

Four Keys to Building a High Performance Team

(aka – giving you more time and profits)

By Beth Papiano

As a social systems consultant and coach, I'm often asked about best practices, especially which ones make the greatest positive impact on individuals, teams, and organizations. The question is fairly typical but what's most often at the root of this question is "Where is the biggest return on investment"?

I know this is an important question, but what seems strange to me is that often the same people who ask these questions invest more money, time and energy in buildings, tools and equipment than in the people that work for them. Why? Our personal experience and the professional literature tell us again and again that it's because it's easier to measure ROI on these assets, because we act out of habit or because it's safer doing what we know.

Whole Foods is a good example of a company who has taken the steps to invest in its people and teams. And, because of that, not only did they rank number 5 in Fortune's "100 Best Places to Work" (up from number 15 in 2006), their first quarter results showed a 12% increase in sales, almost double the 6.2% of comparable stores. They attribute this, in part, to their investment in people and teams.

Whether you're the CEO or a front-line manager, you need to motivate others to work together and to take responsibility for making things better. Our Team Development Model has been successful in accelerating new team efficiency and moving existing teams to higher performance. This higher performance has led to significant contributions to customer satisfaction, productivity and ultimately profitability.

We have seen that the reason most teams fail is because there is confusion around expected results (goals – the what), participation (roles – the who) and methods (processes – the how).

The key to building and maintaining high performing teams is ensuring that everyone who impacts the team, including team members, understands and agrees to the following:

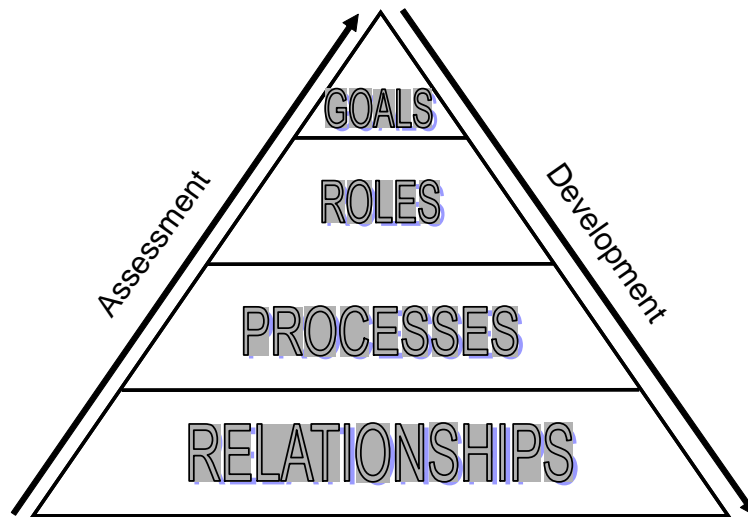
Goals – the primary purpose/mission and expected results of this team. These include current goals, deliverables, timelines and expected results for the team that link to the company goals/objectives.

Roles – the team structure and interdependencies (leader, sponsor, core and sub-team members and other key stakeholders), core member role, general norms and expectations of each other.



Processes - the key processes which include (but are not limited to) the team meeting purpose, logistics and norms; decision making (does the team own or do they need approval from others); communication norms within team and with departments, staff and key stakeholders; assessment; issue resolution and escalation process.

Relationships – building trust by knowing and understanding each other - individual communication and decision making style preferences, individual strengths, challenges and needs.



Team Development Model

The Team Development Model addresses both the development of a new team and the assessment of an existing team. If used correctly, it ensures understanding and agreement of the what, the who, and the how for team members and other stakeholders.

Unfortunately, when misunderstanding or disagreement of the what, who or how occurs, conflict typically shows up in relationships. Here's an example:

Mary and Tom work on a product team. Mary is a sales rep and has made a commitment to a key customer to make a change to the product in order to better meet their needs. Mary asks Tom, the operations manager, to make that change. Tom has been dealing with departmental cost and staffing reductions and is having a difficult time trying to keep his department running. Tom tells Mary that he cannot make the change due to cost reductions. Mary is irritated and doesn't understand why Tom won't support her need to satisfy the customer. Tom is irritated and can't believe that Mary would expect him to spend resources and money on this request. They're both angry at each other and stop communicating, which hurts productivity and efficiency within the team and the larger organization.



So, where is the conflict? It's showing up in the relationship between Mary and Tom, but this conflict is clearly about goals; Tom is being measured on reducing expenses while Mary is being measured on customer satisfaction, yet it is being handled emotionally as a relationship issue.

You can also use this model as an assessment tool. When conflict arises, ask yourself (and your team) "Could this be a misunderstanding or disagreement about how we did something (process), who owned what (roles) or how we are being measured (goals)?" Knowing and addressing conflict from this perspective refocuses attention, minimizes the emotional aspect of conflict, resolves issues more quickly and uncovers and prevents areas that could potentially cause issues down the road.

You need help if:

- You or your managers spend an increasing amount of time dealing with issues related to this team.
- The team is not meeting performance or productivity goals.
- The people on this team are clearly miserable.
 - Top performers don't stay long - they quit or transfer as soon as possible.
 - Managers do not want to be promoted or reassigned to lead or sponsor this team.
- The team's performance is negatively impacting company goals and other areas of the organization.
- You want your team to have the tools to be their best.

I trust that this information will help you understand the importance of investing in your people and provides you a tool to assist you in building high performance teams within your organization. I also trust that this information will help you determine when you can do it on your own and when to get help.

About the Author

Beth is a nationally known coach and social systems consultant who works with executives and business owners to optimize performance. She also coaches and transfers knowledge to HR managers to increase their value to the businesses they support. Her expertise in designing systems that produce winning cultures and in facilitating leadership, team development and new manager integration sessions has resulted in many businesses increasing employee engagement, productivity and profitability. Beth's 20+ years experience as an organizational effectiveness manager and coach within Fortune 100 companies and her commitment to continuous learning make her a valuable resource to her clients. Beth can be reached by phone at 719-495-9002 or through her website www.unltdpotential.com.

