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5 KEYS TO BUILDING A HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAM



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Foreword

The mere gathering of a group of people does not necessarily constitute a team, especially a high performance team. In order to build a productive and successful business, you must build a productive and successful team.

In this eBook you will learn the fundamental principles of teamwork. You will also learn the secrets behind successful teams and how to have the same successes in your own teams. It closely examines team building and the types of exercises you can use to build a dynamic, high performance team.

Key #1 – Team Building is Not Optional

Synopsis

Teams don't happen. You must build your team. The primary and most important element of team building lies in the ability of the leader to instill the vision of working together towards the effective and successful achievement of a goal.

Teamwork is so important that it is virtually impossible for you to reach the heights of your capabilities or make the money that you want without becoming very good at it.

Brian Tracy

To discover the keys to building teamwork, you need to learn about what it means to be a team. You also need to learn about team building. The concepts covered in this chapter include:

- Do you really know what teamwork means?
- Exactly what is team building and how does it help in teamwork?
- What kind of teams can use the team building exercises and learn to be a team?

By the time you complete this chapter, you will have found the answers to all this questions.

The Basics

Team Building Basics

The whole idea behind team building is to encourage good working relationships between the team members. Team building exercises will help members of your team learn how to work together, trust and support each other and develop a sense of cohesiveness that will help them operate at high level of productivity.

Team building also helps members develop critical work skills such as listening and communication. These skills are critical for developing a successful team.

Through team building, the goals and objects of the organization becomes clearer. These are defined and each team member is encouraged to participate in helping achieve them.

Team building also has a number of benefits for the individual team member. For instance, many people have the opportunity to grow and develop their leadership skills by being part of a team. When team members are entrusted with a role, they often find themselves trying to make sure that they do not disappoint their fellow team members.

Team building also allows For instance, knowing that your colleague is a single mom may make you more tolerant of her absenteeism. You may learn to evoke gentleness and sympathy in yourself.

In most cases, organizations normally hire a team building consultant to help with the exercises. The consultant takes time to know the team and come up with the right strategies for the particular team. This consultant is specifically trained for this. He can look at a team and come up with strategies to improve the performance of the said team.

The consultant normally makes a proposal to the organization, clearly

laying out his plan of action. He states the problems with the team and what he recommends for helping solve these problems.

The organization then makes the decision to hire the consultant or not based on the proposal. Sometime, the organization may only agree to some of the strategies but not all. The consultant is then faced with the team building task. After the program, he has to give the necessary feedback to the organization illustrating just how effective the exercise was.

Understanding the various elements involved, such as specifics of the theme within the training exercise, the measurable and achievable standards set, the relevant processes that enable the aforementioned items and the time frame in which all this is to take place.

Discussions on project plans, schedules and budget should all be held at the onset of the training exercise to ensure the overall performance of the team properly reflects the management systems in place.

Within the team training exercise elements like the results to be produced by the team and clear objectives for measuring these results are outlined to be followed diligently and any deviations should be monitored and controlled.

The communications mechanism should also be clear and concise as not all participants within the team will have the same level of technical understanding. Such divulging of information can be done regularly through different yet equally effective tools such as meetings, emails, collaborations, newsletters and many other high tech avenues.

Developing staffing procedures that encourage team participations also allows for the platform where only appropriate participants form the team. Randomly throwing together a group of individual and expecting them to work as a team is not only ludicrous but it can also have disastrous results.

Assigning an individual within the team training exercise to be responsible in ensuring all the participants are always kept abreast with all the relevant information is also important, as this ensure the smoothness of the overall team participation.

A team may simply be defined as a group of people who are working together towards a common goal. These people are entitled with different tasks that make a significant contribution towards the achievement of the said goal. Teamwork normally involves the team working interdependently. This means that one person's task is responsible for the success of the next person's tasks.

Teams are normally formed for a variety of reasons. There are some that are set up for short term goals while others are set for something more long term.

For instance, in an organization, you may find a team formed just to deal with a particular project. However, you may also find other teams in every single department that work together throughout to increase the productivity of their departments.

