



Working Resources

Helping Companies Assess, Select, Coach and Retain Emotionally Intelligent People

Newsletter

Creating Powerful Teams

Teams are the most common business unit for high performance. Although the word gets used loosely and not always appropriately, there is universal acceptance that teams create opportunities for high performance results. A team's performance includes both individual results and collective work products, yielding sums greater than its parts.

True teamwork promotes individual and collective performance. Effective teams value listening and communicating, sharing work responsibilities, provide support and can make work more social and enjoyable. Members are supportive of one another and recognize the interests and achievements of each other. When they are working the way they should, they are incredibly effective in achieving high performance results.

Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith (*The Wisdom of Teams; Teams at the Top*) provide this definition of teams:

A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and an approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.

From Group to Team

The essence of a team is common commitment. Teams evolve over time and have a pattern of development. During the *forming* stage, groups attempt to define their tasks and decide how to accomplish them. They sort out how the members will relate to each other. During the *storming* stage, members establish a pecking order within the group. Then, in the *norming* stage, members accept the ground rules and norms by which the members will cooperate. In the *performing* stage, the group has settled relationships and validated expectations and can turn to work for which they are mutually responsible. At this stage the team is capable of more work in concert than the sum of the individual efforts would have produced.

Dr. Maynard Brusman is a consulting psychologist and trusted advisor to the senior leadership team. He is the president of Working Resources, a human resources consulting, training, and executive coaching firm.

We specialize in helping companies assess, hire, coach and keep top talent; executive selection; leadership consulting; 360-degree feedback; change management; interpersonal communication skills; emotional intelligence; performance improvement; culture surveys; career development and executive coaching.

Dr. Brusman is a highly sought-after speaker and workshop leader. He leads mission, values, and vision retreats.

"Maynard Brusman is one of the foremost coaches in the United States. He utilizes a wide variety of assessments in his work with senior executives and upper level managers, and is adept at helping his clients both develop higher levels of emotional intelligence and achieve breakthrough business results. As a senior leader in the executive coaching field, Dr. Brusman brings an exceptional level of wisdom, energy, and creativity to his work."—Jeffrey E. Auerbach, Ph.D., President, College of Executive Coaching

He has been chosen as an expert to appear on radio and TV, MSNBC, CBS Market Watch, and in the Wall Street Journal, San Francisco Chronicle, and Fast Company magazine.

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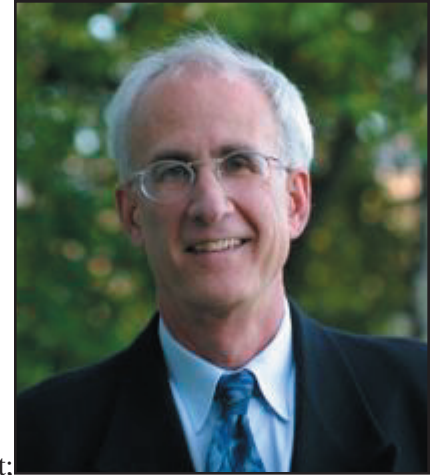
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Teams differ from working groups because they require both individual and mutual accountability. While they also rely on sharing information, perspectives, and joint decisions, teams produce results through the joint contributions of its members. They are committed to mutual goals, as well as individual goals, and they share a common purpose. Teams develop direction and momentum as they work together to achieve a shared goal. Thus they commit to working together towards the same ends, even though each member may participate in different ways.

Working together towards a shared goal can create social ties and enjoyment. This is an important factor that contributes to high achievement. The Hawthorne Studies reveal that people work better together when they are allowed to socially interact with one another and are given supportive attention. While this study initially set out to determine how lighting in a factory affected performance, the results revealed that the fact that people were being observed and had others interested in them was the determining factor that increased performance. This is called the Hawthorne Effect.

The Hawthorne Effect has importance for executives interested in increasing results without command and control tactics: pay attention to people and their teams, express genuine interest in them, give them opportunities for social interaction, frequent feedback, and stand back and let them perform.

Management should not leave teams alone. Teams left on their own can be confused. Most successful teams shape their purpose in response to a demand or opportunity put in their path by higher management. This helps teams get started by broadly framing the organization's performance expectations in alignment with the organization's mission and purpose. Management is responsible for clarifying the team's challenges. It should let the team develop a shared commitment to purpose, set specific goals, and determine its timing and work approach.

Defining Common Purpose

The best teams spend a significant amount of time and effort exploring, shaping and agreeing on a mutually defined purpose. This activity continues throughout the life of the team. Research on failed teams shows that they rarely develop a common purpose.

The best teams also take their common purpose and translate it into specific performance goals. These goals relate to the common purpose and build on each other, moving the team forward towards achievement and creating powerfully motivating and energizing steps to success. The achievement of goals along the way builds momentum, fosters trust among members and helps build continued commitment

Specific performance goals may be such things as bringing a product to market in record time, a 50 percent decrease in customer complaints, or achieving a zero-defect rate while cutting costs by 40 percent. Transforming broad directives into specific goals provide first steps for forming the identity and purpose of the team. As the team progresses with small wins, they reaffirm their shared commitment.

