

5 WAYS TO BUILD

A HIGH-PERFORMANCE TEAM



By Deseri Garcia

Why So Many Teams Fail

One of the most common conversations I have with company leaders revolves around low-performing teams. “How can I get my team to be more productive?” they ask. “My employees aren’t committed to results ... help!” they plead.

Believe me, I get it. As a business leader, it can feel hopeless when you’re struggling with dysfunctional team behavior, disengaged employees and destructive patterns. Even worse, it’s costing your organization money. According to Gallup polls:

- Actively disengaged employees cost organizations \$3,400 for every \$10,000 of salary, or 34 percent. That means an actively disengaged employee who makes \$60,000 a year costs their company \$20,400 more per year.
- Actively disengaged employees cause U.S. companies between \$450 – \$550 billion in lost productivity per year.
- An alarming 70% of American employees aren't working to their full potential, and they're slowing economic growth.

I’ve worked with hundreds of executives, managers and company leaders to turn underperforming teams into brilliant success stories. My experience proves time and time again that there are five key sources of team dysfunction:

1. Dishonesty and mistrust abounds
2. Healthy conflict is absent
3. Commitment is lacking
4. Accountability is unclear
5. Unity and results are inadequate

Here’s the good news. There is a process for helping you ignite and engage your teams and getting the kind of results you know they’re capable of. It’s all about getting individuals engaged and inspired. And it all starts with you.

This list of Five Ways to Build a High-Performance Team is a great place to start. By modeling the behavior you want to see in individuals and encouraging positive change within teams, your company will experience benefits far beyond what you can imagine.

01

Build a Culture of Trust



Openness and trust are essential components to productive and cohesive teams. Without them, individuals become guarded, suspicious and protective of their own interests. When team members aren't honest, or they simply don't trust each other, idea-sharing and brainstorming are minimal, and your project has very little chance of being successful.

As a Leader

It's important to model the willingness to display vulnerability-based trust. What does this mean? Being able to say, "I don't know the answer," or "I'm sorry, I really screwed up."

Your employees don't do what you say, they do what you do. By showing your own vulnerability - and that it's okay to not always have the answers - you enable them to breathe, focus, and understand that learning and growing are an acceptable part of the process.

Engage Your Team

Foster trust. Building a culture of trust takes time and requires many exposures. You have to give trust to get trust by showing team members respect and allowing them to take on new challenges. And when someone makes a mistake, talk with them about lessons learned.

Take time to get to know team members. Have meaningful conversations with the individuals on your team. Find out what their career aspirations or goals are. Learn to understand what matters to them outside of work. The bottom line: caring builds and begets trust.

Give team members your undivided attention. In Google's research from Project Aristotle, this is called ostentatious listening, which means that you actively show each team member that you are genuinely listening. This can be done in simple ways, like:

- Turning to face whoever is speaking
- Making eye contact with the speaker
- Putting down your cell phone
- Closing your computer
- Asking clarifying questions

All of these listening behaviors give team members a sense that you care. And when team members understand that you care, they will open up and trust further.

02

Encourage Healthy Conflict



From an early age, most of us have been taught that conflict is bad. So, it's no surprise that as adults, we either instinctively avoid conflict at work, or we follow the old-school rules of "playing nice," and avoiding "making waves." The problem is that when we choose this path, we actually miss out on the kind of passionate debates that are essential to great teamwork.

In reality, all lasting relationships require productive conflict in order to grow. When teams experience the same kind of productive conflict around ideas or concepts, the potential to create, innovate and perform increases exponentially (and you get faster at it, too).

Engaging in unfiltered passionate debate about issues is not only healthy for your team, it is vital for peak performance. In fact, you'll know when your team is on track when it experiences uncomfortably exhilarating debates that lead to growth and discovery.

As a Leader

Start off by learning more about what constitutes healthy conflict, and how to manage it within your team. This can be done a number of ways. For example:

1. Take an honest assessment of you and your team's willingness to engage in conflict. There are a number of ways to do this, including [The Five Behaviors™ assessment](#), behavioral profiles like [Everything DiSC](#), and [emotional intelligence assessments](#).
2. Reflect upon how conflict was handled in your family of origin, and how you handle it today as an adult. Encourage this same reflection among your team.
3. If you are conflict avoidant, it's going to be important that you stretch outside of your comfort zone. Learn to welcome and engage in healthy conflict and communicate the desire to have passionate debate among team members.
4. Enlist those who are good at handling conflict to hold others accountable.
5. Get commitment from the team to embrace conflict and value it as an important part of teamwork.

