

HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEAMS

7 Building Blocks to Improving Your Performance

What do the names Lombardi, Wood, Coach K. and Smith all bring to mind? Successful coaches. These coaches accomplished great things by recruiting and developing good talent, building consistent training models, and delivering high quality performance for their schools and professional franchises.

Sounds a lot like what we would want to see in a corporate or non-profit organization:

- + Recruiting good talent
- + Building consistent business models
- + Delivering high quality performance for stakeholders

So what's the difference between a successful "business team" and a successful sports team? First lets talk about the definition of a "team". Webster's New World Dictionary defines:

Team: a group of people working together in a coordinated effort, to join in cooperative activity

Teamwork: joint action by a group of people in which individual interests are subordinated to group unity and efficiency

In life, sports, and business the greatest accomplishments can be attributed to the work of teams focused on a common goal to achieve unified results. What does a highly effective team look like? We'll discuss seven characteristics that are important to building a team that consistently delivers high quality and innovative performance.

1. TRUST

Why is it important?

In order for the team to work effectively, there needs to be establishment of trust between all the members that:

- + There is confidence among the team that the intentions of all members are good
- + There is no reason to be protective or careful around the group
- + All members can be vulnerable – not afraid to ask questions for help
- + Each member will be there for the other and the team, doing their best

Without trust:

- + Individual success is more important than group success
- + People don't share for fear of criticism
- + Communication breaks down
- + Groups become politicized
- + Team lacks commitment

Can you think of examples in work, sports, or life where teams have operated with and without trust? What were the results?

In business a contract cannot be entered into without a statement of understanding and trust between the parties entering into it. Teams enter into unwritten contracts when they are formed to work together towards a common goal in the completion of the assigned task. In most cases the strength of the team is dependent on the diverse skill sets of each individual member and they are brought together for their specialized expertise. If the parties do not all perform at the expected level, the entire team will not function at its best.

How can the team leader develop trust within his or her team? The first step is to show that he/she is trustworthy. By modeling teamwork for his co-workers, he shows them the way and “gives them permission” to let go of personal gain and submit to the greater goals to be accomplished.

This means:

- + Communicating well on tasks, deadlines, and deliverables
- + Being on time and doing his/her part
- + Showing vulnerability
- + Encouraging colleagues
- + Listening well
- + Going above and beyond when necessary

A team that exhibits strong trust is job-focused not politically motivated, however a lack of trust can lead to discord, low morale and high turnover.

Exercises for increasing trust with a team:

Personal Histories

Share your background and expertise. Knowing teammates is the first step to building trust.

Team Effectiveness Exercise

Discuss former team experiences. What worked well, what didn't? What are personal goals for this particular team?

Personality & Behavioral Profile

Understand how teammates receive information and communicate. Think about roles they play and where they can be most effective.

360 Feedback

Share honestly strengths and weaknesses with teammates.

Experimental Team Exercise

Share a team experience out of the office.

Taking the time to develop trust will prepare your team to go above and beyond for one another, with goal of achieving more than the individuals could on their own.

2. CONFLICT

How can this be part of an effective team?

Why would it be a good thing to cultivate?

Conflict at its best can take thinking and idea generation to its furthest depth. Each member of the team brings unique personality and specific experience. This dynamic can produce tension yet also contributes to the innovative strength of the team. By pushing one another in an "idea battle" - solutions can be generated and discussed that might never have been raised. This important dynamic of an effective team is called *productive ideological conflict*. It is conflict that is focused on *concepts and ideas*; a necessary and essential characteristic of great teams.

In order for this conflict to be productive several qualities must exist:

Trust

The players need to feel safe within their team in order to be vulnerable to presenting ideas.

Respect

The team must respect all ideas. They can argue the value, but each needs to be considered and “tested” as a potentially successful goal or solution

Conflict is about ideas and is not personal

The team must understand that ideological conflict can display the same qualities of inter-personal conflict – those of passion, emotion and frustration. Team members must be reminded this is not personal. To keep the emotion at a concept level it’s about developing the best ideas for the team

“Bad ideas” generate “Good ideas”

Often an idea that seems ridiculous can generate thought for one that is “the solution”. Encourage ideas to be shared, respected, and critiqued - it is a process that ultimately succeeds and it take a team willing to be vulnerable to all ideas to produce the best answers.

Ways to promote “Productive Conflict” within a team:

Leader Must Communicate...

Conflict is good and desired. It allows the team to produce the best possible solution in the shortest timeframe without “group think”.

Conflict is productive, not be avoided and never personal. Do **not** fear it as a part of teamwork.

Mining

Assign a member to extract the buried disagreements, shed light on them, and commit to staying with them until they are resolved.

Real-Time Permission

Recognize when members in debate become uncomfortable and reinforce what they are doing is important.

Role of Leader

Demonstrate restraint, allow natural resolution, and personally model appropriate conflict behavior.

Set Up Rules of Engagement in Advance

- + Agree to disagree
- + Respect all ideas
- + Assign the decision-maker when team is indecisive (CEO, COO, Manager, etc.)
- + Goal of productive conflict is to stay on the cutting edge of thought

3. COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Plans are no good if they aren't executed.

A function of clarity and buy-in commitment is a result of productive conflict and trust as discussed above. By soliciting team members' opinions in a trusting environment and then testing those ideas in a challenging and comprehensive way, a team can confidently commit to resolution knowing that a decision benefitted from multiple ideas which were respected and tested in an innovative and thorough format. The difference between commitment and consensus (or majority rule) is striking:

Commitment: the team agrees to the decision knowing that they took the best course of action with everyone's ideas considered; tapping into the collective wisdom of the entire team

Majority rule: the majority can make a decision that does not consider the ideas of the minority

Effective teams can commit to a clear course of action even when there is little assurance that the decision is correct, thus willing to take risks when necessary. Non-commitment can lead to delaying important decisions causing lack of confidence and "analysis paralysis".

