

## Sled Dogs and Business

Imagine a sled and gear being pulled by dogs across the brutal terrain of Alaska. The typical team has 12-16 dogs. If in a race, like the Iditarod, they must finish with at least 6. This race is 1000 miles.

What can be learned and translated to the business world by this?

- The leader (musher) is responsible for recognizing talent, issues, and/or red flags. This becomes a problem in all size businesses especially as they grow. Sometimes leaders don't know what talents or positions they need or talents for the position. This leads to hiring the wrong people for the wrong jobs. It is also easy for the leader to become jaded in their ability to recognize issues or even worse they just turn their head to it. Like with the dogs, it requires constant communication, work, recognition, and tolerance thresholds. Hiring is not a one time process it is continuous for each hire. Leader pride and ego will get you killed too. Pay attention to what the "dogs" and team are saying.
- All of the dogs are trained and conditioned months before they are put to the test. Often this is where leadership fails. The expectation is to promote people to positions internally or hire externally and see the immediate ROI with no investment other than the "new" title. The timing of the hire is critical, especially as it relates to the company or organizational goals/deadlines. Your lack of planning doesn't constitute an emergency for everyone else.

- Diet- during the season the dogs can consume 15,000 calories a day. This is important with regards to mentorship and training for all levels of employees. One of the biggest unrealized things is that, just as the dogs take the initiative to eat, leaders and employees must take some initiative to train and gain knowledge. Often, they just wait for someone to do it for them.
- All dogs are going in the same direction. This is a matter of effective communication, monitoring, and discipline. It is hard enough to succeed and achieve goals. Having a team running in 1000 different directions almost guarantees failure. This does not mean ideas and challenging the process are not important because these are vital, but it should still move in the leader's end-game direction.
- Certain dogs have certain jobs. Each dog has specific tolerances; you can't get more than the dog can deliver. This may be the biggest failure for a company, department or business. The leader sets the stage with the expectations of the job. There will be employees, and team members that hold back and the leaders must draw out the max performance. There will also be those that need to be harnessed some. In start ups and organizations, failure sometimes occurs when the "team effort" approach is the culture set. Don't confuse this. It does take a team, but don't expect when one team member or position is slacking that another will just pick it up. Likewise, if one area is excelling, it doesn't mean that the lower performing positions or departments will take notice and apply the same tactics.

- The dogs understand the concept of pace. The pace is key in any business. Too fast and burnout may occur. Too slow and competition may beat you there. Based on the “leg” of the race the pace may be different, know it and gauge it.
- The dogs adapt to the course. Leaders often fail to recognize this in the beginning. There are employees and team members that only know “one way,” they do not adapt. This can be dangerous. It is the leader's responsibility to decide how far these people go with the team or organization and whether not they go transition to the “race.” Change occurs and often rapidly. In the Iditarod, dogs can be taken off the team at checkpoints. If not, it may hold the other dogs back and cause unnecessary work for others.
- The leader (musher)- decides to cut dogs loose. As described above. Confrontation and the fear of having to hire often cause leaders to keep low performers around. Or the leaders expect that others will carry the load of these people. Wake up!!!! The cost of keeping these people around are killing your culture and business. Your best will be looking for other jobs. If the dogs see that one dog is underperforming, they will start performing less. Cut these people loose!!!!
- Leader (musher) sometimes sacrifices load as team size decreases. This is simple, are people on the team just in position. All too often there are just people in occupying positions (obstacles). It is more important to have fewer people that are higher performers.

- The musher may get recognition, but the dogs made it happen. Credit, this is often a failure point. Remember the leader takes the credit for successes and failure. If success remember to recognize the people that got you there.
- Weaker non-performing dogs don't make the trip. This was described above. Just because people can't perform doesn't make them "bad" people. They just aren't cut out for this run. Don't make the dumb decision to let them run, by just finding them a job. Mixing business with friends and family can be a quick way to fall into this trap.
- The dogs are invested in their jobs. The musher gets out of the dogs what they put in. All too often the team or institution expects a high level of loyalty. Remember, what are you doing to show loyalty. Position and \$\$\$\$ only buy temporary loyalty!!!!

#cutthemloose, #knowthepace, #feedthedogs