

# NO NONSENSE ADVICE

19

BUILDING AND LEADING  
HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS

VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA  
ANTON THAYALAN

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**Vidusha Nathavitharana**  
**Anton Thayalan**

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**EDITED BY TATUM DE SOUZA  
COVER DESIGN BY ZAFRAN PACKEERALLY**

# PROLOGUE:

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As a leader, your journey includes building a strong team that performs exceptionally well. This is part of your core job, as the achievement of organizational goals and targets will depend on the deliverables of your team.

Gone are the days where individuals are looked up to, to deliver set targets. In today's context businesses are global. The demand of each organization is way beyond an individual scope. You need a team, that can collectively deliver not only quality, but also efficiency.

A high performing team will bridge that gap. This is easier said than done. Building a team is one thing, building a High Performing Team, is a different story all together.

Your team needs to collaborate, share a common vision, stand up for each other, support the common goal, hold each other accountable and take responsibility.

Each member will be different, with varying skill sets and personalities. The goal is to bring all of these ingredients together as one, and to deliver superior service and standards.

That's the easy part...building such a team takes effort, time, dedication and solid discipline. As a leader, your role and responsibility does not stop there. You now need to lead that team, so that they can deliver to expectations and beyond. Remember that a high performing team is a foundation stone for the organisation.

Hopefully this book will give you an idea upon which you can start building that team and then start successfully leading them...

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# Chapter 1

## Setting up a team

It is important to get the start right. Setting up your team is crucial. You must get this aspect right, or you will end up dealing with unwanted issues.

### **- Hire for attitude**

The mantra is simple: Hire for Attitude and Train for Skill. Many successful organizations have this as a part of their strategy. The simple truth is that personal traits or attributes are hard or impossible to train.

- When you hire for attitude, ensure that the individual is moldable
  - Hire with the idea of building the right culture
  - Never ignore the technical competency
- Always ensure that the individual values of the candidates are aligned to that of the organization

As long as your strategy is on point, you will find it easy to drive engagement amongst your team. So plan carefully.

### **- Hire for complimentary skills**

Complimentary skills are key to managing the hundreds of tasks your team will have to face. While you will have a core job, your team will have to deal with many smaller tasks and assignments along the way. If all your members had similar skill sets, or characteristics, it will make for a daunting task, if not a near impossible one.

- ALWAYS check for other skills that the individual possesses
- ALWAYS find out what additional tasks he/she has taken on in the previous roles
  - NEVER assume that they can handle it later on
- Also check for personality types as this will matter to you in building that high performing team

Having individuals with complimentary skills will ensure that you can delegate different tasks to different individuals and each one will deliver their respective area while contributing to the overall team objectives. The same principle will apply to personality types too, as these will also compliment the different roles required to complete a task or an assignment.

## - Technical Competence : and EQ

Technical competence is key - depending on the job or role. For example, a network engineer must know his or her job and be qualified to do that particular job. However, once that part is sorted, you must then go back to the attitude mantra and work out if this is the right fit for your team and organization.

Same with EQ or Emotional Intelligence. The candidate may have all the right qualifications, but it is imperative that the individual's ability to relate to others and the organization, and understand varying situations, is his or her top attributes. Otherwise you will end up with a highly qualified individual who is unable to react to a situation efficiently and work with his or her team.

## - Initiation and Orientation

Once you have the team in sight, you must ensure that they are taken through the initiation and orientation process. This is so that everyone starts with a level playing field and that all the expectations are set right.

- ALWAYS set the expectations right from the very beginning
- ALWAYS make sure that each individual is accountable for his or her area and this is common knowledge
- SET the right tone so that everyone knows that recognition is based on meritocracy
- ALWAYS answer and clarify any doubts...give them sufficient opportunities to ask

As a high performing team, each one must hold the other accountable, and must also know his or her own deliverables. They must also understand the possible impact, if they fail to deliver. The orientation will help align everyone to the overall organizational goals and also prepare them for their tasks and challenges ahead.

## - Training and Development

Now that you have hired for attitude, you must train for skills. Soft skills or essential skills are critical to every organization's success.

- Spend time to first understand each member of your team and their respective strengths and areas of development
  - Gain an understanding of the required soft skills to deliver to expected standards
    - Work out the gaps in skills so that you have a strong and practical TNA
- Work with your bosses to ensure that these trainings are rolled out
  - ALWAYS have a conversation with the individual before you send them on a training program, so that they are aware of why they have been nominated
- Have a discussion with the individual post-training to gauge their understanding
  - Make it a part of your daily devotion/meeting to have the participants explain the key takeaways to the rest of the team

You must ensure that through the identified training, there must be development, and this in turn should contribute to the overall team delivery.

