



WORKLIFE STRATEGIES

Building Successful Teams

Baird Brightman, Ph.D.

A group of people working together is not necessarily a team

When leaders assemble a group of people and give them work to do, they always hope for the best. Sometimes lightning strikes and they get a high-performance team. More often, teams develop the stress fractures that come from the ongoing challenge of balancing the “Me” and the “We” while also, by the way, getting all the work done.

Unlike the best military units and sports teams that usually have a robust team infrastructure from the start, many work teams operate more like a pick-up game on the fly. As one team leader put it: *“We’re building this car while driving it at 90 mph!”* When teams are running fast and furious, they don’t usually have the time or the inclination to step back and ask *“How are we doing?”*

What should you do when a team falls short of your expectations? Schedule a retreat and do some “team-building exercises”? Hire a coach? Start firing people? Hope for the best (again)?

TEAM SUCCESS CONSULTATION

Worklife Strategies’ **Team Success Consultation** focuses your team’s intelligence and energy on building a successful team. The consultation cycles through 3 critical phases: Assessment, Planning and Action.

PHASE I. Assessment

First you need to determine whether your team has all the active ingredients required to succeed. A team assessment is conducted through the use of two proprietary web-based instruments and aligned interviews:

Team Success Inventory

The Team Success Inventory is a web-based survey that asks team members to evaluate how well their team is managing the 4 drivers of team success:

- Structure: *team focus, leadership, consequences*
- Process: *disciplined alignment of work with customer wants/expectations*
- Talent: *right skills, best talent management practices*
- Relationships: *right ground rules, best relationship management practices*

INDEX5

Each person has a default behavioral style that characterizes their performance across a range of work situations. When people are assembled into a work team, a chemical reaction occurs between their individual work styles. **INDEX5** measures the default work style of each team member (how they handle work tasks, relationships, emotions, problem-solving) and maps those profiles onto the 4 core processes of team success (Creating, Planning, Energizing, Performing). While most work style instruments are SELF-assessments that can produce distorted results (due to ego and reputation filters), **INDEX5** is the only assessment where people are described exclusively by others rather than by themselves [go to www.wklf.com/INDEX5.pdf for more information].

PHASE II. Planning

Once you have clarified the main challenges to your team's success, you can decide what to do about them. Based on a detailed review of the assessment data, you will develop a structured Action Plan to address one or more obstacles/challenges to your team's success. Clear action steps, timelines and assigned responsibility create a map for movement from the current to the desired level of team functioning. Some action steps may be taken completely within the team; some may involve other people within the organization and/or external resources.

PHASE III. Action

Once your Action Plan is finalized and ratified, nothing can be allowed to stand in the way of its successful implementation. The team's members/leader and key organizational stakeholders must own and execute the plan.

CASE STUDY

A healthcare team was failing to meet critical requirements for quality, cost and speed. Team members completed the Team Success Inventory and INDEX5, and participated in structured conversations with a consultant to express their views about the team. The assessment phase revealed the following obstacles to team success:

- Vague definition of team success
- Weak team performance management
- Lack of customer focus
- No ground rules for team behavior
- Dysfunctional relationship management practices
- Default work style favoring a lack of competitiveness and discipline

The Solution

The team and its sponsor agreed that the situation needed to improve quickly or the team needed to be re-staffed. The following intervention plan was developed and implemented with good results:

1. Create clear metrics for quality and financial performance and provide continuous feedback to the team
2. Develop and institute best project management and process improvement practices
3. Align compensation and other incentives with team performance
4. Establish and enforce a set of ground rules and best practices for successful team behavior
5. Empower the team's natural performance "Energizer" to push the team to higher performance levels, but coach him to refrain from driving the team at the wrong times (e.g. during the Creating phase) and in the wrong way (he was too aggressive, not a natural team player).

By moving crisply from assessment to planning to action, **Team Success Consultation** creates a platform for building high-performance teams that can deliver a strong return on your organization's investment.

AUTHOR

Baird Brightman, Ph.D. helps people succeed in their career and business.

Trained as a behavioral scientist, Baird has worked as a health professional, leader and consultant. He has been a lecturer at the Harvard Medical School and an instructor/advisor at Harvard's office of executive education. Baird's publications include *Transforming Health Care: Action Strategies for Health Care Leaders* and *One Perfect Meal: Saving the World from the Calorie Crisis* as well as articles on professional and organizational effectiveness. He has been interviewed by Forbes, WebMD, The Washington Post, The Boston Globe and others on a variety of work-related topics.

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