



# Building High Performance Teams

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# Chapter 1:

## What are High Performance Teams

Did you know that the presence of high performance teams is a defining determinant of a company's success?

A high performance team is a team which has been created and which functions specifically keeping certain strategic goals in mind. Team members share a common vision and the teams are built keeping in mind complementary skill sets that will ensure high performance, goal achievement, and profitability.

### HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS VS REGULAR TEAMS

The primary difference between a regular team and a high performance team is the purpose of creation. In an average team, team members are brought together without much planning. It is only after the team is created, that team members find ways to develop synergy.

However, high performance teams are formed with the express intent to achieve key corporate objectives. That's why team members are hand-picked to ensure





there is 100% synergy and skills-match, in addition to a match in their corporate vision and commitment.

You'll find that high performance teams are more:

- Aggressive in their pursuit of goals.
- Committed to the team vision and objectives.
- Willing to adopt new work practices that can help them perform better.
- Accountable and responsible to goal achievement.
- Transparent in their communication with each other.
- Likely to resolve conflict in the interest of team performance.

This shows that coaching doesn't just seek to help people with professional development and advancement. In fact, coaches empower people to become the best versions of themselves in their personal lives too.

## HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS VS REGULAR TEAMS

According to a study conducted by the Brandon Hall Group, 72% of the respondents confirmed that high performance teams were directly responsible for the company's success & profitability.





The study also revealed something shocking. Despite their importance to company success, more than 1/3rd of the respondents stated that they didn't know how to develop and nurture high performance teams.

Maybe you're facing the same problem. If yes, you've come upon the right book. Here we take you through the steps you need to follow to build high performance teams.



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# Chapter 2:

## Lay the Groundwork to Build High Performance Teams

The people you select can determine whether your team will be successful or not. Some of the key ways to build a performance-driven team are:



### 1. Select people who are good communicators

Teamwork involves a lot of communication – be it through face-to-face discussions or emails. It's important that you select team members who can carry on a mature conversation.

More importantly, you should select assertive communicators, who will be able to minimize chances of conflict that always arise due to dominance or submissive behaviors. They should be self-assured and be willing to address any issues that the other team members may not talk about.



## 2. Find people who have a skills-role match

Technical skills are one of the cornerstones of a high performance team. When determining the team composition, you should also focus on the candidate's technical skills. The skill sets you acquire should be complementary to each other and make up for what the other team members lack.

In addition to the technical skills, the people you choose should also have the relevant soft skills needed to work well in a team. The Cliftonstrengths test is a great indicator of the skills-role match.



## 3. Choose individuals who are socially sensitive

A study by Carnegie Mellon, MIT, Union College, and Harvard Kennedy School showed that the best performing teams meet three criteria:

- They have high EQ and are very empathetic to each other.
- They encourage individual thinking and discouraged group think.
- They have a higher number of women, compared to those in traditional teams.

If you think about it, socially sensitive people are very empathetic, they give everyone a chance to have their say, they are more receptive to subtle signs of conflict and are more willing to break down barriers in the team.



The reason why women fit-the-bill better, is because women generally score better on these type of social skills and have scientifically been proven to have higher EQ than men.



#### 4. Check for project experience

While this isn't always essential, it does help if you select team members who have prior experience working in projects. Such individuals will already know how to organize their various tasks, how to work with deadlines, how to be resourceful with their limited resources, and how to manage collaboration problems in a large team.



#### 5. Select people who really do buy-into the team's vision

A person will be committed to a goal only when he/she believes in it. That's why it's very important that you select team members who show true confidence in what the team is expected to achieve.

During the interview, pay attention to what the candidates say. How do they respond to your questions, do they seem positive about success, do they proactively provide ideas that can be implemented once they onboard the team?

All of these matter.



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# Chapter 3:

## Create a Team Dynamic Conducive for Success

Your team members may work great individually, but their skills and efforts need to be melded together to ensure they give you the results you want. For teamwork and collaboration to happen, the team dynamics must be just right.

Here are a few things you can do, to nurture a positive team dynamic:



### 1. Understand how each member of your team thinks & behaves

Team dynamics are influenced by the people who make up the team. So, to improve team dynamics, you need to first analyze how each member of the team thinks, behaves, and responds to stress/challenges. It helps to have a conversation with each person before work starts, so you can know what to expect from them behaviorally.

