

*Mandy Flint and Elisabet Vinberg Hearn, authors of The Team Formula share their ideas for team work.*

# TEAM SUCCESS

Any team can be successful. In fact, we would go as far as saying that the most dysfunctional team can thrive given the right circumstances and with the right focus and leadership. In all of our roles and the increasingly complex jobs that we have in recruitment we have to be more emotionally intelligent; we must think about the impact of our own behaviours as well as the collective behaviours of the team we are a part of. Because, let's face it, we are increasingly playing a role in more teams than one; the teams we lead, the teams we support, the teams where our peers are, the teams in which we are led by others, and more.

We bet you have at one time or another been part of a team that wasn't working well – it is that common, we've all been there. We also think that you can remember a time when you were part of a really successful team or one that really pulled together and got behind something – together.

As we reflect on the common team challenges we have seen or experienced over the years, they include:

- Team members who don't know or trust each other;
- The angry leader who attacks everyone who dares give him bad news – leading to a fearful team in a downward spiral;
- Conflicts or tensions within the team, sometimes just under the surface and sometimes blowing up into a shouting match;
- People who are not engaged, or maybe even apathetic about work – they show up but they are not really there;
- Teams that don't deliver as wanted or expected;
- A team that's not well perceived by others;
- People who are working in silos, thinking mainly of themselves, fighting their own corner;
- People who don't share relevant information with each other, either intentionally or simply because they've never realised that they should;
- Cliques, sub-groups, teams within teams, 'us and them' behaviours, gossiping and going behind people's backs.

The list is long but we know you get the picture.

Based on all our learning of human interactions from being leaders, consultants, executive coaches and team members, we have worked with teams and leaders all over the world to help them create highly effective teams. Team success is rarely the result of chance. No, it takes focus and proactivity. Someone, usually the leader, needs to decide that they want to focus on their team and then make a move and do it. Sounds simple? Yes well, to some degree it is.

You have to start by taking action and making the decision to work on the



team. Let us share with you what we have found to be the secret formula for team success:

**Get together as a team.** Set time aside for this, plan when, where and how to do it. Do it regularly. Do it formally as team meetings or team events and do it informally in the shape of the occasional office breakfast, meal or simple team huddle. Find a way that works for your team

**Get to know each other much deeper, and create trust in the process.** When people know each other, they feel more at ease, they have less to lose, they open up and start bringing more of themselves to the workplace. It is a wise investment of time

**Really talk to each other in an open way.** Be courageous, dare to bare something about yourself, your thoughts, your feelings – not just your job knowledge. This is not always easy, but it can certainly be done. The leader often needs to lead the way by divulging something about him/herself, allowing him/herself to be vulnerable. One way of doing this can include talking about the leader's feelings about a setback or mistake at work and what the learning was. Once the leader has opened up, others usually find it easier to follow suit. It shows people that it's not just the best results that should be talked about and that no one is perfect. But also that it's okay to talk about things. The act of disclosure breeds disclosure from others

**Give each other behavioural feedback.** It is close to impossible for a person to see him/herself as others see them. Getting to know how you are perceived is crucial – only then can you start to take real control of the impact of your communication, your behaviours and actions – and →

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therefore the results you get. Here's an example: If a person is very driven and achieves results by being forceful with others, but doesn't realise that he is seen as too pushy and that people are therefore avoiding him, then he is not likely to get as good results as he could in the long run, as people's genuine desire to cooperate with him will be low. The person may not be aware of the EFFECT this has on others around them, so getting that feedback may help them with a potential blind spot. If we have a major, defining strength, the bigger our blind spot can be!

**Agree on your team purpose and direction.** Get the whole team to discuss and agree what the joint purpose/mission of the team is. Make sure you are all aligned as you will otherwise have team members who work towards different agendas, which could be very counterproductive. If it's unclear what that purpose is, or people have different ideas about it, you will need to give more direction and guide people in their thinking. Remember too that a team's mission should be a clear contributor to the overall vision of the organisation. Think of that time when you were in a successful team and pulled towards something together; at the point when you were most successful as a team, it would have been when you were clear on the purpose and direction. This can also often happen when a crisis occurs and the whole team must pull together. We simply need to be more proactive about it and not just await a crisis!

**Decide how to work together and how to measure success.** Once you are all in agreement about what you are here to do, have a discussion



about how you need to work together, how to operate as a team to be able to achieve your purpose. What will your team rules be? What behaviours will be helpful? What behaviours are not acceptable? Be open about this. Let people speak freely. The great thing when agreeing how to work together is that everyone has a greater understanding of what is expected of them, and it's easier to give each other feedback (and resolve team issues) if someone doesn't follow the agreements. Another thing to cover here is how you will measure your success – how will you know if you are doing well as a team, what will be the tip-offs? How will you know when you get there?

**Be generous; fearlessly share what you know with your colleagues.** This can often be challenging for many people. We're sure you're familiar with the expression 'knowledge is power', where we've learned that it's what we know that makes us unique and makes other people and the organisation need us. Yes, it makes us unique but at the same time this kind of thinking trips us up. No matter how much you know, no matter how much experience you have, there is always more out there. No one can do everything themselves, everyone needs other people. Work with your team to show them that you can achieve more if there is greater generosity, if you pool all your skills and knowledge and experience – this can create real synergy. I am sure you can think about a time when a colleague has not shared important information with you, how did that affect you?

**Commit to what's been agreed together.** Ask each team member for their commitment to the work you have done. One way of doing this is to go around the room and ask each member to comment on what they will do to keep the commitment. It can also be great to create something visual such as having every person sign the list of agreed actions. The physical act of signing something further cements the commitment for each person, you are gaining emotional commitment not just intellectual commitment

**Keep your promises, hold each other accountable.** Great teamwork is built on trust and real trust comes from when people keep their promises. If you've agreed to something you must commit to it and make sure you do it no matter what. Or that you explain why you can't, if circumstances have changed. It's also about holding each other accountable – if someone isn't keeping their promise, talk to them about it, challenge them, find out what the problem is – and help them solve it and keep their word. This is how trust is created. Trust is the foundation level to build on in all teams.

Be courageous and start now! Play your part in making your team successful and follow the formula. ■