EMPOWERING YOUR TEAM

How to Build a High-Performance Environment

BY MAGI GRAZIANO

When it comes to constructing a team of people who work well together to create winning outcomes, knowing "how to" and understanding "how to" are very different concepts.

A strong and astute organizational leader is one who is committed to optimizing their resources and maximizing their return on their investment. Given that people expense is often the largest investment in any enterprise, creating this kind of culture is simply smart business. As a leader, empowering your workforce to unleash their strengths, collaborate and innovate, will leverage their ability to act as a team and produce results.

Work cultures where people focus only on their piece of the puzzle leads to a *silo mentality* and ultimately breeds ineffectiveness and inefficiency. A high-performance team cannot exist in an environment where competition and *one-up-manship* prevail. Additionally, teamwork is adversely impacted when the people on the team feel the need to focus on fighting and jockeying for authority or power. This need to be "better than" decreases collaboration and limits innovation. It is a recipe for stagnation and conflict—neither of which drives long term results.

Being a leader calls for rewiring our minds and our teams to repair an absence of trust. But before you can rewire, you first need to be aware and responsible for the absence of trust

in the first place. Whether you are seeking to create a high-performance work team or a high-performance culture, there are seven steps for creating an environment where high-performance and teamwork can thrive.

1 Identify and Clarify the Purpose for the Team

People must understand the "why" behind what they are doing. Clarifying the purpose allows people to see how they connect to it. Communicating an inspiring vision for the people on the team and mapping what success looks like when it is achieved is a foundational element for congealing a group of people together and getting them geared up to work in unison.

2 Select a Leader

The team's leader does not have to be the person who invents the purpose for the team. Instead, they need to be the person who accepts the responsibility for shepherding and guiding the team to success. The leader's job is to be present and there for the team. The best leaders select the right people, inspire them towards a vision and back out of the way during the planning stage unless they are specifically asked for guidance.

3 Establish Rules

People need to know what is expected from them and from the team. They also need to know and understand where the boundaries are regarding decision-making, autonomy and performance. Giving people the rules of the game before they agree to play it allows for people to opt in or out. Advanced clarity of expectations also reduces unnecessary problems and confusion, and it serves to mitigate poor performance and unwanted turnover on the team.

4 Select the Players

Whether you are building an enterprise or a team of people to accomplish a project, it is crucial that you select the right people for the right roles and for the right reasons. When people are engaged, they have a strong desire to bring value—to be a contributor. They enjoy the type of work they are doing and are able to connect their work to the bigger picture.

The best team dynamics happen when there is a variety of people who bring their uniqueness to the team. Beyond competencies and skills, it's important to consider unique traits that each team member brings to the table and how those unique traits can be leveraged for optimal creativity and innovation.

5 Set the Level

Level-setting gives each member of the team a new opportunity to begin again. During a level set, team members explore the barriers to working with others in a productive and effective manner. Even the most astute and self-aware people discover limits that were previously hidden from their conscious view. The team lays out the path for the best way to work together and how they will resolve personality conflicts and internal challenges with the dynamics on the team. At the completion of the level set, the team creates a collective possibility for the team that is inspiring to each and every member.

6 Planning

The best approach for a leader during planning is to be a source for inspiration, questions and guidance. Leaders who step too far in create teams that are dependent on them and lack creativity. If the leader notices a problem with the plan, rather than pointing it out, it is much more empowering to ask questions that provoke the team members to activate their critical thinking skills and think potential challenges through.

7 Check in, Track Progress and Celebrate Success

When people are aware of the milestone meetings and are given regular feedback, uncertainly and unnecessary stress is reduced. Laying out the stages of organizational effectiveness by defining the criteria for low, moderate and high momentum gives the team an opportunity to self regulate, correct and celebrate as they see fit.

While "knowing" and "understanding" are very different, "doing" is the key link. For the impatient leader, doing may be a challenge because progress is most often only experienced incrementally. Building a high-performance team is not about exponential breakthroughs. Sustainability is your goal and impatience is your enemy. Teams respond best to a system that allows them to fall, learn from their mistakes, move forward and sustain progress over time. When high concentration and effort is celebrated and genuinely appreciated, teams build confidence and fortitude to stay the course. ✪

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