## - Handling initial jostling for power and influence

As with all teams, be prepared for the initial power struggle. This is normal; as individuals we try to protect ourselves and struggle for power. While this may be acceptable in other areas of life, within a team this will create a lot of distraction and lack of transparency. This in turn will prevent each other from working together and create a sense of dislike amongst the members.

Bearing this in mind, strive to create an atmosphere of shared responsibility and foster team spirit. That way, when the team is threatened by an external force, individuals will NOT react selfishly, but instead will unite for the common defense of the team.

# Chapter 2

## Getting Basics Right

Many fail in their endeavors simply because they forget to get the basics right. Keeping things simple is always to our advantage. Always get the basics right.

### - Setting a common purpose : not just KPIs

While KPI's are important and a lot depends on an individual delivering on the KPI, do remember that there is more to it than just that.

- NEVER make the job about numbers
- ALWAYS explain the purpose of the role
- Be clear about how his or her role adds value to the organization
- Explain how failure to deliver will impact the overall organizational goals
- Talk to the team as a whole and explain how they can work together to deliver on the common purpose
- ALWAYS check for their understanding of the common purpose

As a leader, you must understand each individual's motivations and work towards bringing it all together for a common purpose.

### - Finding a common enemy

This is a strategy used by great teams to help their members focus on the ultimate goal. The 'enemy' can be a competitor or even an old system/method of doing things. The idea is to focus on what you need to achieve by ensuring that you overcome the 'enemy'.

- Identify what your team's purpose is
- Identify the factors that you need to overcome
- Drive your team to focus on the key points so that they fight this as one team
- Remember when united, the team's confidence to deliver superior performance, rises
- Focusing on a common enemy pushes individuals to do things even they didn't know were possible
- Focusing on a 'common enemy' is also a great motivator

A common enemy, even in theory, is a great way to keep your team driven and motivated to deliver on the shared purpose or goal. It will help them to be accountable at the same time.

## - Setting Performance Parameters

In order to meet your organization's overall goals, there are objectives and targets that need to be met, both at individual and team level. Knowing that your team as a whole is working well is simply not enough.

You need to know how well each individual is working: whether an individual is doing the right kind of work and contributing in the right manner. Collective data is one thing, but as a leader you need to know if each individual is on the right track; If their output is achieving the organizational goals.

Performance Parameters or KPI's (Key Performance Indicators), are quantifiable metrics that reflect how well an organization is doing, how well a team is doing and drilling it further down to how well an individual is doing. KPIs link an organizational vision to an individual action.

Without overdoing or having too many KPI's (ideally a max of 10), you will need to identify those that are able to measure the appropriate activity for your team, which in turn will contribute towards the organizational goals and targets. Use the SMART approach in identifying and setting those KPIs:

- Specific: you must be absolutely clear about what your KPI will measure and it's importance
- Measurable: you must be able to measure each KPI to a set standard. It can't be vague or generic
- Achievable: you must ensure that your team members are actually able to deliver on those set parameters. Don't get too ambitious and set very high targets, which no one will be able to achieve. Growth is a process, not magic!
- Relevant: you must ensure that your KPIs are relevant to the role or function and that it is important. While there are hundreds of possible KPIs, ensure that those you identify actually improve or drive performance of your team

- Time-Bound: you must ensure that the set KPIs can be achieved within a set time frame – daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc. That way you will always have a reference point to each individual's performance, and you will be in a better position to guide them in the right direction, should they fall behind or veer off-course.

### - Managing Performance

Now that you have set the parameters, the challenge is to manage the performance of your team. Remember this will not happen instinctively. You must drive it. You must manage it.

Communicate the KPIs to everyone in the team clearly and address any concerns immediately. Ensure that everyone is on board. Ensure that they are aware of the impact of meeting or not meeting the set KPIs.

Your next step is to ensure that the data is collected in a timely manner and analyzed. You can even assign this task to someone within the team as a part of their development. Make sure the data is accurate and it covers all your KPIs.

Measure performance continuously so that you have a trend line against peaks and dips in performance – both as a team and individually. Understanding this will allow you to manage the targets of each KPI for each month. As a leader you must also possess business acumen in knowing what is happening around you in the industry and the organization. This will give you a more rounded approach to manage your team.

This is the process of assessing an employee's progress towards a common goal. Remember, the idea is to identify the strengths and development areas of each individual and make informed decisions regarding their contributions, their training needs, career progressions, etc.

So, when you embark on your journey to manage performance, please remember the following:

- The feedback process is a continuous one and must be done in a timely manner throughout the review period. It should not come as a surprise to the individual as this is about his/her performance and they should always be aware of how they are doing
- Performance feedback must be on results measured against clear and specific targets and goals, which should have been established between you and the individual at the very beginning of the performance management period
  - Always document the discussion and set clear timelines and objectives for the next discussion
- This is a discussion between you and the team member and it should be a two-way conversation. As much as you dish out feedback, always ask for ways you can support the individual to do better

### **- Creating Norms and a Culture**

As you begin to build your team, it is important to create the right culture. Before that, you need to set the norms of the team. These are a set of guidelines or rules that will shape the interaction of the team members with one another and also, to some extent, with others in the organization.