You can also subject them to tests like MBTI and Enneagram, which help you identify the defining personality traits of each team member. The 5 Love Languages is great to understand what type of feedback each person responds to the best.





## 2. Identify the problems in your team

Conflicts take time to emerge. But the precursors to the conflict are adjustment issues in the team. It's imperative that you identify these issues and address them immediately to ensure that they don't escalate.

You can set-up an anonymous complaints box, where your team members can submit the problems that they want to be addressed quickly, without drawing attention to who placed the complaint.



## 3. Nurture a team culture that is unique to the group

A team culture brings people together and is a great equalizer. Some ways to develop a team culture are:

- Encourage your team members to engage personally – through team lunches, activities and other non-work-related events.
- Give them a team building exercise that they can complete only if they work together.
- Encourage people to talk to each other and bond.





#### 4. Develop a team charter to give your team direction

A team charter is like a roadmap that high performance teams can use to streamline their efforts. Team charters help reduce any ambiguity about who is responsible for what task and it gives clarity about the things that need to be done.

When you distinctly delineate each team member's responsibilities and tasks, there is a lesser scope for friction and conflict.



#### 5. Identify what barriers are preventing collaboration

The fundamental barrier to a good team dynamic is a mismatch in expectations amongst team members. There may be a mismatch in terms of:

- Buy-in into the team vision.
- Passion for the job.
- Commitment to the goals being pursued.
- Consensus about the practices & procedures being adopted.
- Level of accountability towards the team.

These issues need to be identified, and you need to have a frank conversation with the entire team to bring them up to speed about what is expected out of them and what they owe each other.





## 6. Open the channels of communication between team members.

Finally, a great way to improve team dynamics is to encourage people to speak to each other whenever they need to. Having a flat team structure helps, since it makes all team members more approachable.

You should also organize check-ins every day, where your team comes together to discuss where they currently stand in terms of goal achievement & what they need to do next.



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## Chapter 4: Choose a Team Leader Who Inspires

While your role as the manager of the department or as employer is important to the team's success, high performance teams often require a team leader who can work more closely with them on a day-to-day basis.

Some of the ways to choose a leader from within your team are:



### 1. Speak to your team's old managers to get their inputs

Your team members' previous managers are great sources of information. They'll be able to tell you whether their ex-subordinate has the markings of a leader or not. Apart from talking to old managers, you should also speak to any mentors that your team might have had or currently have.



### 2. Subject your team to leadership games and tests

Another great way to vet and select a leader, is through leadership tests, quizzes and games. You can administer experiential exercises, case study analysis, and simulations to your team to check for leadership skills.





Both self-testing and third-party-testing need to be administered, as you can get a complete picture about how people perceive an individual and how he/she perceives himself/herself.



### **3. Choose the person who displays the highest maturity and EQ**

Emotional intelligence is an absolute necessity for any leader. So, it makes sense to choose a team member who is emotionally mature and is highly empathetic, to be the leader of the high performance team.

These days there are many tests, such as the Emotional, Work Group Emotional Intelligence Profile and Social Competence Inventory and Genos Emotional Intelligence Inventory – which can be used to measure a person’s EQ and ability to lead.



### **4. Select the individual who has a strategic mindset and can take clear judgements**

Finally, select a member who has honed his/her strategic thinking skills and can see beyond short term objectives. A leader with a strategic mindset and excellent decision making skills can really serve the team very well.





## ARE YOU GOING TO DON THE LEADERSHIP HAT YOURSELF?

If yes, then here are some of the things that will help you successfully lead and inspire high performance teams:

- Conviction and passion for the team's goals and visions.
- A flexible communication style that matches the needs of the person you're speaking to.
- The ability to juggle multiple people, tasks and projects simultaneously.
- An attitude that supports and empowers the weakest member of the team.
- Clarity in decision making, to channel to the performance of the team.
- Adaptability to change and openness to new ideas and experiences.
- High levels of empathy and candor – to engage with each team member emotionally.





# Chapter 5: Increase Intra-team Trust Through the Right Engagement

Trust plays a huge role in team success.

When team members don't trust each other, there is a massive disconnect between them. Lack of trust makes people less interested in collaborating and there is a lot of uncertainty, fear and doubt. People are less-likely to take risks or be innovative, in the fear that any mistakes they may make, might jeopardize their careers.

Instead, team members of high performance teams spend an excessive amount of time protecting themselves and confining themselves to safe, tried-and-tested practices that may not yield any results.