Engage Your Team

Once you've gone through the exercise of learning about healthy conflict as discussed above, it's time to help your team do the same. Communicate your desire for healthy conflict, conduct honest assessments, and encourage them to reflect upon their own conflict history.

Establish Healthy Conflict Team Norms. You will need to cultivate a healthy conflict culture by creating team norms as a group. The following list is a good example:

1. Model healthy disagreement behavior and acknowledge that conflict is sometimes uncomfortable.
2. Interrupt unproductive conflict.
3. Give real-time permission to disagree with or challenge others.
4. Acknowledge and encourage “good” conflict situations.
5. Foster trust in one another to engage in passionate debate.

Conflict norming. Develop clear rules of engagement around dealing with conflict. For instance, identify and agree on behavior do’s and don’ts. Here are some examples:

- Behavior Do’s:
 - Listen to understand
 - Be open to other points of view
 - Be willing to admit when you’re wrong
 - Display positive body language
 - Assume positive intent
- Behavior Don’ts:
 - Allow negative facial expressions, like eye rolling
 - Cut others off in mid-sentence
 - Display negative body language
 - Engage in side conversations
 - Solicit or form ally’s

Understand your team. As you engage in team discussions regarding conflict, strive to gain a solid understanding of each person’s viewpoints and comfort levels. Discuss obstacles to engaging in conflict, and how to overcome them.

For example, if a member is conflict avoidant, realize that they might better respond with some prior notice. You might say, “Hey, I need to talk about this, when would be a good time for us to discuss?”

Always bring them back together. As a leader, you’ll need to mine for conflict and police interactions, looking for direct or indirect tendencies to avoid it. But also keep in mind that avoiding conflict is human nature. Continue to encourage healthy, passionate debate, and don’t be afraid to stir the pot a little for rewarding outcomes.

Take the time to reflect after your team has navigated a time of conflict. Use positive reinforcement and emphasize the rewards and benefits. In addition, continuously remind members that you’re all on the same team working toward the same goals.

03

Raise the Level of Commitment



If your team members are not emotionally attached to project goals, then the level of commitment will be low. Unfortunately, without a clear focus on common objectives, no one will take ownership of tasks and responsibilities. Quite simply, individuals will not be invested or even care about the group outcomes.

As a Leader

There are a number of elements that will raise the level of commitment from your team members, and as a leader, you can positively influence them all.

- Identify and communicate the team's mission and how it fits into the bigger organizational picture.
- Ensure your team members perceive that their service on the team is valuable to the organization and to their own careers.
- Show members how individual challenges are an opportunity to grow, contribute, and learn new skills.
- Focus on collective, outcome-based results rather than individual status and goals.

Engage Your Team

Cascading messaging. When a team meeting concludes, review key decisions. Reach an agreement on what should and should not be communicated to the rest of the staff. Through this exercise, team members can ensure they are on the same page with all major decisions.

Deadlines. Ambiguity and misalignment among team members can be reduced by simply defining clear deadlines for when decisions must be made. Deadlines should be set for final/major decisions and actions, as well as milestones along the way.

Contingency and worst-case scenario analysis. Teams can overcome their fear of commitment by discussing contingency plans, worst-case scenarios or possible pitfalls.

04

Ensure Accountability



From the very beginning, team members should be well aware of not only their role, but the role of others. Reporting structures and responsibilities should be made very clear in order to minimize conflict. If this doesn't happen, your team will most likely experience territorial disputes and power struggles.

Project managers are responsible for not only defining roles, but also making sure there is effective communication between individuals. They should make sure all project assignments are understood, while delegating tasks and clarifying proper authority accordingly.

As a Leader

Successful teams thrive when members are free to hold each other accountable by way of a healthy dose of peer pressure. Building a culture where holding each other accountable is not only acceptable within a team, but encouraged and expected. Once you have a high level of comfort, trust and respect for each other, members will be able to speak freely and help each other maintain focus and productivity.