Once these are set and understood, they will guide the behavior of the team, leading to the team culture. They will also help you to understand how well each member of your team is interacting. These will greatly help your team improve overall performance and have a more healthy debate for the overall benefit.

Not only does it remove 'office politics', but it helps to create a sense of ownership, where everyone is heard and valued.

Some suggested team norms:

- Details Before Meeting – This would mean that anyone within the team calling for a meeting, will have to send in their agenda ahead of time and the same goes with presentations, data sheets, etc. This way, everyone attending is prepared and can add value by giving constructive feedback. This will also prevent a second meeting in most instances
- 15-Min Meeting – Any meeting should not be for more than 15 mins. This will ensure that everyone is prepared and understands how to contribute. Time wasting and non-value adding items will not be brought up. It also is a great way to avoid unnecessary meetings
- Celebrate Success – Creating the environment where success is recognized and celebrated, is important. This is the kind of recognition, which goes beyond a paycheck, that individuals will value. This will drive them to perform even better.

Now create your own!

### - Building relationships that transcend work

Professional success and personal success are important to everyone, but they mean different things to different people. But the reality is that no success ever exists without great relationships. These are built on some strong foundations and done over a period of time.

Remember, each member of your team comes from a different background, a different culture, etc. It takes time and effort to both understand and bridge the differences. This involves Respect, Genuineness and Transparency.

When you are genuine and authentic in your approach within your team, not only will they respect you but will also reciprocate. This will build a relationship that will certainly go beyond the office hours and the organization.

Even after they leave the organization, they should be able to value that relationship. That will be the true litmus test.

### **- Weeding out those who don't 'fit'**

Now that you have your team, regardless of new members or old, and you have set your KPIs, and Norms, you need to exercise patience.

Patience to give each member the time to turn around and adhere to the set norms and standards. Granted it will take time; however, they do need to start working towards it. As you progress you will notice certain types of employees who clearly will not fit your 'Norm' & 'Culture', and these you must weed out.

Anyone who thrives on being the 'rebel', one who does not contribute towards the team but claims to be of leader material, one who is constantly falling behind on deliverables owing to lack of competency, or those who make it a habit to gossip about others, or are busy trying to step over a colleague. Basically, anyone who does not fit into the team culture. Same goes for those who display behaviors of harassment or bullying.

While this may seem too harsh, you just have to cut your losses and let go of the member, specially if they have ignored all the warnings. You tried, and that's that. Remember this is for the best of the team and the organization.

### **- Multiskilling**

This is crucial; and the sooner you get on to it, the better. Once you have your teams working on their core roles/tasks and have gained some level of proficiency and are delivering expected KPI's, you need to look at cross-training them.

Either within your own team or within the organization. Within the team, it would be great to have more than one person trained for a specific task. It will enable your team to always be ready for any event and ensure that work is never dropped.

Within the organization, this would make your team members (and your team) a great asset, as they can support other teams or departments, when the workload is less for your teams. This is also a great way to build a better understanding of the organization, and at the same time create visibility for your team members so that they are better positioned when internal growth opportunities arise.

### **- Setting up Values and Competency Frameworks**

This is a key step in creating your high performing team. This process will drive your team towards working for each other as much as working for the organization. Your team values must be aligned to the organization's values and goals. They can't be disconnected.

This process must be done as part of your work, and not as a side-role.

Get your team together for a 'brain-storming' session. Go the whole 9-yards: flipcharts, marker pens, blue-tack, etc. Get your team to list out the values that are common to all first (example: trust, honesty, etc.)

Then get them to list out values that are specific to their role.

Get your team to then provide examples of these values and how they connect with the team responsibilities. Once the values are all listed and aligned to the organization's values, you need to ensure that the expected behaviors are listed out too in the document. That is the competency framework, which you will document and keep for reference.

Once you have completed this exercise, get your values up where everyone can see them, not just your team. When your values are clearly defined and displayed, it is imperative that every single member of the team adheres to it. Failing would mean losing your teams credibility, and your values will become meaningless.

# Chapter 3

## Times of Crisis

Never let a good crisis go to waste. While times of crisis can be very demanding and painful, they are also a great opportunity to showcase other characteristics and qualities. It is a great opportunity to show resilience and adaptability.

### **- The power of a rousing speech**

This is always a testing time for a leader. This is where you must learn to put aside your personal worries and rally your team. Everything you do and say will be watched by your team. They are looking for direction and guidance. They are probably feeling let down and see no hope. Be ready to stand up and show them you care and that you are there for them.