It's imperative that team members be engaged and trust be fostered between everyone so that 100% commitment, innovation, and hard work is displayed towards the team's goals.

The good thing is that trust can be developed. There are many initiatives that you can implement, which will improve trust and teamwork in your team.







## 1. Play a blindfolded obstacle game

Here, team members are paired up and one person is blindfolded. The person who is blindfolded needs to cross an obstacle-filled path and reach their partner who isn't blindfolded. Their partner helps them by giving them exact oral instructions of what they should or shouldn't do, as they come across various obstacles.

This game is all about completely trusting another individual with your safety. It also increases the responsibility that another person feels towards you.



## 2. Go night trekking

Trekking is fun, but also fraught with small dangers if you're not careful. Night trekking is even more challenging because you can't see the trekking route clearly.

When you take your team out on a night trek, you put them in a situation where they need to trust others in their team to help them get back to camp safely. The trek and the camping session will also be a great time to bring down any barriers between team members and help them bond outside work.





### 3. Host a potluck

Food is a great way to help people connect. Humans are biologically built to trust people who are similar to us in their habits and lifestyles. So, it's very likely that you'll trust people who share a love of food that's similar to your own.

This is where potlucks help really well. You can help team members bond with each other over their favorite meals.



### 4. Sit down and talk

Finally, the greatest catharsis to a lack of trust is conversation. You can host a weekly or monthly talk where each team member directly addresses another who has hurt or displeased them in some way. When these negative emotions are brought to the surface and addressed, there is little chance of disengagement and distrust.





# Chapter 6:

## Address Conflict To Ensure Performance

Conflicts are a common and natural part of teams. That's why you need to be prepared to handle and address conflict if it does crop-up. The success of a high performance team depends on this.



### 1. Set-up a formal complaint & arbitration process

One of the most-effective ways to manage conflict in the team is to set-up a formal process where team members can escalate the issue to you and you address it following the conflict resolution practices laid down by the company.

Such a formalized process ensures that every team member is measured against the same yardstick and everyone receives the same type of justice.



### 2. Give everyone the opportunity to have their say

Having an open floor discussion about conflicts helps address the elephant in the room. It allows all the relevant parties to take accountability for the conflict and actively work together to find a mutually-acceptable solution.





The best way to make these conversations more fruitful, is to frame the talk. For example, you can state what you hope to achieve through this conversation i.e. better collaboration, less in-fighting between team members, higher trust & empathy between people, more accountability towards the team etc.

This gives greater direction to the conflict resolution conversation, and it becomes easier to find solutions to specific problems that the team is facing.

It's important that you become an active listener and listen (plus look at body language) for subtle signs of stress or conflict that the team is not openly mentioning, but which need to be addressed.



### 3. Encourage radical candor

When people communicate during a conflict, there is a potential for passionate outbursts that lead to misunderstandings. This is where radical candor helps.

In practicing radical candor, you openly and very respectfully share your honest opinions with others, without being rude to them or indulging in backbiting. You open-up about the conflict you're experiencing, without hurting others.





You can make people implement radical candor by:

- **Creating a shared vocabulary** – When you associate certain words to mean specific emotions/experiences and everyone uses the same words when referencing these emotions/experiences, it becomes easier to actually understand what someone is going through and not misunderstand what they’re trying to say.
- **Championing candor yourself** – Invite your team to give you feedback openly, instead of bottling up their emotions. Accept your mistakes and apologize when it’s your fault. When you practice radical candor in your own role, you inspire others to follow suit.
- **Making the behavioral change permanent** – When you infuse honesty, transparency, and respect into every conversation you have with each member of the company, you commit to the behavioral and mindset transformation that comes with radical candor. You then encourage your high performance team to live by and work by such honesty and respect. This improves the overall atmosphere in the team and eliminates conflict.

When you follow the above strategies and manage conflict, you create the arena which high performance teams can use to meet their goals and fulfill their responsibilities.





## CONCLUSION

High performance teams can have a significant impact on your company's profitability and longevity. Managers and employers need to know how to build high performance teams the right way, to ensure they can get the most out of them.

By choosing the right people, by fostering a positive group dynamic, by appointing a leader who inspires, by developing trust & engagement between team members and by actively addressing conflicts, companies can effectively build the most powerful high performance teams that will lead them to success.



## A few books that we recommend:

