

Creating HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS





The concept of a team is not unfamiliar to us. From athletics to school assignments to volunteer activities, we are trained to become members, active participants and, even, leaders of teams.

Most people recognize that teams are crucial to the success and progress of businesses and organizations.

**Yet, the difference between a
“group of people working together”
and a high performance team is
similar to the difference in a
LION hunting its prey on the African savanna
and a domesticated CAT
sitting in front of a fire.**

High performance teams are more than a group of people working together to accomplish a common task. They share a common vision and purpose that inspires their performance. They feel accountable for their work, solve problems, make decisions and fully invest themselves in the organization. In order for a team to achieve high performance, they must be allowed the time to set their purpose, operating norms, characteristics and desired performance results.

High performance teams have been defined as self-managing, multi-functional groups of people who are organized around a whole process and empowered with full responsibility for their own success. To achieve this, certain elements must be present.

Elements of HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS

Within the high performance team model, there are three elements that must be understood by team members. These include the charter, design and relationship.

The **CHARTER** (or the “why”) is the definition of why the team is in existence and provides clarity for team members. It focuses on the customers, purpose, team goals and team vision.

The **DESIGN** (or the “what”) is the architecture of the systems and structure of the team. It focuses on the core work processes, roles and responsibilities, procedures and norms, and systems.

The **RELATIONSHIP** (or the “how”) is the area in which team members understand how to relate to each other. In this element, the focus is on trust and respect, communications, cohesion, and synergy.

In high performance teams, these areas are not independent. They all impact each other and the outcomes expected of the team. However, there is a sequence that must drive their development. The charter must be clear before a team can be designed and a team must be designed well to reduce relationship problems.

Once the team’s charter, design and relationship are established and agreed upon, the team will show the following characteristics:

- A shared mission
- Autonomy and authority
- Interdependence and shared leadership
- Broadly defined jobs
- Meaningful participation in decisions
- Higher performance

In a high performance team environment, the group is enabled to become self-governing with facilitative guidance. This is possible because it is organized around core processes and employees possess multiple skills, are governed around principles and view each other as partners. They also demonstrate an atmosphere of shared leadership and are able to make decisions.



HOW HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS *Communicate*

Communication is a cornerstone of how well teams interact, perform, and ultimately, produce results. High performance teams are aware that perceptions are often based on past experiences and can vary from person to person. They can also get in the way of communication. However, high performance teams can learn to use verbal and non-verbal communication and effective listening skills to avoid misunderstandings and loss of productivity in a team environment.

Communication within teams can be a complex process. Often, it is difficult to put internal perceptions, feelings and motives into meaning and words. Messages can be misunderstood and misinterpreted due to personal attitudes, feelings, motives and experiences. Additionally, non-verbal behaviors may communicate a conflicting message than is in contrast to the one that is being verbalized. In a team environment, communication can be difficult but it is possible with effort and attention.

Active listening is a skill that is evident in high performance teams. Listening – the true ability to accurately perceive a message that is conveyed by another – is far more than the exchange of information. When active listening is employed, it creates a safe place for team members to explore ideas and builds confidence and trust within the team.

Active listening involves six steps, including:

- Create a safe place by drawing the person out with terms such as “could you explain” or “tell me more” and by acknowledging what is being said
- Become actively involved by focusing completely on the speaker, maintaining eye contact, tuning out distractions, and maintaining an open and relaxed posture
- Avoid the temptation to evaluate and resist judging or criticizing
- Search for meaning by decoding the message and trying to discover the real message
- Confirm understanding with acknowledgment, restating points and paraphrasing the message
- Bring closure by summarizing the conversation and agreeing on necessary actions

A Leader's ROLE IN HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS

High performance leaders create high performance teams by helping them understand their charter, their design and their relationship. Empowering leaders have a vision and the ability to develop and share it with the entire team. They are driven by a strong motivation and passion for this shared vision.

Additionally, such leaders are able to establish high levels of rapport and trust among team members. They avoid controlling and coercing team members. Rather, they inspire and induce a high degree of enthusiasm from team members toward meeting the agreed-upon goals.

“Effective and empowering leaders also believe in the team and its members and are able to demonstrate a positive quality that results in a work atmosphere that is conducive to synergy and achievement.”

However, to get to this point, leaders and team members must work through certain processes. The processes that go into building a high performance team include understanding how teams work, learning good meeting management skills, and clarifying team members' roles and responsibilities. A system for measuring performance, setting goals and tracking progress must also be in place.

When a team has successfully moved from high potential to high performance, three results are visible. They are able to:

- Raise their goals to meet new business demands
- Successfully identify and eliminate the most threatening problems and obstacles
- Effectively develop and implement action plans to reach established goals

Is your team performing at this level? Have they moved from high potential to high performance? The High Performance Leadership program's faculty members can work with you, your leaders and your team members to move from the traditional and ineffective "work group" model to the high performance model. You will be better prepared to face the ever-changing dynamics facing organizations across the globe.

