

CREATING A DREAM TEAM

Mandy Flint and Elisabet Vinberg Hearn look at the 10 most common (and very solvable) problems of teamwork



You can take a proactive or reactive approach to teamwork. The reactive way is hoping the team will function well without any help or intervention from you. That approach rarely works, so why not try the proactive approach of taking charge and deciding to create the climate and circumstances needed for your team to function successfully.

There are 10 very common team challenges that you are likely to encounter. Unless these are addressed they will hinder the team from achieving success.

The “busy bug” is a common workplace disease and can become the excuse for not properly solving these challenges, which means many leaders don’t even realise what the potential of their team could be.

Let’s look at these challenges.

LACK OF TRUST

Trust is the foundation of any team. You are always working at increasing trust levels, no matter what your

starting point. Team members absolutely need to know each other, both professionally and personally. If people don’t know each other, then they won’t understand each other and they won’t want to engage or take an interest because they haven’t made that human connection. As a result, they won’t trust each other.

CONFLICT AND TENSION

Conflict and tension doesn’t have to be a bad thing. Conflict can be healthy and if carefully managed it can trigger healthy debates and make people think differently, hence knowledge and insight can expand, innovation can happen and results flourish. Conflict is simply a difference of opinion, which in itself is not bad. It’s how we handle the conflict that makes a difference.

NOT SHARING INFORMATION

Teams are made up of individuals who all bring their unique set of skills, knowledge, experience and wisdom to the table. Effective teams fearlessly >>>

share regularly and generously for the benefit of everyone. In order for this to happen, there has to be a high level of trust. An effective way of building trust is to kick off some powerful sharing, starting small and building it up.

LOW ENGAGEMENT

Team engagement is not just a “nice to have”, it is a driver of success. Team members who are engaged are interested in what they do. They are committed to the team mission, to going the extra mile. They behave as if they are the owner of the mission/task, rather than a passive observer. They feel connected, express enthusiasm and are driven to do the job. They are there in body as well as mentally and emotionally. This kind of behaviour is contagious. The key to engagement is involvement; by involving others you make it impossible to stay detached.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

Transparency is quickly becoming the expected norm in business and expectations are growing. Increased transparency has great benefits and there are consequences involved with not creating higher levels of openness. If you already strive for openness, then strive for more. It will need to continually increase in the future. It starts at the top, the more senior you are the more responsibility you have to be a role model for this. Employees will follow the leader's behaviours, good or bad. When this is done well, it can have a very positive cascade effect throughout the organisation.

NO LONG-TERM THINKING

It is crucial for business leaders to be able to take a holistic view, to see the big picture and see how all the parts fit together. For a team this means being able to think beyond your own area, to think about how you fit into the wider organisation and how you impact the customer experience and the value proposition. This includes sustainability thinking, which is the ability to

continually consider the triple bottom line for long-term success; the impact on the human, natural and financial resources the organisation is dependent on. Everyone is busy but just being busy is not good enough. If you're not busy with the right things at the right time, you're wasting time. Long-term success requires long-term thinking.

BADLY PERCEIVED, NOT DELIVERING

Every team has a team brand, an image and a reputation, created by the actions and behaviours of the team and its individuals. A large part of the perception is driven by how well the team delivers on expectations and promises made. As a team, you need to make sure that everyone understands and takes responsibility for their role in creating the perception of the team. This includes both what is delivered and how it is delivered. As a leader, you need to create the environment and infrastructure that allows the team to deliver to expectation.

POOR CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Change is inevitable, but unless carefully managed it can be detrimental to teamwork and results. Change starts and ends with communication. Whenever you think you've communicated enough, you need to communicate some more. The key is to make it interactive; listen, talk and involve others. Be aware of the change curve, the four predictable stages we go through in change; Denial/resistance, Emotional, Hopeful, Commitment. Help your team members understand how natural the human reaction at the various stages is. Being aware of the change curve makes life less threatening – ‘Aha, it's not just me that feels this way’. Each stage is needed but how long someone stays at each stage varies. It can be managed and kept to a minimum.

WORKING IN SILOS

Many teams work side by side but in silos. Getting a team together is, or could be, like the three musketeers – all for one and one for all. It is not a

utopia. If you are in a team you may as well be really in it. Working together in earnest is about making the most of the fact that you are a team. Honour your time and efforts by seeing yourself as a full time member of the team, not just an individual contributor. Get the whole team talking, imagine how great it would feel to be part of a team where everyone is happy to do things for the good of the team and not just themselves.

NOT GOING IN THE SAME DIRECTION

For a team to walk in the same direction they need to know where they are going or what they are contributing to (vision) and why (purpose). Spend time on this with your team. This clarity provides a framework and “reason to be” that can really rally a team to work together. Keep in mind that visions need to be compelling and purposes meaningful. People respond to the importance of both, the sense of making a difference to someone or something.

In closing, if you want to create great teamwork, pay particular attention to behaviours. How we behave and conduct ourselves has an impact on others, creating a ripple effect. It's when we change our daily behaviours that we can achieve transformational change.

Even a single person in a team, doing something different and powerful, can start to make a difference and influence team members to do the same.

And remember; even doing something seemingly small and simple can have a big impact. It doesn't have to be complicated, some of the simplest solutions are the best. ▼



Mandy Flint and Elisabet Vinberg Hearn are the authors of new book *Leading Teams - 10 Challenges: 10 Solutions*, published by FT Books. For more information see www.leadingteamsbook.com