Prepare your thoughts. Do your research. Understand the situation. Identify the actions of the organisation. Calm your nerves. Write down if you have to, all the key things that must be said, being transparent and truthful, yet supportive and encouraging.

Talk to your teams and do this genuinely, with all your heart and soul behind it. When done sincerely, every word spoken will be absorbed by your team members. A when done right, a rousing speech can drive your teams to success beyond your imagination and it will make all the difference.

Remember, many a losing battle were won, because of a rousing speech!

### **- Communicating across: not just at the top**

One of greatest mistakes made during any crisis is the failure to communicate across the organization. In most cases, discussions are held at the very top and then passed on to the line managers.

When left unattended, employees will almost always make assumptions, and immediately start worrying about their jobs. All of these anxieties will most certainly distract even the most promising employee from staying focused. When this happens, it is usually followed by rumors. It is your responsibility as a leader of the team to ensure that the spreading of misinformation is prevented and the productivity is continued.

It is understandable that you may not have all the answers at hand immediately. However, make sure that you are transparent with your team at all times, while ensuring they remain focused on what is accurate and that work continues, as much as possible.

Your relationship with your team will matter now the most. If your team trusts you and believes in you, then you can rest assured, that even if you don't have all the answers, they will listen to you, and misinterpretation will not happen. In fact, if you plan well enough for any crisis, you can even prepare your teams for the social media impact, which is inevitable.

### **- Rallying the troops and Keeping up morale**

Each crisis will vary and will have a different impact. Rallying your team together and ensuring their morale is up, should be a key priority for you as a leader. It is important that they are still up in spirits, since this will ensure they are ready to hit the floor running when things settle down. Otherwise, your task will be to get them back on their feet and then to focus on work, which will certainly take up a lot more of your time, effort and energy.

- Focus on the organization - Drive your teams to focus on the organization and what it means. Now is the time to focus on what needs to be done differently and why it is important for each individual to stay on the new course. Make them understand their new roles and the expected results
- Encourage openness – always tell the truth and expect the same from your teams. Encourage them to speak openly and ensure that others do not frown or criticize them for doing so. This will ensure that you get to understand exactly what each member thinks and feels. This is important
- Be future focused – Let your team know what the new expectation is. Encourage them to make suggestions and recommendations to improve their work. Get them to be creative and innovative and to come up with ways to meet the new targets or ways to work better.

## - Revisiting Assumptions

Businesses and targets are almost always built on some assumptions. Over a period of time, things change, market conditions change, or some crisis would have tilted the scales. When this happens, the old assumptions will not hold.

The danger, though, is that many leaders today, brush that under the carpet and pull through, only to realize that things have changed drastically and its too late and too costly to make changes now.

Here are 3 highly recommended suggestions on how to avoid this pitfall:

- Have regular check-ups on the assumptions. This will let you know if you are on the right track or if you need to make changes to the assumptions
- Involve every single member of your team, including the new ones when scrutinizing the assumptions
- Ask for a third party or an outsider's perspective. A fresh pair of eyes can't do you any harm

## - Revisiting Processes, Policies and Procedures

Revisiting is a great exercise....specially when it comes to processes, policies and procedures. Make this another one of your core activities as a part of building a high performing team. This is also a great way to ensure that everyone understands these documents.

Then, assign tasks to smaller groups and identify areas that need to be changed or areas that can be improved. Look for any outdated policies or procedures. Identify any new inclusions.

Not only will it unite the team, but it will ensure you have the buy-in from all concerned, once the exercise is completed.

### **- Minimizing and silencing the doomsday prophecies and naysayers**

Keep away from these as much as possible. If you succeed or if you fail, it is irrelevant. You will always learn and do it better next time. That should be your only attitude. Having said that, you will always have individuals who will constantly tell you how things may not go well or how this may not work and so on and so forth.

These naysayers bring along nothing but negativity. For whatever reason, their role is to criticize and create doubt about everything you wish to embark on. You don't need that negativity.

Remember you are the sum of all the 5 people you associate with most. Ensure that you are surrounded by positive people. People who will guide you and motivate you and inspire you.

Continue to drive your teams and achieve the goals and targets set before you. Succeeding despite the naysayers and doomsday prophets, would eventually be your best response to ALL.

### **- Celebrating wins - even the smallest ones**

While you and the team put in all the hard work to build this strong unit that is focused on achieving the targets and delivering on their commitment, don't forget to celebrate the success at every stage. This is an important component of building that solid high performing team.

As you celebrate, remember it is a reward in itself. It is a recognition, not just within the team, but visible to everyone else as well, and this will drive your team to do even better.