The Types of Teams That Can Participate In Team Building Exercises

Team building can basically work in any given team. It can work at work, school or even when it comes to sports. One of the most popular types of teams that use these strategies is the departmental teams. These are teams made up of people who do the same kind of work. For instance; you may have a team from the human resources department or even have a team from the I.T department. This type of team is normally found in work environments.

There are also management teams. These teams may comprise of managers from various departments. Even as leaders, these people need to learn how to work together for the overall success of the company.

Team building also helps the managers to become better leaders to their teams. The skills acquired can be passed down to the team by the leader.

There can also be team building for mixed or cross-functional groups. These are usually teams that are made up of people from different departments in an organization. These departments have to have some common ground. For instance, you can have departments that deal with people such as customer care and human resources.

Special projects teams can also use team building exercises. These are teams that may be set up for just short term goals. If they successfully complete the team building program, such teams will be more effective. In addition, the team may be able to complete the project in a shorter time than anticipated. This all comes from learning how to work well with each other.

Self-directed teams that comprise of people from different fields also use team building exercises. They take the program to help themselves grow as leaders.

They also use what they have learned to train their individual teams on how to foster the bond that will enable them to work together.

Any team that has a common goal can use team building to help them work together much better.

A good team is one that has learned how to work together to achieve a common goal. This is the essence of teamwork.

Key #2 – Solve Problems Quickly

Synopsis

In the very competitive and cost conscious environments today, a lot of companies are beginning to realize that most matters can be successfully dealt with within the company if there are workable teams of problem solving expertise in place. By getting the most out of the resources available from the people already knowledgeable on the problem the company can problem solve more effectively and in a fraction of the time.

Team work entails a lot of activities. There is decision making, problem solving, communication and a number of other activities. In this chapter, we look at the team building exercises that tackle different aspects of teamwork.

- What are the different exercises that a team can participate in?
- What do these exercises entail and how are they important?

Relationships can't be forced; people need to work on different things to make them work. This is the same thing with teamwork.

People will not just automatically learn to communicate and trust each other. They have to practice on these skills.

Fixing It

The successful companies realize that by getting the employees to work in teams, ongoing challenges, opportunities, improvements, re- engineering, product development and many other aspects can be better addressed and solutions found simply based on the oneness effect of the problem solving mindset.

Being able to quickly deploy teams whenever there is a need, can only be done if the proper complimenting tools and training are constantly available.

Some of the problem solving areas that should be covered within the exercise should be clearly defined. These may include clearly defined goals, identifying and priority listing the barriers pertaining to the said goals, suitable development of solutions that are not only clever and cost effective but should also be workable.

Not forgetting the cooperation of all involved, is another very important element that should not be overlooked as this one element can derail any problem solving exercise.

When all this has been discussed and explored, the next step in the problem solving venture should be to ensure the proper execution of the plan takes place.

Constant or periodic checks should be practiced to ensure the exercise is kept on track and the problems are effectively solved or at the very least some success is shown in understanding the problem and addressing it.

All this is done with the end goal in mind to ensure its smooth and speedy attainment. With the necessary tools and techniques available, most teams can help to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the company.

Communication Exercises

Needless to say, communication is a vital part of any given relationship. Two people can't live and work together unless they can communicate with each other. The same theory applies to team, for a group to work together they must be able to effectively communicate with each other.

Communication goes beyond sharing a common language. Two people may be English speakers but even without the language barrier, they may not be able to communicate with each other. There are so many fundamental principles that go into effective communication. This is why this type of exercises is normally vital in any given team.

There are many types of communication exercises all geared to help team

members communicate with each other effectively. One such exercise is the "blind man and guide." In this exercise, two teammates are forced to work with each other. They need to retrieve a certain object within the vicinity. However, one teammate has to do the retrieval while blindfolded. The other teammate will then give directions to help them make the retrieval. The only way they can do this is by working together and communicating. If the guide becomes frustrated and starts yelling at the "blind man" this will bring about confusion and hinder their progress. On the other hand, "the blind man" will not succeed if he decides not to listen to the "guide."

There are also communication exercises that involve interaction with all team members. You are supposed to mingle and bond with members and get to know them well. After this, you will be asked details about the team members. This normally tests listening skills and memory.

