

Team Coaching That Accelerates Performance

Follow this six-step process for engagement and growth.

BY JACQUELINE PETERS
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Ask any CEO if she has problems with her leadership team and you may see her eyes roll. This is not surprising given that, according to Harvard University research, only one in five teams is high performing. Team coaching has emerged in the past decade as an approach that helps frustrated leaders and their teams assess, and then accelerate, their ability to create the structure and relationships required to build a truly effective team.

What it is

Team coaching is not just team building, which often sees a team completing ropes courses together or going out for drinks. Several decades of team effectiveness research by Harvard professors Richard Hackman, Ruth Wageman, and others has proved otherwise.

There are conditions that specifically set the stage for high-performing teams. Hackman and Wageman found that partnering with a competent external executive team coach can help leaders more effectively design and develop high-performing teams.

How it works

Safety and trust are the most critical factors for high-performance teams and are a core factor that coaches need to establish with and within the team, as validated by Google's research in Project Aristotle. Jacqueline Peters and Catherine Carr have done extensive research in the area and

developed a practical six-step process for high-performance team coaching that has psychological safety as its center point.

Guidelines

There are six phases of coaching for high-performing teams.

Team assessment. Starting from "where the team is," is fundamental, so completing surveys or interviews with each team member and organizational stakeholder is the place to begin. A review of expectations, culture, and rewards systems, as well as team strengths and challenges, can reveal opportunities and gaps between where the team is and where it needs to be.

Team structure and design. Research reveals that the structure and design of a team accounts for 60 percent or more of the team's performance success. According to Wageman, Hackman, and fellow researchers, there are three essential conditions and three enabling conditions that teams need woven into their basic structure to be successful. Team coaches assist teams in assessing and designing their makeup according to these six conditions.

These essential conditions must be met:

- "Real" teams have clear boundaries, defined membership, and strong interdependent goals.
- The right people for the group are those with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to achieve the team's goals.



CHECKLIST

Key Elements of a Team Charter



Vision. What big aspiration is the team aiming for?



Mission. What is the purpose of the team?



Team members. Who is on the team and what are their roles?

- A compelling direction or purpose gives teams a sense of meaning and urgency about their work and its impact.

Enabling conditions further support team members to do their best:

- Solid team structure means clear roles, responsibilities, and working agreements or norms.
- Supportive organizational context means that a team has resources to support its operation—that is, the time, talent, and money.
- Competent team coaching refers to coaches (or leaders) with experience in team coaching.

Team launch. New teams are launched, and established teams are relaunched to develop or refresh their mission and vision and establish a safe, cohesive unit. Led by team coaches, such launches are usually held off-site to focus teams on the purpose and the ground rules of the team. A team charter also is formulated to keep the team on course in the future. According to Hackman, a productive team launch accounts for 30 percent of the team’s effectiveness and success.

Individual coaching. Coaching the team leader is important for team coaching success. Providing coaching and a sounding board for other team members also may help keep the team on track.

Ongoing team coaching. A team coach guides and helps monitor the team’s progress after the team launch. Sometimes the team leader will take over the coaching reins after the team is up and running. However, an independent team coach can provide objective and valuable observations and model effective team coaching behaviors. When coaches train and encourage the team to engage in peer coaching, it can become a driver of employee engagement and team performance.

Team performance. Reviewing a team’s progress periodically and then at the

RESOURCES

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completion of a project or defined time period (such as year-end) is a key factor for team success. One of the coach’s jobs is to help the team and its stakeholders reflect on their collective and personal learning so that growth and development is conscious.

Results

Team coaching provided by experienced and knowledgeable coaches can help fuel team performance, as measured by three outputs:

- **Quality results.** Did the team produce the product, service, process, or leadership it was supposed to? Teams must answer, “What does success look like?”
- **Team capabilities.** How well a team gets along and how effectively members learn to work together affects its performance. Teams must answer, “Did the team improve over time?”
- **Individual engagement.** Even one disaffected, toxic team member can deeply impair team results and morale. Individual team members must answer, “Am I committed and engaged in contributing to this team?”

Leadership teams are the backbone of every organization; ensuring their health and effectiveness is critical to success. Teams that adhere to this six-phase, research-to-practice model of high-performance team coaching have the best chance at achieving solid performance, engagement, and growth and development.

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Values. What principles guide how the team works together?



Working agreements. What are the agreed-upon rules of engagement?



Interdependent goals. What results does the team need to accomplish together?



Measures of team success. How will the team assess itself?



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