These celebrations, while they need to be regular and consistent, do not have to be expensive. From going out for coffee or even walking up to the nearest supermarket to buy an ice cream, do it as a team. Have a 'potluck' and get everyone to bring in something to eat and then enjoy the food in the break out area of the canteen. Let the others see what is happening around your team. Soon people will start talking about your team and this will also be a driver.

# Chapter 4

## Managing Conflict

Learn to manage conflict inside a team. Far too often it is conflict that creates the cracks that eventually brings down even the best performing teams. Identify the 'cracks' early : and keep a look out for them. They are inevitable. They are common. They are 'normal.' No two human beings can work without conflict for too long. So, DEAL with the conflicts : don't ignore them. A word of caution though : don't get 'too' involved either : your task is to enable those who have conflicts to sort it out themselves as much as possible : YOU as a senior leader should be a last resort : NOT the 'go to person' !

### **- Encouraging open communications across the team**

We often try and avoid conflict. Don't allow this to happen. Encourage candor. Encourage honest opinion. Encourage argument. However, also, ensure you encourage mutual respect, deep consideration of contexts and situations, empathy, and above all, honest acceptance of each others flaws and flawed logic.

### **- Spotting power struggles and dealing with them**

The most common conflicts are down to 'power struggles' : learn to spot them : and ensure you talk to all parties concerned about the need to see beyond themselves.

- ALWAYS maintain, and stand by the fact that OVERALL KPIs are far more important than the individual KPIs
- NEVER promote a person who does not actively SUPPORT others to achieve their objectives : and who selfishly disregards all others
- ALWAYS rotate jobs from time to time : and also, never allow one person to always take the lead on key initiatives
- ALWAYS take 360degree review results SERIOUSLY and have personal coaching for those who are identified as 'glory seekers'
  - REMOVE those who cannot play as a team

## **- Handling issues arising from succession planning**

One of the other issues that leads to conflict is those who are identified as successors. We have a fun book on Creating and Grooming Successors - read this for more details and in-depth appreciation for how to ensure your successors don't become 'pig headed.'

- ALWAYS be clear that you can and WILL remove those from a successor role if they don't support others - or become 'too big for their boots'
- Make successors play 'follower' roles to Junior members for certain initiatives : and assess if they truly serve others
- Ensure that those who were NOT selected for the successor role do NOT jeopardize them : and set them up to fail : take swift action if you see this kind of devious politics being played
- Encourage successors to share their 'mistakes' openly - rather than 'covering them up' or glossing over them
- Ensure you are always there as a 'sounding board' for your successors : and make these conversations 'no holds barred' open renditions

## **- Ensuring that processes and policy/procedure frameworks are not counterproductive and cannibalizing each other**

One of the other BIGGEST reasons for conflicts are the Policies Procedures and Processes you put in place. Most of the time : these 'frameworks' you create are actually 'cannibalizing' each other : in that : trying to meet ONE is often at the cost of another. So, be mindful please : and ensure you sit with a wide team when setting up these frameworks. We will speak later about taking an internal customer satisfaction approach to things : and do the same when it comes to setting up policies, procedures and processes.

The simple key is this : if the reason for a conflict is a policy, procedure or process, CHANGE IT !

## - Establishing EQUITY as much as EQUALITY

We often sacrifice EQUITY for the sake of equality. Remember EVERYONE needs to have the same ACCESS to resources : but performance is performance. So, when rewards, recognition and progression are considered, DO look at EQUITY too. There is honestly no point in rewarding the best performer and the worst performer in a team with the same increment, bonus and share of recognition. Being able to call a spade a spade is as important as being able to groom everyone irrespective of their current levels of performance.

## - Creating Transparency

The key to ensure conflicts are managed professionally is TRANSPARENCY. Many of the common conflicts would simply never take place if there was transparency in the first place...

- Be clear about who does what
  - Be clear about how things are measured
  - Be clear about how grievances and issues are dealt with
- Be clear about what the values are : and what will happen if values are violated
  - Be clear about how progression inside the team will take place
- Be clear about WHY certain frameworks are in place : and what needs to be done if they need to be changed
- Be clear about HOW you need to BEHAVE inside the team : and what is, and what is NOT acceptable behavior

Be transparent in absolutely everything that is NOT confidential. It honestly saves a hell of a lot of hassle in the long term.

# Chapter 5

## Leading a Team

There is a huge amount of literature around leading teams, and leadership in general. Our attempt here is not to have a verbose dialogue about a rather infinite subject : but to have pointed discourse about leading a team in the context of making the team perform superlatively. For more detailed discussions about leadership, do read our 'First Time Managers' and 'Senior Leaders' books from the No Nonsense Range.

