

Creating Teams

Performance within groups typically does not just happen. For a group to really perform well it needs practice. The group needs to understand the best way to organize itself for performance. This concept is commonly understood by sports teams and the military. They clearly see the need to give groups opportunities to practice. Boot Camp for the military and pre-season workouts for sports teams are the norm.

It is interesting to note in business that there is far less interest or appreciation of group development and the need for practice. Team practice, for the most part, is not factored into the business or corporate world. We form groups in business and march them into the corporate battle zone expecting them to perform and when they fail we are surprised.

This whole process was once again revealed to me as my business, CMI, went through the process of putting together a high performance work team. In 2008, we expanded our organization by one. A full 25% change growth in our employee numbers. This growth caused a change in our work mix and demands. In essence, we needed less administrative work and more research and marketing.

As we went through the expansion process, some basic truths about teams, groups, and performance helped me traverse this territory:

1. The essence of good work team performance is not good communication or good relationships.

But a focus on performance and an agreed upon appreciation of what this means.

Typically in the work place people relate to each other socially. This means they are concerned with getting along and staying out of each others hair. This is not how team players relate to each other.

Basically, the difference is between how one relates to people at a barbecue and how one relates to the work group who is trying to win a big contract? The nature of the relationships is quite different. The first is based on the social context of let's all just get along while the latter is based on the context of let's get something remarkable done and perform together so that specific results occur.

2. Teams enjoy and play games.

The vast majority of employees go to work because they have to in order to survive. That is the culture most adults live in. This is different than in the world of sports. People voluntarily play the sport because they want to and like the game. When members of teams fundamentally do not like the games or feel connected to the game the group is playing, there will be real performance issues for the group. However, when teams of employees are into the game of making their customers raving fans, magic occurs, and they start enjoying the game.

3. The definition of real teams from “[The Wisdom of Teams](#)” by John Katzenbach and Douglas Smith is accurate.

They define teams as a small number of people with complementary skills who are equally committed to a common purpose, goals, and working approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. Real teams are a basic unit of performance. Mischief comes from team members who are equally responsible for the result. This is quite different than how most of the work world is organized.

In the typical work place each employee is accountable for their job and they are often formally measured on their performance in the yearly appraisal process. No group or team performance is formally measured or expected. The pretense is that if each employee just does his or her thing it will work out perfectly. Unfortunately the work world is more complicated and in many cases customers are impacted by a group of employees. When a group takes on being mutually accountable for their customers' experiences, the group can generate profit and customer loyalty.

4. In sports different games constitute different types of teams.

Soccer, because of the nature of the game, will require a different type of team than baseball. Work related teams are similar. Depending on the work output of the team and the dynamics of the workplace the type of work team that is required is different. The rules and dynamics that govern the work team will also be different.

5. Teams develop in stages.

It is good for participants to be aware of these stages because they normalize the experience of growing and developing into a high performance team. The stages are as follows:

Stage A – This is the birth of the group and there is typically some excitement and anticipation about the **potential** and possibility of the group.

Stage B - This is when reality sets in about how group life can be demanding and hard work. It is no longer fun and there is finger pointing between employees. Mutual accountability by most is seen as an empty concept and team members look at who to blame. This is where most teams die and where there is the need for the most support and focus. **Commitment** needs to be generated to work through the issues. This is also where the employee's love of the game is needed and counted. For most groups Stage B is where the real work counts and is necessary.

Stage C – Getting behind the game stage. This is when everyone begins to **align** behind the group performance and what needs to happen in order to allow the group to succeed. Real group performance results are for the first time seen.

Stage D – This is the high performance stage, where the team is really using its group structure to produce some remarkable **results**.

I hope the above insights are valuable to you and your work groups. They have been valuable to me as I seek to establish a high performance team in my office. I invite you to share your experiences in building high performance teams.

Read more from Bruce [here](#).