

# CRS's Performance Culture

A continued and reliable delivery of High Performance requires the creation of a network of high performing peers that have agreed on a set of critical "Rules of the Game". These being purposefully and explicitly designed for the continued and reliable delivery of High Performance.

Said in another way, in this network people agree on a set of distinctions *and* speak the same language, a so-called Jargon, the mastery of which results in a fundamental new Way Of Being.

*Definition of Jargon:*

*Jargon or technical language is the specialized terminology associated with a particular field or area of activity. Jargon is normally employed in a particular communicative context and may not be well understood outside that context.*

Similar to a high performing sports team a series of foundational distinctions critically help you and your team to speak about, deliver and ask for what's required for High Performance. They are, in a way, a door into a distinct world - in this example the specific world of a given sport.

Imagine a great coach shouting (for you and I) cryptic instructions to his team on the field just before the next play. While you and I might not grasp any of what is being communicated, these instructions might unlock the teams next play and allow them to score the critical points.

Time and team support are the foundations needed to begin training on a common set of rules, sequences and plays that then allow for a high performing team to execute said instructions in the heat and stress of the moment.

To be able to reliably deliver High Performance at CRS we have identified a series of distinctions that have emerged over the years as *the key ingredients*. You will hear about them often in your conversations with your peers, keep an eye out for them and see if you can Discover For Yourself how they allow you to unlock productivity at a different level.

Note to the reader:

If you are reading this like any given corporate document you will not gain access to what this document unlocks, however if you treat it like a treasure map where the distinctions are key markers to be *uncovered* or *discovered*, you have a serious shot at fundamentally elevating what you - and all of us as a team - are able to deliver.

# The Key Distinctions for Performance

Here are the 12 key distinctions that make up CRS's Performance Culture. **Master them for reliable access to extraordinary performance.**

## 1. Complete Work

Delivering Complete Work is the key to performance at CRS. A simple example:

An engineer has completed a feature as intended and has tested it locally. While a milestone in and of itself, this is not Complete Work. To understand the distinction Complete Work, you have to go back to what the original intention of this work was and was not.

The intention of this work was not the technical completion (e.g. the development) of the feature itself even if that part was done to the reviewers full satisfaction. The actual intention of this work was to get this new feature into the hands of a customer, working as expected.

The completion of a task **as it was intended** (as distinct from how it was communicated), completed from beginning to end - in our example documentation completed, marketing having received all of their required information, sales people having been properly trained, the new feature having been rolled out in production with the necessary monitoring in place and finally, with one (1) customer having been brought on and now using the new feature successfully.

That is Complete Work.

*A key tool that demonstrates Complete Work is a burndown list equipped with clear Intentions, Demonstrated By, and By Whens. [Learn more here.](#)*

## 2. Ownership

A key tenet of Performance at CRS is Ownership.

Ownership is the quality of owning the related Burn Down List (e.g. a complete ledger of all required tasks to be completed), said differently: having total command over a specific task, from beginning to end so that, if there are any questions about this specific task, you are able to give a concrete, concise answer (or able to get that answer with velocity).

When you find yourself diverting questions or feeling stuck in any way those are most often indicators that you are not owning the specific task as it was intended.

Ownership at CRS *does not* mean that you are doing all of the tasks required yourself - to the contrary, your performance is critically tied to being able to use available company resources and to lead your peers to the completion of your (owned) Burn Down List.

### 3. Demonstrated By

Demonstrated By is one of the most powerful distinctions of Performance Culture.

Once mastered it will transform how you will see not just the work you do, but it will have profound implications on how you see the world in general.

In essence a Demonstrated By tethers you to the ground of reality.

Here's what we mean by that:

In any given project there are a myriad of intentions and goals one pursues: "We want CRS to be the #1 brand in the data world" would be one such example.

Of course this is an ambitious goal and one probably everyone in the company would agree is worth pursuing.

