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Chemical Engineering for Entrepreneurs

High Performing Teams

High performance team members have specific roles and complementary talents. The team is committed to a common purpose, and works with a high level of collaboration. They are innovative, tight-knit, and built on trust. The team has the collective confidence to surmount any barrier. Leadership is more orchestration bringing out and blending the subtleties of the common purpose of the team. As with all organizational structures, there is “the” leader shouldering the ultimate responsibility, however, everyone on the team is “a” leader. “Leadership” is rotated according to the need at that moment in time. Decisions are made on the analysis of the facts. Egos are checked at the door and there is efficient conflict resolution if it is ever needed. High performing teams could take over the world if that was the common goal to which everyone was committed.

Teams are Different

On football, basketball, soccer teams everyone must do their part on every play, if someone misses a block, a pick or a pass, the team cannot move forward. Progress forward in a broken play has to be picked up by some other extraordinary part of the play. This is the common “hero” approach. Some organizations reward the hero approach. On high performance team, hero worship is outlawed. If there are heroes then the team is not high performing. The team results are rewarded and respected, not the individual heroes. On a track, baseball, and swimming team individual performances in the moment are tallied together to build the team score, each individual contribution is important, but not necessarily dependent upon each other. The task at hand must consider the type of team most suited to successful completion of a task. With anything having to do with people leadership, you do not want the round hole square peg mismatch or even simple actions will be difficult.

Team Member Responsibilities

On a high performance team, the team members must articulate the information clearly, bringing facts to enable decision. The team must take personal ownership and do the work. The leader must guide, coach and course correct as needed, but not micromanage. To enable efficient, effective and enjoyable actions, simplify everything. A good rule of thumb is the 3 by 3 format. Focus on three achievable short term goals. Minimize information sharing and drive exception reporting. Simplify all support systems to the minimum set needed. Use the principal from nature of having evolutionary processes achieve the minimum level of complexity where any one piece taken away would impede the function of the system, but there is no extra

baggage to burden the system. Use no more than three points to make any task go and have no more than three focus areas at any one time. One complex projects with hundreds of required tasks, use a more rapid pace to compete all the work that is needed, but keep the 3 by 3 limits in any one engagement. 99 tasks done in 3 by 3 chunks rapidly is much more effective than a marathon session trying to work though all 99 items in one swoop. Team members can never lie. The whole of the team structure is based upon trust. Take the time to build the trust, but make sure the investment of time will have a high reward. Set high standards, give true evaluations and fix problems immediately.

Bring to the Field

Just as in any sporting event, the team members must bring certain items to the field of play. Always bring positive energy. Be passionate and have the energy be never ending. It's the fourth quarter, or the last 50 feet of a race that brings out the reach within yourself passion to drive to the finish. Have that type of drive throughout the whole of the event. Make things happen, always take an action oriented approach. Apply your skills for a higher purpose. Make meaning and the financial rewards will come. Excellence must be the rally cry of the day. Excellence means knowing how to figure it out and fully understanding the topics being worked. To keep the focus data based, reduce descriptive performance of the varied parts of the effort to correlations generated by the factors, levels, responses and constants. A high performance team member is selfless. They make everyone around them better. They work together to win. They always do the right thing.

What It Feels Like

Think for a moment the trust and openness of a coffee shop conversation with a close friend. Open “bare your soul” exchange is comfortable and close. Think of how you can work a problem off the top of your head at the wipe board without needing preparation because you live every detail in the moment. Think of how you can nail any elevator speech with which you are called upon to give without warning. Feel how you excite in a member of the team being recognized so it makes the supporting cast also feel rewarded and proud in the achievement. Everyone on the team is also rewarded. It is said that heaven and hell both have people sitting at dinner tables with ample food but very long forks. In hell everyone is starving because they cannot each use the long fork. In heaven everyone is feeding each other. Feed each other with the long fork. The shortstop concentrates on fielding the ball. He does not think about the second baseman who is instinctively running towards the bag at second. The second baseman does not worry about the shortstop fielding the ball. He knows that the toss will come his way and the shortstop knows that his colleague will make the turn. Turn the double play. Be confident that when you toss the ball, I will be there.