Engage Your Team

Continue building trust. When you continuously exhibit trust in each other, you will let your guard down. When you let your guard down, you are able to hold each other accountable.

Ask for help and insight. When you give teammates permission to speak freely, they can hold each other accountable in areas in which they need improvement, knowing they are already receptive to feedback.

Receive feedback openly. When team members do offer suggestions or reflect on each other's performance, assume they have the best of intentions. Remember that you are all pursuing the same team goals and want positive results for your team and the organization.

Ask why. Before you make a judgment and give feedback about someone else's behavior, pause and give them the benefit of the doubt. Ask 'why?' and try to determine the intentions and motives behind their actions. This will keep the level of trust among the team intact.

Embrace discomfort. The most difficult part of peer-to-peer accountability is learning to be open and honest with your team. It's not easy to be frank when discussing performance and behavior with your colleagues. But it's worth it, as it's essential to the success of your team and your organization.

05

Build Team Unity to Improve Results



The importance of team camaraderie and bonding cannot be overstated. If individuals do not feel united, they will act on behalf of their own interests. Nothing good can come out of this from a team perspective, because you'll have rogue individuals taking action without regard to others. This will lead to conflict, dissention, resentment and inaction.

The key points to focus on for improved results:

- The true measure of a great team is that it accomplishes the results it sets out to achieve.
- To avoid distractions, team members must prioritize the results of the team over their individual or department needs.
- To stay focused, teams must publicly declare their desired results and keep them visible.

As a Leader

You must develop a team approach and become a champion of collaboration, versus spotlighting individuals.

How do you do that? Start by brainstorming ways to recognize or reward efforts based on full team results. For example:

- Ensure team members understand a shared purpose and vision.
- Reinforce collaboration by rewarding and acknowledging collective over individual accomplishments.
- Foster team unity by encouraging team members to share information and resources with others to further the company's goals.

Make sure your team clearly understands the interconnectedness of what they do, and how each of their actions affect goals and productivity.

Engage Your Team

Track Results. Create ways for tracking key metrics and results. Teams should be able to see where they stand relative to their success at all times. This can be in the form of a scorecard, scoreboard, or KPIs.

Conduct regular reviews. Schedule regular one-on-one reviews with team members to review personal goals. Compare personal goals with team goals to see if they align. If they don't, encourage and look for opportunities to redirect priorities toward team results.

Go public. We all know the power of making public declarations of your goals. With this in mind, have each person state their team goals aloud among the group. Then encourage the team to verbally commit to those goals. Review and evaluate progress on a consistent basis.

Ready for High Performance Teams?

Vida Aventura can help.

If you're struggling with an under-performing team, you are not alone. Most leaders are faced with addressing disengagement, dysfunction and destructive behaviors throughout their careers. And we can help.

Vida Aventura delivers training that develops leaders and engages teams, leading to increased productivity, innovation and revenue.

Start with training and development. The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team will guide you through the hard work and huge payoff of forming a cohesive, productive team.



Based on Patrick Lencioni's bestselling book, "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team," The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team is a development program that guides teams to improve in five key areas that are paramount in creating a high-performance team.



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What Our Clients Are Saying

In response to the Inc. article, "Google Spent 2 Years Studying 180 Teams. The Most Successful Ones Shared These 5 Traits," originally published online July 19, 2017:

*Google could have saved two years starting with reading *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* and have Deseri Garcia teach *The 5 Behaviors of a Cohesive Team*. A cohesive team starts with trust. Learned it and now live it.*

Adam Dawson

Global Product Line Director at Delphi Technologies

Vida Aventura's approach doesn't fit in any of the neat little category boxes of team building. Deseri's team building is a combination of stretching personal limits, critical thinking, and exploring the limits of teamwork and trust. Our team that went through her program developed dramatically better insights into each other's core values and a deep sense of trust that turbocharged our interdependent business collaborations. This was experiential learning at its best!

K. Giesselman

Business Development, Siemens Industries Inc.

Highly skilled and engaging facilitators are essential to organizational learning. Deseri Garcia's strategic decision to earn Facilitator Accreditation demonstrates her commitment to improve people's lives at work and beyond.

Barry Davis

Vice President and General Manager, Wiley's Workplace Learning Solutions Group

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