

Is Your Group Really a Team?

We sometimes wonder why our “team” is not gelling, why it seems to have little spirit, or why it is not producing the results that it has been asked to deliver. In some cases, you are working hard to make a team out of a collection of people whose only common denominator is that they share office space or work for the same boss.

Before investing energy and money trying to make a team out of a group of individual contributors, ask ...

- Do these individuals share a common purpose (at a lower level than company mission and values)?
- Do these individuals need to coordinate effectively, or depend on each other, to achieve demanding goals?
- Are there practical ways these individuals can assist each other in pursuit of their common goals?
- Can they learn from, and with, each other?

If you answer “yes” to these questions, then you have the foundations for teamwork.

Teams exist in many forms: centrally located or distributed, formal or virtual, hierarchical or self-managing. But the best teams share four common conditions...

- *Purpose*—They know why they exist, why their work matters, and who cares about what they do.
- *Path*—They align in pursuit of common goals, balancing external demands with the reality of their own capacity.
- *Performance*—They deliver results reliably, serving the purpose that brought them together in the first place.
- *Partnership*—Their interaction allow them to produce more together than they could have by working alone.

These conditions typically don’t happen spontaneously. Leadership is the final necessary ingredient for effective teamwork. Someone must step up, acting as a catalyst for development of the team.

As in any other leadership situation, the best advice is to “learn, then lead.” Use the questions below to assess the current conditions in your team.

<i>Right now, to what extent would members of your team agree with each of these statements...</i>	<i>Not At All</i>					<i>Completely</i>					
Others outside of this team care about the work we do—the efforts of this team are valued.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
We deliver quality products and helpful services—our “customers” get what they need from us.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
We are uniquely qualified to do what we do—we are the right people with the right resources.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
The work we do together really matters to the business—we impact the bottom line.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
We pay attention to what’s happening around us, then adjust our priorities and plans accordingly.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
Our priorities are very clear—each of us knows what work really matters most at any given time.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
We know where we are headed as a team—our goals are clear and the path to them well defined.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
There is no confusion about who does what—everyone knows their role and who’s doing what.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
Each of us knows what is expected of us, and is committed to doing it as best we can.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
I have sufficient opportunity to participate in decisions that affect the team.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
I know how well or poorly we are doing as a team at any given time.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
We are always getting better at what we do, and preparing for whatever the future brings.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
The time we spend together in meetings is valuable and productive.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
I would not hesitate to offer my teammates feedback on their work or behaviour in the team.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
We learn together constantly, as a team as well as individually.	0	1	2	3	4	5					
I respect and trust my co-workers, and feel respected and trusted in kind.	0	1	2	3	4	5					

Lead Team Development Conversations

Becoming a team requires that someone, leaders within the team, step up to initiate then facilitate conversations that build effective teamwork. Anyone can lead—you don't have to be a "boss" to start team members talking about *What* they will do, *Why* they should do it, *How* they will get it done together, and how they will *Check* that the right things are happening.

How could you help your team have the following team development conversations?

PURPOSE

Purpose precedes great performance. A team with a shared, compelling purpose becomes more focused, energized and confident. People need to know why their team exists; why their efforts matter. Connect the team with its stakeholders and the value delivered to them.

<p><i>Who cares about what we do, and why do they care?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers/clients/users • Investors/managers • Communities/regulators • Employees/suppliers 	<p><i>What do we contribute or deliver to our "customers"?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality products • Helpful services • Peace of mind • Opportunity
<p><i>How does our team add to the business bottom-line?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase revenue • Decrease cost • Impact cash flow • Mitigate risk 	<p><i>What uniquely positions us to do what we do?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capability, practices • Qualifications, authority • Capacity, flexibility • Access, relationships

PATH

Defining a path forward for the team is a "strategic". Choices must be made: which opportunities or threats to respond to; how best to leverage strengths and manage weakness; or, what to do next amongst many alternatives. Perhaps hardest of all is choosing not to do attractive, but low value, things.

<p><i>What matters most now—what must we focus on?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executing • Producing • Improving • Expanding 	<p><i>What will we accomplish together?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term objectives • 90 day goals • Critical milestones • Key metrics
<p><i>What opportunities/threats do we face externally?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scan the environment <p><i>What are our strengths/weaknesses internally?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scan team performance 	<p><i>How will we align and coordinate our efforts?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear roles • Appropriate authorities • Shared work plans • Mechanisms to coordinate

PARTNERSHIP

Partners see they need each other to succeed, that they are better collaborating together, rather than working alone or becoming embroiled in competition and conflict. There is opportunity in sharing, and strength in diversity. Each may lose a little personally, but wins more as part of the team.

<p><i>How will we learn together, improving as we go?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge ourselves • Celebrate successes • Confront breakdowns • Share individual learnings 	<p><i>How will we sustain high quality relationships?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground rules • Adapting to personal styles • Team socializing • Constructive conflict
<p><i>How will we give each other needed feedback?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe each other work • Listen to each other • Offer helpful suggestions • Support growth/change 	<p><i>When, where and how will we meet together?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily—check in • Weekly—tactical • Monthly—operational • Quarterly—strategic

PERFORMANCE

Teams exist to deliver results—together. An unrelenting focus on taking actions promised and achieving goals set is a requirement for any team to succeed. Energy for the team's work takes root by setting clear expectations, then is sustained by capturing the momentum of progress made.

<p><i>How will we stay on top, prepared for the future?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with stakeholders • Invest in development • Embrace change • Hire the best 	<p><i>What contributions are each of us expected to make?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What—results expected • Why—worth of the effort • How—actions planned • Check—means for review
<p><i>How will we know how we are doing as a team?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visible scoreboard • Progress updates • Commitment tracking • Well run review meetings 	<p><i>Who will make key decisions when they are needed?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directive—boss decides • Participative—we input • Consensus—we decide • Empowered—I decide