

How and Why To Build High-Performing Teams

High-performing teams start with high-performing individuals



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In any business, people make the difference. And people make the difference when they operate as a team, but only if they operate as a high-performing team. One of the most elusive outcomes is that of creating a high-performing team. Why is this so? As it has been said many times, if it was easy... every leader would do it.

The high-performing team starts with high-performing individuals, who have a certain awareness of themselves and the value that others can bring. High-performing teams have many interesting characteristics and are clear on what they are trying to accomplish, how they are going to achieve their goals, and why they want to achieve their goals.

So for leaders, the key is to start with the frame; create and foster individual work style, awareness and motivation; and help the team define the characteristics and behaviors that truly make for a high-performing team, which achieves its goals despite organizational barriers and resistance. For our sake, let's define a high-performing team as research has defined it.

A high-performing team is defined as a team that:

- Identifies with the organization's beliefs and values as to why the company exists
- Understands and demonstrates a "systems approach" in defining performance to support strategy
- Understands and demonstrates how to build deep and multi-level trust
- Is culturally aware, adaptive and flexible in leveraging constructive conflict
- Has individuals who are passionately committed to the team and its objectives
- Holds self and each member accountable for their actions and deliverables
- Focuses on the right metrics and objectives to create the successful outcome the team seeks

A high-performing team requires three areas of clarity to begin their journey:

1. Clarity on the team task, resources, and goals of the team
2. Clarity of the team process or how the team will work together
3. Clarity around the team dynamics or how the team will act toward one another

We typically refer to this effort to create clarity as framing or chartering the team. The idea is for each team member to be initially aligned on what success looks like, what resources are available to the team to create success, and what specific goals the team must reach (both along the way and in the end) to achieve success.

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Many teams, having failed to reach their goals, look back to find that different team members were working on very different views of what success looked like, causing workflows that were either at cross purposes or that didn't flow together very well. Further, many after-action reviews identified misalignment: team members were making different assumptions about the resources and/or constraints that were available or placed on the team. Finally, many teams find that their failures were attributable to different work styles, different personalities, and/or different assumptions about how the team members will act toward one another.

In our experience, this last area, around how people treat one other, communicate, intend to and deliver value, is one of the most difficult for leaders. All teams start with individuals, who have their own work motivations, career desires, communication patterns, cultural patterns, and leadership and influence styles. What must happen in any high-performing, team-building process is an effort to help the individual team members become more aware of their motivations and styles, and their impact on others in the team. The key to this process is to bring into focus how high-performing teams learn to use the strengths of each individual team member, while honoring the differences in how team members work. This understanding of individuals is the basis for initiating and building deeper trust between individuals in the team.

Generally, industries are not teaching its leaders how to educate teams on the differences in work styles and not creating the trust necessary to build high-performing teams. A recent study was done to help further define the problem. Over 1,000 leaders were asked if they were trust worthy, (are they honest, do they tell the truth, did they have the best interest of the company at heart, etc.). Over 95% of the respondents said, "Yes." However, when those same leaders were asked if they were good at building trust in teams or in the organization, only 40% of the respondents said, "Yes."

What goes wrong? Why can't we build trust and thus high-performing teams? First and foremost, our leaders don't always have the tools or understanding of human motivation and work styles, to pre-empt the inevitable conflict that high-performing individuals create when they come together as a team. These tools and processes revolve around helping high-performing individuals understand and learn to utilize what "others are best at" in a team setting. While we may be able to use the individual skills others bring, where we fall down is in learning to utilize others' communication, cultural, and work styles for the benefit of the team. In fact, it is often those differences that cause teams of high-performing to split apart, by making assumptions about why someone communicates a particular way, or fails to respond in a way that "I would."

While there are many tools, we often find that assessments of individual work styles (Birkman Method, Myers-Briggs, StrengthsFinder, DISC, etc.) and team workshops designed to create an understanding of different work styles and motivations, can help teams start the journey to becoming high-performing and building the trust between team members. Understanding and trust are required to achieve success.

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The characteristics and actual behaviors of high-performing teams are well understood and defined by years of team research. There are tools that enable teams to rapidly overcome their internal barriers and organizational challenges, providing a clear and imbedded roadmap to high performance and team success. Good leaders learn about these tools and employ processes to create clarity and individual team member trust in the team, in order to achieve their organizational goals and objectives.

About Endeavor

Endeavor Management, is an international management consulting firm that collaboratively works with their clients to achieve greater value from their transformational business initiatives. Endeavor serves as a catalyst by providing pragmatic methodologies and industry expertise in Transformational Strategies, Operational Excellence, Organizational Effectiveness, and Transformational Leadership.

Our clients include those responsible for:

- Business Strategy
- Marketing and Brand Strategy
- Operations
- Technology Deployment
- Strategic Human Capital
- Corporate Finance

The firm's 40-year heritage has produced a substantial portfolio of proven methodologies, deep operational insight and broad industry experience. This experience enables our team to quickly understand the dynamics of client companies and markets. Endeavor's clients span the globe and are typically leaders in their industry.

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