Trust and Interdependence Exercises

According to research, this is one of the most difficult exercises to administer. Naturally, people take time to build trust. Trying to get the team members to trust each other may be a hard task but still achievable. Trusting each other cements the relationship between the team. This helps them to work with each other well. It also makes an individual gain some sense of responsibility.

There are different exercises that can be used to build trust and interdependence. For instance, there is one exercise whereby the team players line up in two rows. The people on the first row normally have their backs to the others on the second row. Now without turning back, they are required to fall back letting their guard down. They should be able to trust that the team member standing behind them will catch them.

Problem Solving Exercises

The whole concept of these exercises is to test the team's problem solving

skills. You give them a problem to solve and watch every step that they make towards solving it. You will also get to see how well they will work together in order to solve it. This is a vital exercise because it can influence the success of any team. A team that can't handle the task may crumble and fall under pressure. On the other hand, a team that can do this well will be able to go through any difficulties and come out victorious at the end.

Some of the problem solving exercises include, putting a big puzzle together. Every team member plays a role in ensuring that this is done. You may also present a problem to the team and just ask them to solve it. This can be anything that has to deal with their work. For instance, a customer care department team may be asked to play out a scene whereby there is an irritable customer threatening one of their staff members with violence. The staff member isn't supposed to handle the situation alone. It is up to the team to come together with strategy to handle the current problem and put measures in place for handling similar issues in the future.

Decision Making Exercises

This is much similar to the problem solving exercises. It tests the team's ability to make decisions together. In these exercises, the whole team is supposed to work together. It will not be upon the leader to come up with the next plan of action. These exercises are very important in any team. When a team makes good strong decisions together, they will be successful. However, a team that doesn't involve all members in decision making may end up fostering resentment from the members who have been left out. It will also affect the quality of the decision since the best ones are the ones that are made by all members sharing ideas. On the other hand, total inability to make decisions will delay projects and can ultimately contribute to the failure of the whole team.

In such exercises, a team may be presented with a problem and about five different solution alternatives. They have to discuss these alternatives and

decide on the best option for the whole team. Each group member should contribute as to why they believe that is the best option. They should also get to a point of either compromise or total agreement.

Planning Exercises

Nothing much can ever be accomplished without the proper planning. This is why this exercise is very important in any given team. This goes hand in hand with the adapting exercises. This is supposed to help the group to realize their strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are then put all together to show exactly what the group is capable of achieving if at all they decide to work together.

Planning exercises are very many. You can have the team faced with a task whereby they are required to complete it effectively and in the shortest time possible. For instance, you can ask them to provide a budget for a certain amount of money. They should imagine that they are stranded at a bus station with just the basic amount of money. The budget should explain how they expect to get home with their limited funds and within the shortest time possible.

Socialization Exercises

These exercises are sometimes referred to as, bonding exercises. They are supposed to help the employees to get to know each other through a social interaction. It is important for the team to learn how to socialize with each other. This will help build their work relationship making them much more effective in their job. It will also help create a good working atmosphere free of hostilities.

Socialization exercises are normally very simple. You can actually have a setting like a speed dating game. The employees will be asked to talk to each other for a few minutes. When these time elapses, they are to move to another team members. This is repeated until all team members have had a chance to talk to each other. This exercise should be fun and simple.

Personal Development Exercises

Sometimes it's hard to be a team player if you have personality traits that are sociable. There are people who are naturally shy; others are anti-social while others may just not be comfortable in the team. This exercise helps each individual to examine themselves and evaluate what exactly they bring to the team. It encourages members to get out of their own shells or individual limitations and become the best that they can be.

Members may be faced with the challenge of individually coming up with their own shortcomings and listing them down. They should do this anonymously. The lists are then handed down to the leader. The team comes together after this and discusses the solution for each shortcoming. For instance, people who may have listed shyness as a shortcoming may be offered advice on how to overcome this. Remember, nobody will be addressed directly due to the anonymity. It will just be like a brainstorming session. Once a person is comfortable with themselves in the team, they will be more productive.

Awareness And Sensitivity Exercises

This is normally a delicate exercise especially in mixed teams. It isn't uncommon to find organizations refusing this part of team building. However, it is very important. There are so many stereotypes that come with every group of people. This may naturally bring about resentment and also distrust between members of a team. This definitely affects their ability to work together.

