

Creating High Performing Teams

Why Teams Fail

Teams fail for a number of reasons, including poor planning for the implementation of teams and a lack of training. Research by The Ken Blanchard Companies® has identified the top 10 reasons for a team failing to reach its potential.

1. Lack of sufficient charter
2. Unsure of what requires team effort
3. Lack of mutual accountability
4. Lack of resources
5. Lack of effective and/or shared leadership
6. Lack of planning
7. Lack of management support
8. Inability to deal with conflict
9. Lack of focus on creativity and excellence
10. Lack of training

How do you avoid these pitfalls?

Here are seven key characteristics (represented by the acronym PERFORM) to look for in teams of which you are a part.

- **Purpose and values.** A high performing team shares a strong sense of purpose and a common set of values. They have a compelling vision.
- **Empowerment.** Members of a high performing team have authority to act and make decisions and choices with clear boundaries. They have the autonomy, opportunity and ability to experience their personal and collective power.
- **Relationships and communication.** A high performing team is committed to open communication. People feel they can take risks and share their thoughts, opinions and feelings without fear.
- **Flexibility.** High performing team members are interdependent and realize that all are responsible for team performance, development and leadership. Members recognize the inevitability of change and adapt to changing conditions.
- **Optimal productivity.** High performing teams generate optimal productivity, reflected in the amount and quality of the work they accomplish. There is a commitment to high standards and quality. Team members hold each other accountable and strive for continual improvement.
- **Recognition and appreciation.** A high performing team experiences continual positive feedback and recognition on the part of the team members, the team leader and the organization. Recognition reinforces behaviour, builds esteem and enhances a feeling of value and accomplishment.

- **Morale.** Morale is the result of all of the above. If the other PERFORM elements are in place, morale is high. Members are enthusiastic about their work; they are proud of their results and feel pride in belonging to the team.

The Journey to High Performance

Just calling together a team and giving it a clear charge does not mean the team will be high performing. High performance is a journey – a predictable progression from a collection of individuals to a well-oiled system where all the PERFORM characteristics are evident.

To make this journey, it is essential that team members adopt community building attitudes and perspectives. These attitudes and perspectives are:

1. Team members must develop a learning attitude. Everything that happens in the team is “grist for the mill”. There are no failures – only learning opportunities.
2. The team must build a trust-based environment. Trust is built by sharing information, ideas and skills. Building trust requires that team members cooperate rather than compete, judge or blame. Trust is also built when team members follow through on their commitments. It is critical that team members communicate openly and honestly and demonstrate respect for others.
3. The team must value differences. Team members should encourage and honour differences. Different viewpoints are the heart of creativity.
4. People must view the team as a whole. By seeing the team as a living system rather than a collection of individuals, team members begin to think in terms of “we” rather than “you” and “me”.
5. Team members must become participant observers. To work well in a team environment, members should develop the skill of participating and, at the same time, observing. This practice, akin to being in a movie at the same time you are watching the movie, can give team members valuable perspective.

All teams are unique and complex living systems. Knowing the characteristics and need of a high performing team is critical. It gives people a target to shoot for as they progress from a collection of individuals to a smoothly functioning, high performing team.