

Team Building Toolkit



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10 steps to get your team's mojo going

Need to get your team's momentum going, so they're invigorated and ready for their next goals? Here are 10 steps blogger Terry Starbucker recommends:

- 1. Don't dive in—yet.** First, pause and reflect on the year gone by. Learn from the setbacks and savor the wins. Talk them over with your team.
- 2. Analyze your blueprint.** Review your plans and projects. Visualize the full picture, then describe it.
- 3. Size up your team.** *Ask yourself:* Is everybody committed to the plan? Do we have unresolved issues? Do we need to reshuffle tasks or jobs?
- 4. Express the goals.** Call upon your team to help you articulate the big goal and three to five of the fastest or best ways to get there.
- 5. Raise the bar.** Calculate how to do things better.
- 6. Read your own fine print.** In Starbucker's parlance, the "fine print" is the flip side of your strengths. While it's good to be a "hard charger," it's bad to charge right over your people or customers.
- 7. Get out your "virtual Q-tip."** Sit quietly without a smartphone or other distraction and take in what's happening. Then create this "listening environment" every time you're with one or more members of your team.
- 8. Set an "accountability meter."** This is not just the big target your team has to hit. It's the expectation gauge for every person on the team.
- 9. Give frequent feedback.** Key your feedback to your accountability meter and correct course immediately.
- 10. Remain patient, calm and open to ideas.** Your people and your customers are looking to you to set the standard as their leader.

Team dysfunction: Why it happens and how to fix it

Team leaders can bring the most intelligent, creative people to their departments, but if the team members aren't able to work as a team, the department's productivity will suffer.

If your team isn't firing on all cylinders, it's important to identify the reasons why ... and what you can do to overcome the dysfunction.

The 5 big causes

Many teams don't work well for one reason: "Because they are made up of human beings with varied interests and frailties," says Patrick Lencioni, author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. "When you put them together and leave them to their own devices, even the most well-intentioned people will usually deviate towards dysfunctional, unproductive behavior."

As a result, small problems left untreated can spiral into ugliness.

Here are the five major causes of team dysfunction that leaders must routinely contend with, according to Lencioni, and the strategies to successfully overcome each one:

Dysfunction #1: Absence of trust

This occurs when team members are reluctant to be vulnerable with one another and are unwilling to admit their mistakes or need for help. Without a certain comfort level among team members, trust is impossible.

Team leader's role: Be vulnerable.

- Identify and discuss your strengths and weaknesses. Openly accept that a team member might be more skilled in a particular area than you.
- Spend considerable time in face-to-face meetings and working sessions. The goal is to get team members to open themselves up.

Dysfunction #2: Fear of conflict

Teams that lack trust are incapable of engaging in unfiltered, passionate debate about key issues. This causes situations in which team conflict can easily result in veiled discussions and back channel comments. In a setting where team members don't openly air their opinions, inferior decisions are the result.

Team leader's role: Demand debate.

- Acknowledge that conflict is required for productive meetings. Stress that conflict must be up front instead of underlying and underground.
- Establish common ground rules for engaging in conflict.
- Understand individual team member's natural conflict styles.

Dysfunction #3: Lack of commitment

Without conflict, it is difficult for team members to commit to decisions. This creates an environment where ambiguity prevails. Lack of direction and commitment can make employees, particularly star employees, disgruntled.

Team leader's role: Force clarity and closure.

- Review commitments at the end of each meeting to ensure all team members are aligned.
- Adopt a "disagree and commit" mentality—make sure all team members are committed, regardless of initial disagreements.

Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of accountability

When teams don't commit to a clear plan of action, even the most focused and driven individuals hesitate to call their peers on actions and behaviors that may seem counterproductive to the overall good of the team.

Team leader's role: Confront difficult issues.

- Explicitly communicate goals and standards of behavior.
- Regularly discuss performance versus goals and standards.

Dysfunction #5: Inattention to results

Team members naturally tend to put their own needs (ego, career development, recognition, etc.) ahead of the collective team goals when individuals aren't held

accountable. If a team has lost sight of the need for achievement, the business ultimately suffers.

Team leader's role: Focus on collective outcomes.

- Keep the team focused on tangible group goals.
- Reward individuals based on team goals and collective success.

Leadership Rx for coaching your team

Well-supported teams receive the information, training and rewards they need to keep chugging along. Here are four prescriptions for coaching your team:

1. Don't skimp on guidance. Your team members are remarkably adept at developing self-correcting strategies, not to mention workarounds for obstacles. They'll be much more effective, though, if you're in there asking what they need and providing skilled coaching.

2. Get help if coaching isn't in your skill set. You need to model the attitude you want your team to adopt, but an expert coach can jump in to help you if the processes for running large-scale projects aren't clear or you see conflict within or between your teams.

3. Timing is important. At what point you offer coaching matters. The beginning is a good time to explain purpose and processes. Use natural break points—such as thirds or halfway through—to help everybody take stock, make adjustments and solve problems.

Debrief at the end of the launch, and run a postmortem later, especially if things go wrong.

4. Watch for coaching aptitude among your team members. Any one of them may have the main coaching talent in your group. Draw on it, develop it and reinforce it. Resist the impulse to feel threatened and squelch it.

— Adapted from *Senior Leadership Teams*, Ruth Wageman, Debra A. Nunes, James A. Burruss, J. Richard Hackman, Harvard Business School Press.