However, you can make this exercise fun and educative at the same time. Come up with name tags for everyone. In this name tag, don't put any negative stereotypes. Put positive messages that a group or a person. For instance, if a person is associated with a group of people considered to be sneaky liars but with very brilliant minds, put the latter as the tag. Then put the tags at the back of each person. Each person is then supposed to guess what's on their back without taking a look. Teambuilding exercises

aren't just about having fun. They help in teaching people the core aspects of teamwork and how to be a team

Key #3 – Understand the Personalities You Are Working With

Synopsis

In the process of trying to put together a team for any endeavor it would be most useful to carry out some sort of personality assessment. This is because the eventual group that is formed has to be able to work closely and competently until the goal of the project is achieved. When all the participants in the team are on a similar wavelength or mindset then the various functions of the group will be easier and smoother.



Personality

In order to do this personality assessment exercise there are many ways available, some of which are easier and straight forward while others may be a little more complex.

The choice made would really have to depend on the type of project and personalities involved. Simply conducting common type tests like self-report inventories which involves the participant addressing a set of

questions is sometimes enough for the powers that be to make the decisions for team formation.

However there is also more complex test that may require a more in depth amount of information before any decision is made. The different types of test may eventually produce the data in the form of percentile ranks, z scores, sten scores and many other types of standardized scoring platforms.

When all the relevant data is collected then the assessments can begin and the best choices can be made to form the team. Perhaps the most important elements most team leaders look for would be the reliability and validity factors within the individual chosen.

This of course is over and above the relevant technical expertise that may be needed for the project to be able to achieve its goal successfully and smoothly.

Though these personality assessments are a huge help when trying to determine the best people for the team, it is not always a full proof method, as some individual react to different situations where there is pressure from the need for collaboration. Thus these assessments can only be used as a guide.



Key #4 – Be An Empathetic Listener

Synopsis

Working together often has the very rudimentary problems that can eventually be worked out fairly quickly and comfortably. However there are also times when the team leader has to make decisions that are not going to be very popular which may cause negative repercussions among the other members of the team.

One method popularly advised to be used when this occurs is empathetic listening. Studies have shown that this method has proven it worth many a time for its effectiveness and swiftness.

You may be able to find the most effective team building exercises but still fail to get your team to work together. In this chapter, we look at the tips that can help make the team building successful.

- As a team leader, how are you helping your team in the team building program?
- Is everyone in the team committed to the process?
- Do the team members know why they need the team building program?

You can't just decide to go for team building without considering a number of factors. This isn't something that you embark on blindly.

Having Success

Empathetic listening is basically a techniques adopted to help an individual manage and avoid disruptive and negative behavioral patterns from becoming a problem within the team that working towards the successful completion of a project.

This technique can also be used in other circumstances where there is a

need to hear and understand all views and thoughts on any particular situation or circumstance.

The exercise of empathetic listening involves the ability to provide the platform for the speaker to enjoy undivided attention, as any distractions can be deemed disrespectful to the speaker.

It also encourages both parties to be completely committed to solving the perceived problem at the time. Being nonjudgmental is also another very important criteria.

Embarking on the exercise with preconceived notions can only distort any effort to solve the problem. Making a conscious effort not to minimize or trivialize the speakers concerns is also equally important.

Making observations from the visual impacts showed when the speaker is expressing himself or herself is also another form of gaining insight into just how the speaker is effected by the perceived problem. The emotions expressed through the course of the exercise can help define the method eventually chosen to defuse or address the problem.

Offering verbal solutions before the speaker completes explaining his or her perspective is also not encouraged, however asking clarifying questions may be welcomed.

Goals and Objectives

Team building exercises will not work if at all the team has not set the goals and objectives that they want to meet. Without a clear vision, the whole exercise will be futile and you will not be able to achieving anything. You have to clearly define the goals of the team.

These goals should not necessarily be the organizational goals only. You can incorporate your own team's organization. For instance, if you are a sales department team, you may decide to have goals for your sales team. Maybe you can set new targets or aim to reach new markets. This is what

will keep all members of the team focused.

