



A.J. O'CONNOR
ASSOCIATES

HIGH-PERFORMANCE TEAMS

Definition: Taking specific measurable steps to increase the productivity, focus, and interactions of a team to improve their overall effectiveness within the organization

Benefits: Increased performance, improved trust and interpersonal relationships, achieved goals and faster results

Self-Assessment Scale

Me	My Team		Never Always				
			1	2	3	4	5
—	—	Understands the purpose of the team and how it fits into the organization					
—	—	Trusts and respects team members, regardless of position, experience, or skill-set					
—	—	Takes accountability for the team's work and goals					
—	—	Capitalizes on the cultural, physical, and cognitive diversity of the team					
—	—	Demonstrates consistent enthusiasm and energy for the team's work					
—	—	Promotes conflict as opportunity to discuss important or difficult issues					
—	—	Puts the team's needs first – after individual needs					
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Add your scores and divide by 7 to obtain your average score					

Individual and Team Enablers

- Clear unity of purpose; lots of continuous improvement
- Explicitly defined group processes, norms, expectations, rules, etc.
- Performance goals are well-defined with realistic, yet challenging milestones; aligned with the purpose
- The group celebrates even the smallest results
- The work atmosphere is informal, comfortable, & relaxed – even fun
- Team members are engaged and enthusiastic about the work
- Lots of discussion – everyone participates, regardless of seniority, job title, or skills; decisions are made at a point after everyone has been heard and there's general agreement
- Critical feedback is frequent, frank, and expected between all team members
- The leadership of the group shifts from time to time

Personal Mastery

- You admit when you don't know something and you ask for help when you need it.
- You provide frank, honest feedback to your team members – and accept it as well.
- You don't engage in subversive or posturing behaviors.
- You introduce topics even if they cause conflict because you know it's in the best interest of the team.
- You hold team members accountable for their behavior and their work.
- You lead by example – and are willing to be led by your teammates.
- You learn from mistakes and share them with others for team growth.
- You quickly point to the contributions of others when goals are achieved.
- You encourage all voices be heard.
- You ensure everyone is aligned on the same goal(s).

Corporate Areas for Opportunity

- Explicitly share the vision or mission of the organization
- Encourage hiring practices that ensure diversity on teams: cultural, cognitive, skill & knowledge, experience, generational, gender, etc.
- Introduce corporate-wide personality profiling tools to better understand team member strengths and development needs – and create a shared language for feedback within and between teams
- Create opportunities for team members to connect on a personal basis – team building events, retreats, special meals or entertainment
- Ensure team involvement & contribution is a performance expectation across the organization



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Leaders need to lead by example; they must demonstrate vulnerability as a way to encourage trust among the team. This means sharing personal information, publicly admitting mistakes, or asking for help when needed. They need to overcome the communication barriers inherent in teams, especially related to giving and receiving honest feedback and holding each other accountable for achieving team performance goals. Leaders must put the team first and their career aspirations second; this means sharing the leadership of the team as necessary. Leaders must keep the team singularly focused on achieving results related to the purpose.

“Teamwork is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.” – Andrew Carnegie

Coaching Questions

- What are your most trusting relationships within the team? What steps have you taken to develop trust with a team member?
- How do you respond when you receive critical feedback? If you had to share critical feedback, how would you do it?
- What strengths do you think you bring to the team?
- What skills or experiences do you bring to the team that are not being utilized?
- Where is our team strong? Weak?
- How can you personally affect the team's purpose?
- Where might you need to ask for help from team members?
- Which team goals are especially challenging for you?

Personal Action Strategies

- **Practice strengthening vulnerability:** go public with mistakes and initiate a post-mortem to encourage team learning
- **Adopt a fail-safe system** for keeping commitments and due dates. Be on time for meetings, return phone calls, under promise & over deliver.
- **Get to know the people** you work with. Share personal information as a way to make connections beyond the superficial.
- **Identify & overcome the inner conversations** that are permitting you to play the blame game rather than take accountability for your actions.
- **Get clarification** of any individual or team goals that you don't understand or fear you can't impact.
- **Routinely ask for feedback** from teammates on your behavior or actions.

To Learn More

- [The Speed of Trust; The One Thing That Changes Everything](#), Stephen M. R. Covey
- [Rebuilding Trust](#), Harvard Business Review, June 2009
- [The Decision to Trust](#), Robert F. Hurley, Harvard Business Review, Sept., 2006.
- [The Five Dysfunctions of a Team](#), Patrick Lencioni
- [Team Building That Gets Results](#), Linda Diamond and Harriet Diamond
- [The Power of Vulnerability: Teachings on Authenticity, Connection, & Courage](#), Brené Brown
- [A Team of Leaders: Empowering Every Member to Take Ownership, Demonstrate Initiative, and Deliver Results](#), Paul Gustavson and Stewart Liff
- [Stop Workplace Drama: Train Your Team to have No Complaints, No Excuses, and No Regrets](#), Marlene Chism

Team Action Strategies

- Take a personality assessment and share your results. Identify how to use the information to improve team dynamics and relationships.
- Adopt a team norm for “yelling loud and early” if issues arise that require additional support, resources, or adjustment of milestones.
- Build relationships beyond the constraints of team roles – plan team group activities like lunch, even quick warm-ups for team meetings can provide new connections and increased willingness to trust.
- Explicitly define the operations of the team – how works gets done, who does it, and how you keep each other accountable for results.
- Identify & practice norms for providing constructive feedback within the team.