### **- Understanding that Leadership is the role : not the title**

In a team, leadership is a ROLE you perform : it is NOT your title. Leadership SHOULD change when the requirements change : and ideally, it should be based on merit and common acceptance. A good idea is to actually 'vote in' your leader for specific tasks and projects. The manager of the unit will still be its manager ; but the leadership role should change, based on the key tasks undertaken.

### **- Creating leadership across the team**

There actually is room for almost everyone - even the lowest ranking person - to take leadership in a team. Most of the time, tasks in a team are cyclical, and have many handover points. When working collectively, rotate the leadership so as to allow everyone to partake in the leadership process : this will:

- Create an appreciation for the complexities of the overall task - rather than only the sub-task YOU are responsible for
  - Create easy succession when required
- Enable on the job training and job rotation in a meaningful manner
  - Break down rigid hierarchies which are counterproductive to superlative performance
- Take away feelings of 'not being important' - and thereby reduce employee turnover
  - Create a lot more responsibility and collective ownership

### **- Knowing when to step in and when to stay out of the way**

If you are a manager : know when to step in - and when not to.

Sometimes, you actually DO get in the way : so watch out ! As a Manager, specially in a team setting, you ARE ultimately responsible : but if you have created lines of responsibility based on leadership roles others will play, don't overrule them : allow them to lead the initiative without being overbearing or micromanaging.

### **- Coaching and Mentoring fledgling leaders**

You will identify those who show true leadership potential when you task them with initiatives and projects. When you spot talent, take them under your wing : and make sure you actively coach and mentor them.

- Talk them through decisions : never give solutions.
- Once a task is completed, debrief : and talk about what could have been done better
  - Encourage peer reviews
- Encourage creative problem solving - even if they are unorthodox solutions
  - Encourage failure and learning from it - but remember to never accept or tolerate negligence
- Give more responsibilities and wider authority based on performance
  - not on tenure

### **- Empowerment : and Responsibility**

Empowering teams - not just leaders - is key. Empowering a team means enabling the team to function without you 'meddling with things' ! This can be a rather scary thing : specially if the team is not fully fledged : but unless you place that trust and confidence, a team almost never really reaches its fullest potential.

Remember though : empowerment without accountability and responsibility is a lost cause. So, ensure you are able to hold the team accountable at all times : though at the same time, ensuring you genuinely support and enable the attitude to correct mistakes - rather than being reprimanded for genuine mistakes which will negate all the empowerment built over time...

# Chapter 6

## Being a good Team Member

Many times, being a leader of a team gets talked about - but being a good team member is taken for granted. Remember - learning how to follow is also a skill : and often, is as important as learning to lead.

### **- Teaching how to FOLLOW before you Lead**

As crazy as it may sound, conduct training programs on HOW TO FOLLOW or FOLLOWERSHIP as much as Leadership, inside the teams.

If you start doing a little bit of research you will find that being a follower is NOT what necessarily meets the eye ... Here are some aspects to consider as part of your curriculum :

- WHAT DO YOU MEAN by 'following'?
- Types of followers : and how they impact performance
- Key characteristics we need to develop in order to ensure there is a meaningful and mutually respectful relationship between followers and leaders
- When to lead : when to follow : the duality that exists all the time
- Protocols in followership - and why these matter

### **- Rewarding supporters : not just leaders**

Most of the time we assume that things 'go right' because of great leadership - and completely negate the significant, and at times, pivotal, contributions a few followers will make. Enough and more times, some 'followers' actually contribute far more significantly than the leaders: and once again, these generally go unrecognized and unappreciated. Recognizing only Leaders for great success is as dumb as forgetting the anesthetists contribution to a surgery : imagine what happens if the anesthetist got the dosages wrong - either way. Let's also not forget the countless others who helped the doctor : if any one of them actually 'messed up' chances are the doctor will 'lose his head' and make a mistake that would not otherwise have happened. So, when rewarding and recognizing : please make sure you are equally generous towards the followers as towards the leaders.

## - Moving from 'passive' followers to ACTIVE followers

Most of the time, following is considered a very passive activity. Actually, when you look at it closely, following is an activity which is as active as leading...

- Active followers confront and challenge their leaders
- Active followers will do what is required : not what is told
- Active followers almost have a sixth sense for what their leaders want : and will act on that impulse
- Active followers are able to put other followers 'on the right path' rather than avoiding 'conflict'
- Active followers DON'T idolize their bosses : but they don't vilify them either
- Active followers don't break policy and procedure in the name of performance - they find ways around them
- Active followers actively teach others - and motivate others - and groom others

Sounds a hell of a lot like leadership doesn't it ? Well, that s because it actually IS : ACTIVE following is a rather underappreciated facet of leading...