Analysis of Successes and Failures

A team building consultant will take the time to examine how the team works before suggesting the best team building exercises. However, for the exercises to be very effective, the team has to do their own self-examination.

Examine the past successes and failures of the team. Find what needs to be worked on or simply improved and use this as a guideline. You can also have members of the team anonymously writing down issues that they may be having within the team. This will help keep the team building more focused.

Commitment

Before embarking on team building, there should be commitment from the team members. Most teams normally go out of town or to other locations so as to concentrate on the exercises. During this time, they need to be focused only on the task at hand and not on any other issues.

The team members should commit their time and effort. They should be willing to participate in team building. This isn't something that a team leader can push people to do. Commitment is very vital for the success of the exercises.

Communication and Education

To be able to build any successful teams, there should be communication. You should let your team members know exactly what is planned. This shouldn't be an ambush of some sort. Getting the team involved is very important in making the exercises effective.

You should also take the time and educate the team on the importance of the exercises. This will help them be more serious and committed. Point

out the importance of team work and that can be achieved if the team learnt how to work together. Don't assume that everyone knows this. There are so many people who may strongly be pro individualism.

Team Charters

Every team needs to have a charter. This should clearly provide a guideline on the behaviors and code of conduct for every team members. Don't even attempt to embark on team building if you don't have this charter. This is what sets the whole basis for team work and is therefore very important.

Expectations

Everyone should lay out their expectations for the exercise. You can also involve the team members in clearly defining this. It's not enough to have goals for the team. It is also good that you have short term goals for the team building exercises. This will help you focus. It will also help in evaluating just how effective the whole program is. The expectations can also act as a guideline for selecting the right team building exercises.

Leadership

Leadership is very important for any team building to succeed. This is why it is advisable for the leaders to actively participate in all the exercises. The leader should also take the initiative and the role of setting examples for everyone. An absentee leader can actually make the whole exercises flop. It may be perceived as a lack of interest on their part. In addition, the team can't learn effectively.

The team leader has to be involved in the team especially during the team building exercises.

Key #5 – Focus On Improving Your Leadership

Synopsis

A good team is one that has a strong leader. This leader will be able to effectively lead the team in team work and in the pursuit of the set goals and objectives. This chapter looks at some of the qualities that a good leader should possess.

- Is the leader a part of the team?
- What role does the leader play in supporting the team?
- Do you have what it takes to successfully lead a team?

Doing It Right

There are several reasons why there is a need to explore and even implement periodic exercises within a team for spoken communication training. Some of the elements that should be addressed within the spoken communication training are as listed below:

- Ensuring that all involved learn to speak clearly and audibly is the first step to effective communication. Taking the time and effort to stop where the impact is needed for all listening to understand the importance of a particular point being made help to emphasize the point.
- Using “clever” or bombastic language is often more confusing than enlightening. By the constant use of such language the listeners would either lose interest in what is being said or worst still go about doing things in a way that quite contrary to the purpose at hand, thus causing even further complications. The idea of effective communication is not to impress but to ensure the contents of what is being said is completely understood by all.

- When delivering important instructions, adopting a method where the listeners are asked to repeat the said instructions, ensures complete understanding of what is required by both parties. Also giving the instruction in an orderly format helps to keep confusion levels minimal.
- If the intention is to keep everyone relaxed, simple and easy to understand language should be used. Avoid making too many jokes especially if the connotations are ambiguous, as it can not only cause confusion but also cause misinterpretation and the feeling of being slighted.
- Using active rather than passive language patterns is also encouraged. There is more emphasis on the importance of the action requirement through active language patterns.

Qualities of a Good Leader

Supportive

A good team leader should be able to encourage and support his or her team. This is what can help build a strong team. Enabling people to be the best that they can be, also improves the general performance of the team as a whole.

A good team leader also listens to the grievances and requests of the team and presents this to the organization. The leader should be willing to effectively represent his team whenever need arises.

Great Interpersonal Skills and Strong Relatable Character

A good leader should have good character. He should be someone that the team members can easily talk to. A good leader knows where to strike the balance between being friendly and authoritative at the same time.

If a team respects their leader, they will be able to follow and work

together effectively. However, a team that fears their leader will not be able to work well together.

