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THE FIVE BEHAVIORS
OF A COHESIVE TEAM™

Building Team Trust by
Tearing Down Silos

A Success Story featuring :

HARRIS FARM
MARKETS

An Australian retailer dismantles its silos and increases team effectiveness with The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team™.

“I ONLY LOOK AFTER MY GROUP OF STORES.” With a distinctive “Whole Foods meets Trader Joe’s” ambience, the family-owned Harris Farm Markets retail chain has thrived since David and Cathy Harris opened their first fruit store in 1971. The enterprise, now run by the founders’ sons, has 25 sites in the Sydney, Australia region and 1,400 employees. Harris Farm Markets had attracted a loyal clientele but was hampered by a siloed, distrustful, and competitive internal environment. Recognizing that teamwork was their most untapped competitive advantage, the company turned to The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team™, the comprehensive team development program from Wiley.

“One of the four pillars of our strategic plan is to create a team of enthusiastic experts who our customers love. We were good at that,” says co-CEO Luke Harris, “but we could never get our area managers working together.” Five area managers were each responsible for five stores...and cared only about their five stores. Meetings were tense, teams were secretive, and areas operated as separate businesses. “We had a silo mentality to the extreme,” relates one area manager. “One of my fellow area managers happily stated, ‘I only look after my group of stores and that is it.’”

Harris recalls one incident that typified the issue. Area managers would occasionally be asked to visit another manager’s store and provide feedback. The most experienced area manager on staff paid a site

inspection to the least experienced manager’s store. On hearing his feedback, she became extremely defensive. “She thought he was having a go,” Luke recalls. The visiting manager’s reaction was equally negative. “If she’s not going to listen to me, this is a waste of time,” he declared, and walked out.

“Even at the CEO level,” admits Harris, “we acted as a tag team, not a rowing crew.” The company was adept at getting things done short term; executing for the long term was very difficult. In order for the company to achieve its full potential, the organization’s culture had to change.

In October 2014, Harris presented his organization’s challenge to consultant Nicole Wales of Human Tribe. Wales had previously helped Harris Farm Market’s managers understand their preferred management styles; now, based on the feedback she was hearing from Luke Harris, Wales recommended an immersion in The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team program.

Based on *The New York Times* best-selling author Patrick Lencioni’s *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, The Five Behaviors™ learning experience helps team members and leaders understand how their unique group dynamic can build a more effective team and achieve sustainable results. The facilitated sessions of The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team



enable teams to see where they stand on the five pillars of The Five Behaviors model: trust, conflict, commitment, accountability, and results.

In October 2014, the Harris Farm Markets Area Management team took The Five Behaviors assessment, rating themselves in each of the five behavioral traits. The results confirmed Luke Harris's observations: The team's commitment to the organization was high and they were moderately able to engage in constructive conflict and focus on achieving results. But low scores in trust and accountability raised a red flag: Team members were reluctant to admit weaknesses and mistakes and to be vulnerable and honest with one another. They were focused on their own areas rather than on the organization as a whole.

Human Tribe brought together the area managers for a two-day offsite. The Five Behaviors program "is not like your

typical training session," says Wales. "As facilitators, we cannot simply work to a time schedule and tick off agenda items. In order to move forward, the team needs to demonstrate vulnerability-based trust, everyone needs to participate in positive conflict, participants need to show they are committed, colleagues need to hold their peers accountable, and lastly, the team needs to show they can put the collective results ahead of their own individual results."

Neither Wales, the facilitator, nor Luke Harris knew what to expect. Area managers come up through the ranks: The best workers become store managers, and the best store managers become area managers. Practical and pragmatic, these hands-on problem-solvers "aren't the type of senior management who would say, 'Oh, let's go read the book ahead of time and talk about it,'" explains Harris.

Not surprisingly, the first session, held in November 2014, was awkward and difficult. "We had set aside two days for the workshop and spent a whole day on vulnerability. But no one wanted to let their guard down. The discomfort in the room was palpable," Harris remembers. At the end of the first day, the group threw in the towel. Unless they could be vulnerable and trusting, the team was unlikely to successfully tackle conflict, commitment, or results. They canceled the second session and rescheduled in the hope that the holidays and New Year break might enable them to start fresh.

In January 2015, the group reconvened. The wait was worth it: After five tough hours, a breakthrough struck. “A senior manager dropped his guard,” relates Luke, “and that’s when it all came out. The manager had very significant issues around his vulnerability and once he opened up, the conversation just flowed.” As often

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— Nicole Wales, Facilitator, Human Tribe

happens in The Five Behaviors sessions, the revelation did not need to be very dramatic. “All he did was admit to something he was really bad at and apologize to someone across the table,” says Wales. “That brought the walls down between the team and we roared through. You could feel the transformation.”

The group moved along to the rest of The Five Behaviors modules, learning to engage in the unfiltered, constructive debate of ideas, commit to decisions, and hold one another accountable to a clear plan of action, all toward the goal of achieving collective results.

By the end of the program the team agreed (via some healthy conflict) on three action items. Weekly meetings now begin with these three action items, keeping them front of mind and ensuring the team remains more effective.

The pre-program assessment, we noted earlier, had shown the Harris Farm Markets team to be weak in four out of the five behaviors. Four months after the program, the follow-up progress report painted a very different portrait. The team had significantly improved in all five behaviors, scoring high in four out of the five behaviors. Most gratifyingly, in the area of their biggest challenge, trust, the area managers leaped from low to high.

Facilitator Nicole Wales sees the progress in the day-to-day dynamics among the team members. Feedback from a colleague is welcomed, not dreaded. “Before, if another manager walked into your shop, you’d be horrified,” Luke says. “Now, they ring each other up asking, ‘Please come and have a look at this and tell me what you think.’”

One unique action point devised by the Harris Farm Markets managers was “caravanning.” When a store struggles with a challenge, the group travels to the trouble spot and brainstorms to help the area manager. “They call it retail caravanning,” says Luke proudly, “and it’s their favorite part of their job now.”

Harris Farm Markets received a wake-up call that highlighted the conscious effort required to maintain successful team unity. December 2015 was the only month in the fiscal year when they did not hit budget. It was also the period when they noticed



vulnerability falling off and tension creeping back into the managers' meetings. "Was it just because we weren't hitting budget that we became dysfunctional—or maybe we weren't acting so wonderfully toward each other because we were aware that we weren't hitting budget. That could have been the elephant in the room that struck all our vulnerabilities. I've been reflecting about that," said Luke.

A second workshop was arranged, and soon camaraderie, contributions, and humor revived at meetings. "If a team loses vulnerability, it starts to lose its cohesiveness," Wales points out. "It takes work."

Harris Farm Markets area managers appreciate the ongoing nature of The Five Behaviors framework. "We are constantly building a better team," says Helen, an area manager. "We have more to work on and we are doing this together. We can only become more awesome."

Helen's fellow area manager, Peter, senses new respect for the area management team in the company. "After completing the course, it was clear that the team was totally engaged in becoming more united. We are currently working on some very big projects. I can safely say that if we hadn't completed The Five Behaviors course, we would not achieve what we set out to achieve. It was one of the most beneficial courses I've completed in recent years."

While the bottom line is always on Luke Harris' mind, an equally gratifying benefit stands out for him. Harris Farm Markets is, simply, "a lot more fun." And that's the best result any employer or employee could hope for.