# Chapter 7

## Making sure teams work with other teams

One of the BIGGEST reasons why teams fail is because they can't get along with OTHER teams. Specially when a team is performing well, and a team is truly cohesive, there is an instinctive 'them and us' psychosis that takes over, that you need to ensure you guard the team, and yourself against. Instinctively, we see 'everyone else' outside of our team as 'outsiders' and this, inside the same organization, is a rather counterproductive attitude to have. Remember : NONE of us can work in isolation : and no matter how brilliant a team is, ALL teams rely on OTHER teams at some point or the other.

### **- The importance of teamwork at leadership levels**

The fish rots from the head, they say : and generally it is leaders who make the horrible mistake of carving out serfdoms for them to rule. so, make sure you dismantle the proverbial 'walls' between departments on an ongoing and active basis. ALWAYS work as a team at the senior levels : working towards a common objective rather than petty individual KPIs.

- At leadership levels, look at setting common KPIs you are collectively responsible for
- Have a strict 'code' that you live by : and ensure you hold each other accountable
  - Encourage sharing resources (people, equipment, budgets even) when required : and ensure this is never one-sided
  - Meet often, meet with families as well, become friends
- NEVER say things in public about each other : never be judgmental of a peer leader
  - NEVER entertain gossip and tell tales about peers
- NEVER get defensive about your team : always be open to criticism and accept faults without trying to 'shy away' from them.

### **- Creating frameworks that encourage internal customer satisfaction concept**

Nothing drives better teamwork than being accountable and responsible for making life 'easier' for your peers and colleagues from 'other units.' Develop an internal customer satisfaction index where you measure the 'levels of service' you offer other departments/teams.

Make sure you ask the 'hard questions' and take the ratings as seriously as you would take an external customer satisfaction survey. As much as you would ensure you will move 'heaven and earth' to ensure your customers are 'delighted', do the very same with your internal customers as well : and you will find team work happens between units and overall as an organization almost by default.

- Meet regularly : and have focus group discussions
- Have an ongoing action plan to ensure that the issues raised are addressed
- Include the internal customer satisfaction index into the overall business measurement indexes

### **- Job rotation**

Encourage interdepartmental 'job rotations' and 'a day in the life of a...' type experiences to ensure the overall organization is understood : and empathy is created about the type of pressures and challenges EACH job has. It is quite normal to consider your own functions far more difficult and complicated than others : and the only way to break this cycle and attitude is to get others to 'feel your pain.' Job rotations are also a beautiful way to ensure you are able to have 'stop gaps' when sudden departures take place (as they inevitably will from time to time).

Nothing builds camaraderie between departments than having someone outside your team coming and helping you out in times of desperate need - and job rotation prepares you to do just that...

### **- Encouraging Cross-Functional Teams**

Try to find ways for cross-functional teams to solve organizational issues - rather than having everything managed through the formal hierarchy and departmental structures. Build short-term cross-functional teams and give them the authority and power to take decisions across the board : enabling them to work in a unit/team and be responsible as well. The more cross-functional teams work on issues, the more the overall organization starts looking at things in a sensible and non partisan manner : without it, organizations will always think in silos and jealously guard territory rather than look at things holistically.

Cross-functional teams are one of the only ways to truly get a fuller appreciation for organizational issues - and how each department's functions/work affect the outcomes.

**Chapter 8**  
**Tips and Insights at Each Stage  
of a Teams' Life Cycle**

EACH team goes through a lifecycle : and that is inevitable. No team can afford to always be a top performing team : and as much as you mature as a team, even one person leaving it and/or a new member joining in changes the dynamics and paradigms : and the cycle starts all over again. Being conscious of the fact that there IS a lifecycle, and understanding that you need to have little things being done at each stage enables you not to 'drop the ball.' As with all things : there are no definitive - and you have to 'feel your way' through your team's growth curves. However, it is wise, to ensure the basics are always in place.

### - Forming Stage

Don't rush the forming stage. Too many times we actually are in one mighty hurry to 'perform' that we forget to 'take it slow' to enable the team to really get to know each other. The forming stage : similar to that of a child's normative years, sets the foundation for a teams growth and development : so, allow the liberty of a little time for people to settle in...

- This is a perfect time to take the team on an OBT type team building session. Take the whole team : get to know each other : and don't forget to have a small 'bonfire' session and share stories from each others' life. These 'little things' really help 'connect' at a personal level
- Allow the team to 'try out' different tasks and jobs inside the team. Don't be pedantic about sticking to the 'job' they have been assigned or given : allow the freedom to move around the team and try out different jobs. If you are at liberty to do so, change the JD to suit the person, rather than trying to shove the person into a job...
- Get families to come together informally : and spend a day or two. Families play a huge role in having a support structure around a well performing team : so, get them involved at the forming stage itself
- Invest in technical training and coaching. This is the time to really train the team. TECHNICAL training comes first : always : before anything else, ensure that all members of the team are truly competent technically : and that they can actually do their respective jobs and roles : all other training is secondary.

