors shown was not specifically mentioned in the case study, but might be effectively employed by Sally as part of her leadership development plan?
- **Fostering Innovation** (creating a safe environment for innovation and creative solutions when working with others like David on stretch projects)
  - **Role Model** (accepting or setting stretch goals for herself, making them visible within her team, and being a role model for performance and accountability)