But, *what does it actually mean?*

What does it really mean to be the #1 brand in the data world? And if we were on a conference call with, let's say, 10 leaders from our company, do all of these 10 folks have the same idea about it in mind?

*Of course not!*

Any intention that has been aligned on any level primarily exists in an ambiguous "thought-state" until tethered to the ground of reality by one of more Demonstrated By's.

In this example the Demonstrated By's might look like this:

1. When searching on Google for decisioning data, CRS consistently shows up as the #1 non-paid result
2. When asking an AI for help with retrieving data for decisioning CRS and it's

APIs are consistently in the top 3 response bullet points for GPT, Claude and Gemini

3. When speaking to any underwriting specialist at Money2020 (the big fintech conference) and asking for the top data companies, CRS reliably (e.g. 80%+) is the first mentioned data provider.”

Now you might disagree about the perfect Demonstrated By's but we hope you will notice how they transform an amorphous something into a result concretely recognizable *in reality*.

True success is measurable, the Demonstrated By distinction is a tool of power to discover and communicate the success criteria of completing your work or delivering your milestone.

Think about:

What would unambiguously demonstrate that you have delivered on the intended outcome, e.g. delivered Complete Work?

That is your Demonstrated By.

#### 4. By When

By When is a powerful communication tool that creates a reliable foundation for performance. A communication without a By When is just chatter (“I will get back to you asap!”). A communication with a clear By When will open the door to a different level of Performance (“I will get back to you by 5pm tomorrow!”).

Once a By When has been delivered the recipient can use it as a reliable building block to build on top of or use the By When as the moment to follow up. A committed communication with a By When helps keep what needs to get done in reality (e.g. on a calendar).

Consider that a highly effective organization (e.g. high performance) is held together by a highly reliable network of By When's (i.e. organizational commitments).

Also consider that, as humans, we are fallible. Missing a By When is not in and of itself an issue, but failing to communicate an updated, revised or revoked By When will *reliably* reduce the organizational performance.

## 5. The Burndown List

Most companies will provide you with a range of project management tools.

*=> AT CRS - ALL YOU GET IS A SHEET OF PAPER!*

Compared to the other points on this document this might look a like a ridiculous distinction to add.

The Burndown List finds its adjacent origins in the burndown chart generally found in the Agile project management community, it being a visual graph showing the remaining work versus time.

The Burndown List is a fancy name for a sheet of paper outlining the critical tasks needed to get from Point A (Where we are now) to Point B (Where we intend to be) - it is FUNDAMENTAL in it's nature in the World of Performance, in the World of Accomplishing Anything. What we mean by that is that it is FUDAMENTAL in accomplishing anything. Please do not step over this fact, make sure you fully grasp (discover for yourself) that this is so.

## 6. Qualification is the Enemy of Performance

Qualification is the enemy of performance. To be written.

## 7. Communication - Intentional & Effective

Intentional Communication:

You might have heard the old saying: "Don't ask for permission, ask for forgiveness". Intentional communication is a special form of communication.

Instead of saying: "Can I build a new pricing structure for this product?"

Consider saying: "I intend to build a new pricing structure for this product, the reason is [...], once ready I will brief Product, Sales and Finance and will report back here with next steps."

This is the opposite of operating from a position of seeking approval, which is a "lean back", passive approach to operating, to a lean forward, active position.

Intentional Communication is the practice of speaking your intention clearly and giving the team an opportunity to chime in where needed. You are never blocked.

#### Effective Communication:

Effective Communication is the practice of communication in such a way that the intended message *lands* with its intended recipient.

You sending a message is not communication, you saying something on a call is not communication. Only once your communication has been heard and acknowledged, as intended, was the communication effective.

If you feel like this sounds very similar to Complete Work you are right! It is in the same vein. The best way to let someone know that their communication was properly received is to “recreate” it in your own words (e.g. “So if I understood you correctly you are saying [...]”) with the sender responding with a variant of “That’s right!”.