Taking the Marshmallow Challenge

With 18 minutes, 20 sticks of spaghetti, a yard of tape, a yard of string and one marshmallow, Tom Wujec believes he can tell you how innovative any team is.

Here's how to conduct his fun team building game:

After giving a four-member team the list of supplies mentioned above, Wujec asks them to build the tallest free-standing structure they can. The only rule: The marshmallow needs to be on top.

“I believe the Marshmallow Challenge is among the fastest and most powerful techniques for improving a team’s capacity to generate fresh ideas, build rapport and incorporate prototyping—all of which lie at the heart of effective innovation,” says Wujec, who is a Fellow at Autodesk, the leading 2D and 3D technology firm.

He has used this team building exercise with CEOs, business-school students and kindergartners. And he has learned some surprising lessons about the nature of collaboration.

Among them:

√ **“Ta-da!” can quickly turn to “Uh-oh.”** Most people begin by orienting themselves to the task, he says. They talk about what their structure will look like, sketch it out and jockey for a leadership position in the group.

Wujec says, “They spend most of their time assembling the structure, then just as they’re running out of time, they gingerly put a marshmallow on top. They stand back and admire their work—“Ta-da!”” Then the entire structure collapses under the weight of the marshmallow.

√ **Rapid prototyping is the name of the game.** Recent graduates of kindergarten tend to perform best in the Marshmallow Challenge. They produce the tallest and most interesting structures.

Why? No one spends any time trying to be CEO of Spaghetti Inc.

Kindergartners, unlike other groups, start with the idea of the marshmallow and work backward, building multiple prototypes along the way. Kids get instant feedback with

each version about what works and what doesn't—in other words, they use an iterative process—so they don't end up with a collapsed structure at the last moment.

√ **CEOs perform best with an executive admin on the team.** Why? Admins facilitate and manage the process. Facilitation skills plus specialized skills equal success.

Ultimately, says Wujec, the Marshmallow Challenge helps people find hidden assumptions, build a common language and learn how to manage the marshmallow.

— Adapted from MarshmallowChallenge.com.

8 ways to partner with your boss

If you've ever wondered what an admin needs to do to become a successful executive assistant, Judy Moreo is the person to ask. Moreo has worked with a range of assistants over the years, from her time as the first female executive at one of South Africa's most prestigious corporations to founding her own performance-improvement consulting firm: Turning Point International in Las Vegas.

Here's Moreo's eight-step formula for becoming a partner with your boss:

- 1. Praise the good points** of your boss's behavior. "Behavior rewarded is behavior repeated," Moreo says.
- 2. Voice support** for the boss's goals to others as well as to him or her.
- 3. Volunteer** to take on some of the boss's routine jobs so he or she can focus on more important tasks. "But don't take on so much that you're overwhelmed," says Moreo.
- 4. Stay alert** for ideas that will save time or money or improve the workplace.
- 5. Offer to be a sounding board** for the boss's ideas or to help solve problems.
- 6. Help break in** new employees.
- 7. Offer (tactfully) to help** with tasks for which your abilities are better than the boss's.
- 8. Let the boss and others know** that you're proud and feel fortunate to be working with him or her.

If you stick to that formula, you'll enhance what Moreo calls "your recognizing twinkle: What you leave in the minds of others long after you're out of their eyesight."

Team Diagnostic Exam

Does your team need a push? Sit in on a few of its meetings and then complete this exercise. Read each statement and answer Yes or No:

	Yes	No
The team leader distributed an agenda or action items before the meeting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All of the team members show up for the meeting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Team meetings begin promptly at the scheduled time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All of the team members complete their assignments (present research, provide facts and so forth).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Everyone participates in the meeting.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The team reviews goals from its last meeting, and members give progress reports.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Team members take notes, especially when they promise to do a special assignment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Team members take responsibility for their work rather than giving excuses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Team members linger after the formal meeting ends, discussing issues with enthusiasm.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you checked **Yes** for all nine statements, odds are your team is in fine shape. But each **No** answer raises a red flag. If you notice the number of **No**'s increasing from meeting to meeting, you need to intervene and take steps to lift the collective spirit and performance level of the group.

Track Performance Benchmarks

Fill out this worksheet to determine how you're going to hold your team accountable:

1. What are the team's top three performance goals?

2. Are all the above performance goals measurable? Yes No

If Yes, go to Question 3.

If No, how can you rework the goal(s) to ensure a fair, accurate measurement of the team's progress?

3. How will I know to what extent the team has attained each of the above goals? (Check all that apply.)

The team will have a deadline for turning in reports that contain specific information, such as the percentage of on-time deliveries or the number of customer returns for a certain product.

The team will submit written, actionable steps the company can take to solve a specific problem.

The team will train or educate others (such as employees, suppliers or customers), who will adopt certain practices or follow specific procedures as a result.

I'll ask employees who aren't on the team or consultants to audit or assess the team's work in reaching its performance goals, based on preset benchmarks.

I'll meet regularly with a team representative to see whether the team has met specific standards (such as producing work that meets or exceeds a checklist of quality criteria).

Other: _____

4. How will I monitor the team's effort in pursuing its goals?

_____ I'll ask a team representative to write up "minutes" describing how the team spends its time in meetings.

_____ I'll sit in on parts of team meetings and rate the group in key areas, such as diligence, determination and resilience when facing setbacks.

_____ I'll ask each team member to send me a short memo on a regular basis summarizing his or her involvement and overall assessment of the group's performance.

_____ I'll set up checkpoints every week, month or quarter when the team must complete short-term assignments.

_____ Other: _____