Specific Goals Provide Clarity

The combination of purpose and specific goals is essential to performance. Each depends on the other. Clarity of goals helps keep a team on track, focused and accountable. The broader, overlying aspirations of a team's purpose can provide meaning and emotional energy.

When people are working together toward a common objective, trust and commitment follow. Members hold themselves responsible both as individuals and as a team for the team's performance. This sense of mutual accountability produces alignment towards achieving a common goal. All members share in the rewards. People who participate in effective teams find the experience energizing and motivating in ways that their usual jobs could never match.

On the other hand, groups that are established as a "team" but that do not have a clear common purpose rarely become effective teams. Only when appropriate performance goals are set does the process of discussing the goals and the approaches to them give team members a clear choice: they can disagree with a goal and opt out, or they can pitch in and become accountable with and to their teammates.

Mutual Accountability

Though it may not seem like anything special, mutual accountability can lead to astonishing results. It enables a team to achieve performance levels that are far greater than the individual bests of the team's members. To achieve these benefits, team members must do more than just listen, respond constructively, and provide support to one another. In addition to sharing these team-building values, they must share an essential discipline.

Katzenbach and Smith in their books about teams (1992, 1993) talk about five essential disciplines of effective teams:

1. A meaningful common purpose that the team has helped shape
2. Specific performance goals that flow from the common purpose
3. A mix of complementary skills
4. A strong commitment to how the work gets done
5. Mutual accountability

The challenge for top management is how to build effective teams without falling into the trap of appearing to promote teams for their own sake. There should be a relentless focus on performance. If management does not put the focus on the link between teams and performance, then there is the risk of teams becoming another management fad. Paying constant attention to specific teams and their progress on specific performance goals is the key.

Eight Keys to Team Performance

Here are eight key approaches for building team performance that Katzenbach and Smith found in their research of high performing teams.

1. Establish urgency, demanding performance standards and direction.
2. Select members for skill and skill potential, not personality.
3. Pay particular attention to first meetings and actions.
4. Set some clear rules of behaviors.
5. Set and seize upon a few immediate performance-oriented tasks and goals.
6. Challenge the group regularly with fresh facts and information.

7. Spend lots of time together.
8. Exploit the power of positive feedback, recognition and reward.

Some successful companies have consistently produced the most innovative products under intense deadline and budget pressures by focusing on team emotional intelligence.

A group's effectiveness isn't simply the sum of its members' individual competencies. Instead, it comes from the synergism of members' capacities for awareness and regulation of emotions within and outside the team. These competencies build trust, group identity and a sense of group efficacy. Members feel that they work better together than individually.

Working with Virtual Teams

Deprived of most non-verbal and visual cues, virtual teams can be a challenge. There can be difficult interpersonal relationships. Exacerbating the problems inherent in any team is the fact that virtual team members are often from different parts of the company, different cultures and even different countries.

The challenges of working with diverse team members in virtual environments means there is a greater need for building cohesiveness and commitment to a shared purpose. Using the services of a team coach can help define the team purpose, specific goals, mutual accountability and facilitate communications that lead to high performance results.

Every company faces specific performance challenges for which teams are the most practical and powerful vehicle at top management's disposal. The critical challenge for senior managers is how to obtain maximum performance and in developing the kinds of teams that can deliver it.

Teams have a unique potential to deliver results, and executives have to know when to deploy teams strategically, when they are the best tool for the job, and how to foster the basic discipline of teams that will make them effective. By doing so, top management creates the kind of environment that enables team as well as individual and organizational performance.

Using Feedback to Build Teams Quickly

Everyone extols the value of teamwork. The need to build effective teams is increasing and the available time to do it is decreasing. How do you increase team effectiveness in a climate of rapid change with limited resources? Here is an excellent team-building exercise developed by Marshall Goldsmith (1998) in *Team Building without Time Wasting*.

To implement this process, the leader will have to coach or facilitate rather than be the boss of the project. Members should develop their own behavioral changes, rather than have them imposed upon them.

1. Begin by asking each member of the team to confidentially answer two questions:
 - A. On a scale of 1 to 10, how well are we working together as a team?
 - B. On a scale of 1 to 10, how well do we need to be working together as a team?

Calculate and discuss the results. Research involving several hundred teams in multinational corporations showed that the “average” team member believed that his/her team was currently at a “5.8” level of effectiveness but needed to be at a “8.7.”

2. Ask the team, “If every team member could change two key behaviors to help close the gap between where we are and where we want to be, which two behaviors should we all try to change?” Prioritize the behaviors and determine the two most important behaviors to change for all team members.

3. The team members also choose two behaviors for personal change that will help close the gap. Then they ask for brief progress reports from each other monthly.

Progress can be charted. Results have clearly shown that if team members have regularly followed up with their colleagues, they will invariably be seen as increasing their effectiveness in their selected individual “areas for improvement.” The process works because it encourages team members to primarily focus on changing their own behaviors.



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