Keep in mind that all the basics of [Respectful Communication](#) (“Being clear, honest, and polite, and avoiding language that is rude, aggressive, or judgmental [...]”) apply here as they do anywhere.

#### Complete Communication:

## 8. Alignment & Enrollment

Nothing happens without alignment, nothing happens without enrollment. It is your job to get alignment from your peers, leaders and those that report to you. Any change, adjustment, new invention or product - they all require enrollment, from those around you and from your clients.

Communicating in such a way that they discover (for themselves) that what you are proposing will benefit them or will support them or their organizations to fulfill their own intentions is a key component of an enrollment conversation. Another key component is acknowledging and dealing with consideration, concerns and disagreements.

Oftentime it is not necessary for everyone to end up with the same conclusion - what is however required is acknowledging these considerations, concerns and disagreements. Once the conversation is completed a commitment is made by everyone, e.g. what next steps to take is clear to everyone.

Important: an aligned commitment is not necessarily a compromise and most importantly, "disagree yet commit" promotes action over paralysis. We all have to be able to disagree yet still commit.

Note: using "Force" is always an available tool in a Leaders tool box. Using "Force" often however is an indicator of underdeveloped Leadership skills.

## 9. Symptoms vs. Systems

Symptoms have a gravitational pull. Often when we encounter issues, the natural reflex is to get in there, engaged, enthralled with the symptoms and patch those up: our CRM is missing the right Customer IDs every few records? Let's set aside a recurring time to correct those! It certainly sounds like that makes sense. A little later, this procedure has now become part of our Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

The key to performance is to recognize when we are engaged with the symptoms and not dealing with the systems causing the symptoms. There is no recipe for this, it is a practice. Taking a step back and distinguishing the symptoms from its root causes takes courage and often requires engaging deeply with the subject matter. Good indicators are: noticing when manual tasks are being repeated without questioning, repeated inconsistencies occurring seemingly at random (and often have become a part of everyday life).

Keep in mind that there are indeed times where the best decision is to treat the symptoms. And: Turning the above mentioned reflex into a conscious and communicated choice is the hallmark of good leadership.

## 10. Mastering The Tools I Own

Proper tooling is a force multiplier. Just as levers allow us to lift weights that are otherwise impossible to lift off the ground, software (technological) tools allow us to deliver performance far beyond what would have been possible without them.

As such, a major unlock is available through the mastery of the aforementioned tool. When you are concerned about performance, the choosing, setting up and using of your tools-of-the-craft will have an outsized impact on you, your teams and your peers' performance.

Own your tools, master them, refine them - often you will know these better than those that built them.

## 11. What I Measure Grows

Performance only exists in the Realm of Measurement. There is no performance without measurement.

Measurement often has a connotation of getting trapped, of being monitored or controlled. However in the world of performance the scoreboard determines success or failure, whether it's on the sports grounds or in organizations.

Finding the right metrics to measure performance is mostly a science and sometimes an art.

Supporting your Demonstrated By work ("What would unambiguously demonstrate that you have delivered on the intended outcome?") by developing the skill to create the appropriate OKRs and/or KPIs that really reflect you "hitting the mark" is critical.

Know whether you are progressing, stalling or regressing with what you are out to achieve. Build a strong productive relationship with your metrics.

The right metrics are often uncomfortable at the beginning and our natural instinct is to shy away from these as they are effectively "telling one on ourselves".

Here a leadership decision is needed, what are you more committed to? The "looking good" or the delivery of extraordinary performance? Understand that all leaders at CRS are clear that early metrics, more often than not, look terrible and that the key is to measure "what's really going" (as we call it, the what's so) on and increase performance, together.

## 12. 10x Results

As leaders our job is to manage work and get it to completion, establishing a well run machinery that delivers consistent, predictable and appropriate results.

As Leaders at CRS we are asked to go beyond that, while the above is critically important we expect our Leaders to reliably carve out time for, what we call, 10x Projects.