Cultural Indicators

Every organization moves to a certain beat of the drum. It defines the pace of the place. The pace of the needs must match the pace of the team or the team will be out of phase and the harmonics of the interactions will tear the team apart. Observe how long it takes to complete

an interdependent task. There is a buffer in each step. Observe the red light going to green at any stoplight, then consider each small delay until action is taken by the next car lined up. The same thing occurs in an organization. If any step has too large of a buffer, the whole of the work flow will lag. How long does it take to cycle interdependencies ? Rope is great in tension. In compression, it does not perform. Even the most positive and energetic colleague will become frustrated and ineffective trying to push a rope uphill.

Team Vision

Set simple, customer focused, flexible shared team priorities. Be authentic, tenacious, and resourceful. Eliminate organizational obstacles. Always foster a bias for action. Find a way to deliver as promised. Develop fast, flexible, and fool-proof work processes based on data and facts. Play big and be small. Be small enough to be autonomous and transparent, and large enough to be economical and efficient. Continually engaged with the customer. Always be 100% aligned with business. Always deliver and demonstrate team behaviors. Remember that we are all customers of each other. The infrastructure and interdependencies need to be streamlined, mutually reinforcing and non-duplicating. Pivot on opportunities, but make sure that folks know that the organization is coming about. Use continuous adjustment in timely anticipation of the need. Always remember, change is a way of life.

The High Performance Mantra

We will find a way. That must be the call of the day. Problems must be approached from what can be done versus the traditional “here are all the things that might get in the way” attitude. Do not believe in the no win situation. Like Captain Kirk, gut feel and intuition are part of any decision, however, Mr. Spock’s analysis of data and application of logic must be considered. Remember trust is the most important characteristic on teams. Without Mr. Spock, Captain Kirk might be just reckless and egotistical. Harvesting this balance leads to success. The relationship is built on trust.

Leadership Culture

We always have each other’s back. Create a dynamic, energetic, make it happen environment built on facts, rational discussion, and reasonable expectations. Mistakes are owned up to, worked through, and corrected in a positive environment. Leadership is the focus, not management. Delegate tasks and foster autonomy. Micro-management kills teams. A great leader knows when to let go and when to stay out of the way. Results are expected. Lead by walking around. Keep report outs simple and focused.

Team Logistics

Small is better. If big, be small. Be organized by deliverables. Support people’s work/life balance using flexible schedules and remote connectivity. Emphasize work production and not face time. Defeat FOMO, the fear of missing out. Everyone is connected no matter where they

are physically. Respect the need to collaborate. Let people be location independent to foster their most productive environment. Being busy is good, being burdened is not.

Fear vs. Panic

Fear creates reason. If you are not afraid, then you are foolish or unaware of what you are getting into. Panic creates failure. Leaders do not panic. Great leadership breeds confidence. Confidence breeds enthusiasm. Enthusiasm focused with purpose delivers results. Breed cooperation which will lead to very little need for authority.

Lewis and Clark

They had a plan. The objective was clear. Their preparation was detailed. They sold in support. The plan did not always work out. Lewis's iron boat could not be assembled and sealed allowing it to float. They adjusted the plan. They made use of the luck of fate. A cool headed Yankton Sioux kept the whole of the party from perishing early in the adventure by keeping Clark from using the blunderbuss at the most inopportune moment. Fate favored the cool headed and open minded. Bringing Sacagawea onto the expedition at the Mandan Villages set up the unlikely coincidence of finding her brother Cameahwait just at the moment it was most needed. Open minded leadership allowed Lewis and Clark to the addition of the young Indian women to the expedition. Their combined and complimentary leadership driving an high performing team enabled one of the greatest adventures in human history to be completed opening up the American west.