Commitment to action is an important characteristic of effective teams. When you trust your members and have had comprehensive and thorough discussion, then you can agree to move forward and take action based on the collective wisdom of the group. Ideas that are not executed on can never bring success. Teams that are successful execute on their plans.

Ways to promote team commitment:

Cascading Messaging

After team meetings, record and transmit the key decisions made to determine what should be communicated to the rest of employees or constituents. The result is team members identify areas where they are still not clear about what was agreed upon and need more clarification of outcomes before putting them into action. The outcome will be a clear and consistent message from management determining what needs to be communicated immediately and what should remain confidential.

Deadlines

Commit to schedules for making decisions.

Contingency and Worst-Case Scenario Analysis

This exercise results in reduction of fear. In understanding the risk of wrong decision (if it survivable) is far less damaging than imaginable.

Low Risk Exposure Therapy

Realize that extensive analysis is needed to make a correct decision if topic has be exhaustibly discussed.

Role of Leader

Must be comfortable with a decision that may be wrong, constantly push the group for closure around issues, and commit to schedules and deliverables. Cannot place too much focus on certainty and consensus.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY

What does it mean?

Accountability means:

- + Playing your position
- + Showing up for practice
- + Being responsible for your healthy participation
- + Doing your homework

The importance of accountability in team dynamics cannot be overstated. The willingness of team members to call their peers on performance or behaviors that may hurt the team is extremely valuable to achieving the unified goal. It embodies trust and commitment leading to increased respect, improvement of team relationships and high expectations for one another's performance.

"More than any policy or system, there is nothing like the fear of letting down respected teammates that motivates people to improve their performance".

Teammates are willing to go the extra mile for people who have exhibited trust, have challenged them to do their best and have made a commitment to execute on their plan together.

Methods for improving accountability include:

Collaborate as a Group

Collaborate as a group on what goals, standards of performance, and tasks need to be executed by the team. Assign "champions" for each task and make sure each team member documents commitment to their accountability.

Publish Goals and Standards

Clarify publicly what goals the team needs to achieve, who will need to deliver what, and how everyone must behave in order to succeed.

Simple and Regular Process Reviews

Require team members to give regular feedback on how they feel their teammates are performing against goals and standards.

Team Rewards

Give awards to teams (not individuals).

Role of the Leader

Encourage and allow the team to serve as the first and primary accountability mechanism. Serve as ultimate arbitrator of discipline when the team fails. Clarify the priorities of the organization. Members can serve on multiple teams whose goals and deadlines conflict when given clear direction on which tasks take priority and assure that this is approved by appropriate managers.

5. RESULTS

A must.

Teams must see results. A team that sees results will continue to perform better over a team that does not. It will attract new members and work at a higher level of performance than a team that just gets by. Members will detect or start “taking care of themselves” if they do not see that their team is achieving desired success. So what are results?

“Teams must strive to achieve meaningful objectives, not just exist or survive.”

Meaningful objectives are collaborative ideas about what the team needs to achieve. They need to be measurable and specific and achievable. Results need to be defined by the group and expressed by the leader continually.

Outcome-based performance with attention means to care about collective goal of the team over individual needs and status. Results stem from teammates being accountable for their contributors, turning their attention away from their own needs and advancement or their departments, and shifting their attention away from the individual collective outcomes. Team status and individual status means being the part of the group and position where career goals become secondary to results.

Methods for improving results in teams

Public Declaration of Results

Proclaim specific international and measurable success. “We’ll do our best” is not good enough.

Results Based on Rewards

Tie comprehension to results and the achievement of specific outcomes.

Role of Leader

Set the tone for results. Must be selfless, reserving rewards and recognition for those who make real contributions to achievement of team goals.

6. Training

A team must keep in shape.

All teams must train if they want to see results. A team must be committed to practicing and pushing their levels of individual skills and expertise for the achievement of greater results. Just as a sports team has a rigorous training program, any organization must train its members.

Methods of improving training:

Discuss Skill Sets

Communicate the skill sets of individuals and what they need to continue to innovate in their field. Discuss as a group what skill sets are missing and how they can fill in the gaps.

Training Dashboard

Develop a “training dashboard” for all team members. Assign accountability and review and performance deadlines.

“Success results in embracing common sense with uncommon levels of discipline and persistence.”

7. An Involved Coach

The strategic link that ties the team together

All successful teams have an involved coach. This is the leader who ties all the pieces together and inspires and encourages the team. A team leader must take his or her role very seriously and be accountable to all its members.

Responsibilities of an Engaged Leader:

- + Continually training, developing, and encouraging his/her individual team members

- + **Vision:** facilitate development of and continually communicate and cast the vision of the team to the organization
- + **Strategy:** facilitate the development of strategies to achieve success
- + **Execution:** hold the team accountable to deliver on results

It can be said that the most important contributor to the success of an enterprise beyond the education, skill, and experience of the workforce or the strategy that follows is the functional and behavioral strength of the teams employed. The establishment of teams to accomplish specific projects or tasks is fundamental to the management and operation of any enterprise. Developing teams on the Seven Building Blocks will lead your organization to new heights of performance.

In team dynamics, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

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