These projects are self-discovered and self-ushered to completion and are taken on by our Leaders to deliver outsized wins for the organization. While there are no recipes for these projects, 10x Projects have a clear reason for why they are 10x. For example, they create: 10x revenue growth, 10x efficiency in how we activate customers, 10x difference in compute costs - in short - 10x Projects have outcomes that are inarguably 10x.

What there is a recipe for, however, is to create the appropriate structure for yourself to have the time to engage with this question (“What would deliver a 10x move/improvement/increase/decrease for CRS in my area of expertise or generally?”).

Consider that outsized wins come from outsized commitments (e.g. big goals) and outsized efforts to make those goals a reality.

### 13. Dealing with Breakdowns

A breakdown is an opportunity for a breakthrough. “Consider that all accomplishment is constituted by a series of resolved breakdowns.” Quote - Werner Erhard

There’s generally two types of Breakdowns that interest us, Breakdowns with People and Breakdowns with Systems. Regardless of their type, leaders are adamant about dealing with them quickly. Unresolved issues lingering in the background are a sure way to reduce an organization's potential for performance.

There’s a specific view on breakdowns that we have discovered to be particularly useful in maintaining our own level of performance. We’ve discovered that viewing Breakdowns as inherently not-personal (e.g. “they” are not out to get you) is extremely empowering. Breakdowns *are just things that are in the way* of us achieving what we want to achieve. Nothing more, nothing less.

#### Breakdowns with Systems

These are often systemic in nature, we spoke at length about the differences between fixing the symptoms vs. the systems. A system's breakdowns can usually be resolved in a mostly mechanical way. A Burndown List is generated with the required steps for resolution and the plan is then executed.

Consider that a key aspect of an outstanding leader is that they design systems that follow our “If it breaks will you notice?” principle, systems that raise their issues before anyone else notices.

## Breakdowns with People

While this is the last section of our Performance Culture at CRS document it might as well have been the first.

Breakdowns with people, e.g. your peers, is going to be an inevitable part of your experience at CRS and frankly, life in general.

Somebody promised you they would get something done before a certain date and did not. You are sharing your vision for the next steps and somebody thinks it's really a terrible idea. You promised to get something done by a certain time and did not, worse yet, you didn't want to communicate it because you really thought you would make the deadline. Somebody has bypassed you as the team lead and is commandeering your direct report. There are really endless opportunities to "F things up" and we all do it.

What differentiates a great leader in these situations is *how they deal with breakdowns*. If you really think about it, breakdowns are never really about you and me, as mentioned above, seeing them as truly un-personal is a key skill to develop and practice, especially if it is in relation to Breakdowns with People.

Here's why:

Just as with our way back ancestors hearing some rustling in the bushes thinking the predator is about to pounce, we tend to see a hidden meaning and agenda in the things that happen around us. This human tendency is called [Hanlon's Razor](#).

Frank didn't submit his work in time? He's out to get me. Mike sent me some rude slack messages? He is forcing a reaction out of me to get his way.

While all these interpretations might have lots of reasons to support them, they have one thing in common, they stand in the way of performance.

At CRS, we pride ourselves in having picked great folks to work with us, we are fundamentally clear that all of our people are here to deliver their best work for CRS.

Focusing on the people involved in the Breakdown, their possible motivations and intentions, means going down an unproductive rabbit hole that diverts from getting to the core of what there is to do:

*What actions - now - would resolve the breakdown?*

Here is a list of useful pointers when faced with such a breakdown:

- Don't deal with the breakdown when your blood pressure is high - get off the computer/phone/slack and take a walk
- Acknowledge the breakdown
- Give your peers the benefit of a doubt (specifically in this remote day and age)
- Focus on what you are both committed to (e.g. company success, delivering great work, ...) and resolve the breakdown
- 5 day alignment here. Basically putting a by when on an interpersonal breakdown.
- Put structures & systems in place that support not running into the same breakdowns over and over again (if at capacity)

**When you are ready...**

**[Complete Version of Performance Culture](#)**