Confident

A good leader should always be confident in everything that they do. A team may easily fail to follow a person who seems to be unsure about themselves or the tasks in hand. The team may also fail to respect such a leader. A confident leader can also easily inspire others to be their best and work hard at attaining their set objectives.

A confident person is more likely to lead a team effectively.

Committed to Excellence

There are different types of teams. There is a team that may just try to complete assignments fast without paying attention to quality. There are others that can't be bothered and normally fail to meet objectives or deadlines. These teams have weak leaders who fail to lead them in the right direction. A good team leader should always have integrity and commitment to excellence. They should seek to have the performance from the team. Such a leader ensures that the team remains productive at all times.

As a leader, you have to set high standards and equally high expectation levels. This will help your team members to aim high each time.

Focused

If a team leader isn't focused then it's very hard for the team to work together to realize their goals. A distracted team is likely to postpone assignments or even fail to work together if at all they don't share common objectives.

A focused leader will be firm at ensuring that every member of the team participates in helping achieve the set goals and objectives. He normally

has his mind set of increasing productivity and the output quality of the team.

Excellent Communication Skills

You can't lead people if at all you can't express yourself effectively. Communication is about just being able to be understood. You need to watch out for small issues that may bring a communication breakdown. Learn to be polite and to talk to your teammates with respect. A leader who constantly yells doesn't inspire his or her team. You should also not issue orders. Learn to discuss and make requests or assign roles.

You should also learn to be listener. This is a very effective communication skill. You can learn a lot and get to work well with others if only you learn how to listen first.

Innovative

An effective leader should know how to think outside the box. Such a person will be able to make the team develop and progress well.

Motivating

A team will not be able to perform well if they aren't motivated. You need to keep the team in high spirits. You don't have to give incentives but just simple things can keep your team motivated. For instance, if someone does something good, it's good to take note and compliment them.

There are teams that acknowledge "the employee of the month/year." This form of appreciation is also very effective as it motivates the team members to work hard.

Once your team a member excels in a project you should congratulate or show them some appreciation. This will motivate them to work harder.

Good at Conflict Resolution

A team is normally made up of people of different personalities and ideologies. This means that from time to time, there will be conflicts among members.

A team leader should be able to resolve these conflicts without taking sides or making unfair judgment. He should always ensure that the team gets along and can work together at all times.

Ability to Work In A Team

As a team leader, you have to realize that you are also part of the team. You can't make decisions individually, you need your team. You should be able to work with the others.

If you are the kind of person who strongly believes that individualism brings the best results, you will not be able to accomplish much as part of the team.

Ability to Be Objective

As human beings, we tend to be naturally drawn to some people and repelled by others. You may have things in common with someone and this is what draws you to them. However, as a team leader, you can't have favoritism. You have to be impartial and treat everyone equally.

You also need to stop thinking about yourself. If you have an idea that the group doesn't support, try and get their point of view. Don't try to impose your views on everyone. In addition you have to put your emotions aside.

Knowledgeable

As a leader, you have to stay knowledgeable at all times. Try and read wide and consult with others. You have to stay ahead in the industry. This knowledge will be used to empower the team members. It will also be reflected in the overall performance of the team.

Ability to Accept And Take Criticism

When you realize that your team members are doing the wrong things, you have to correct them in the right way. You should give them positive criticism to make them rectify. The same way, you should be able to accept criticism and use it to become a better leader.

Involved or Active

An active leader normally sets the best examples. He or she managed to fully be part of the team. As a leader, participation is important. An absentee leader who delegates tasks and then leaves can never be successful. You are part of the team so you better make a contribution.

A good leader stays involved with his team. He doesn't delegate duties and then go away.

Wrapping Up

There are a lot of benefits to creating a team environment in the office. Teams can frequently achieve tasks that may not have been otherwise finished

An effective team attitude also improves motivation and job satisfaction, which add to productivity, innovation and retention.

Teams can also perk up coordination between workers and enhance the decision-making procedure. With correct preparation and training, you can construct a team environment inside your workplace.

A team relies heavily on how the team members treat each other. Teamwork can't exist in a team that doesn't respect one another. It also can't exist if people don't trust one another. The key to working together is fostering good working relationships based on trust and respect.

Good luck to you and your team!