

# Working together

Inspired teams fuel winning companies

I frequently coach leadership teams as part of my coaching business. We all know that the word “team” is sometimes loosely applied to groups of people who have very little real connection.

In some instances, they hardly have any shared goals, don't know anything about each other and point fingers instead of collaborating. A business consisting of these CYA agents with competing agendas will eventually stop running, just like any other engine with misfiring cylinders.

But a real team, that's something else.

You no doubt have in your memory bank the experience of being part of such an exciting organism. You remember the feeling of team spirit at its best. Each member's contribution is valued equally in every win. Everyone wins. The team lets no member fail, even if they have to carry someone across the finish line. Everyone celebrates those wins together with lots of pats on the back, high fives and acknowledgement handed out freely. Maybe even champagne.

If you've not had such a team experience, you've seen it portrayed in film, I'm sure. The old, “all for one and one for all” theme that we love to see depicted on the screen.

Working with my clients has taught me so much about the difference between a cluster of disconnected people around a conference table, and a dynamic, inspired, collaborative team.

These are some of the elements that make the difference:

Winning teams invest heavily in relationships with each other, and with other employees and customers. They realize that every possibility begins with human connectivity. They don't wait for mutual caring and respect to develop over the years, they just decide to give caring and respect to

members of the team. In some instances, they may have to retrieve those gifts if a pile of evidence indicates so. Still, it makes much more sense to treat everyone with respect and genuine caring from the get-go. If the leaders don't demonstrate this, there's not much chance of growing a culture that is respectful and humane, which is a culture that attracts and keeps star employees. If respect and caring come from the gut, all of the speaking and listening that goes on between team members will be in tune with that. Music to my ears.

Another essential element is speaking the truth. My clients probably get sick of hearing “speak your truth,” from me. So simple, but everywhere, I find leaders who are afraid to say what they really think. So they speak carefully, withholding the real conversation that needs to happen. Or else they speak their truth to people so far from the situation that they might as well be whistling Dixie. There is no possibility of resolution. We want to trust the integrity of team members. We want to trust that they speak truth to us and will do what they say they'll do. Actually, don't we want that in all relationships?

Real teams deal in the currency of collaboration. That is just how they are with each other. They understand that the result of collective knowledge, collective creativity and collective commitment will greatly exceed any of their individual efforts. Still, each person is encouraged to develop his or her unique talents and innovate like crazy. The members feel safe in bringing their ideas and concerns to each other, and they know that doing so will enhance the resulting action.

Collaboration can grow from setting up informal clusters of team members to brainstorm a project or to help out a team member who needs some feedback, encouragement, inspiration, whatever.

These are team think-tanks that can happen in a brief stand-up meeting or an all-afternoon session. They can probably happen during a short walk down the hall or around the block.

Among team members with high-quality relationships like this, it is expected that mistakes will happen and will be forgiven. People dare to take risks and know they have the support of the team. When conflicts arise, and of course they will, they are addressed directly and constructively. Your teammates have your back.

Naturally, it is fun to work within this kind of a trusted network. It might sound too good to be true. Yet, I have the privilege of working with such dynamic and high-performing teams, so I know they exist.

They don't come about by accident, but by a willingness to lift personal commitment to a commitment to the success of the team, which really radiates to the success of the entire organization. With this kind of interaction taking place among the leadership, trust grows and fear evaporates. This is a gradual process, but it is worth whatever time it takes, because the result is an environment in which people in the organization are inspired to play at the top of their game.



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