## - Storming Stage

When you start out as a team, misunderstandings, little power struggles and 'ego clashes' are inevitable and all too common. Please don't react to these : nor ignore them. Being able to 'deal with them' in a truly 'mature' manner will ensure you are able to edge the team towards the norming stage : rather than allowing the team to disintegrate into chaos.

- Allow dissent, disagreement and arguments : but never allow it to get personal
- ALWAYS encourage people to resolve issues between themselves : and NEVER entertain gossip
- Teach team members to attack a problem - NEVER a person. Teach them to use tools like the root cause analysis and Edward De Bono's 6 thinking hats all the time : rather than have arguments
  - Stay out of finding solutions : get involved only if the team can't handle it themselves. Actively seek the views of all.

## - Norming Stage

Norms, rather than policies and procedures are what sets culture. So, focus on what type of norms are being set : consciously and unconsciously. Remember what you DON'T do matters as much as what you DO : so, be vigilant. If you set the wrong precedence, it is very difficult to reverse things afterwards...

- ACT when you see negative behaviors. NEVER watch it and ignore it. ALWAYS have a chat with the people concerned, and then, without pointing out the person or the incident, talk to the team about it.
- ALWAYS recognize those who live the values : and go out of their way to help others. RECOGNITION doesn't cost anything : but does wonders for setting the right example.
- NEVER allow others outside the team to 'meddle' in its affairs. Be very clear with your peers about protocols that need to be followed when assigning work to your team. Breaking these protocols sets a rather bad precedent to usurp formal structures and authorities which become hugely detrimental when a team grows.

- Be willing to say NO : and stand by it : never just give in simply because it saves face and is generally the easier thing to do...

### - Performing Stage

The performing stage takes place only if the right norms are set. However, be clear : performance ISN'T a straight line : and there are ALWAYS peaks and valleys in performance. So, when the team DOES start performing, make sure you are able to ensure that it is kept at peak performance !

- Watch out for burnout. Peak Performance is often draining : and without a solid break, fatigue can set in. So, when the team is 'really kicking it' - force a few breaks : take them out : and offer a long weekend to 'chill and relax'
- Relook at processes : ALWAYS. When things are going well is when you can make the best changes. So, when the team is performing, ensure they relook at their processes with a keen eye for improvement.
- Make sure you give constant feedback. Differentiate between 'effort and performance' and 'performance by luck' : NEVER allow credit to be taken for 'markets' being the reason for the superlative performance. ALWAYS appreciate the contexts and cause and effects.
  - Make sure you are able to appreciate the performers and the nonperformers. Even in a great team there CAN be those who don't perform as required. So, ensure you don't gloss over this - and continuously coach and mentor those whose performance is subpar.
- Encourage peer learning - and make those who perform superlatively, teach and mentor others (irrespective of seniority)
  - Be mindful of 'group think' - and ensure you are able to stop everyone thinking they are 'invincible' !

### - Adjourning Stage

Remember : even if one person leaves the team - then, there is a NEW TEAM and we start all over at the 'forming stage' : and as such, you need to watch out to ensure you bring the new members up to speed fast : and also, ensure they are 'inducted' into the new team, and also, the norms, FAST.

- As much as possible, try and get the new member to understudy the one who is leaving : and understand the 'shortcuts' of the job
- Put the newcomer 'under the wing' of a top performer : and have a personal mentor for them for the initial 6 months or so
- Encourage the new comer to 'look at what can be improved' as they have 'fresh eyes' - and encourage the seasoned veterans to have an 'open mind' and not shoot down their ideas (remember the 6 hats - use them !)

# EPILOGUE

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A high performing team is a joy to be part of : and is something that will enrich everyone in it. Teams that gel well, perform at their optimum and truly do the impossible; have an energy that is infectious, a spirit that is endearing and a sense of accomplishment that is almost incomparable to anything else. This is why any team in a sport who wins a championship cherishes it for a lifetime : and members carry themselves with a certain confidence throughout their life...

Being a leader of a team that is performing well teaches you, more than anything else, that it is truly a team that can perform consistently : and that overreliance on 'stars' is a sure way of spelling disaster in the longer term...

At the same time, being a member of a truly well performing team teaches you the critical role excellent leadership plays in guiding, supporting and cheering a team on : silent contributors which have nothing to do with technical skill : and everything to do with being human, empathetic and above all, wise !

A team that is truly well-knit that is non-performing is as bad as a team that performs brilliantly that has no team spirit. One without the other is counter productive : and never lasts...

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA

Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Training and also the organization's founder member. His areas of expertise lies with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



### ANTON THAYALAN

Anton is a multi-faceted professional who has had over two decades of hands on experience in process improvement, change management and strategic management. As the former AVP at HSBC DPL Anton won accolades for his superlative work there; and won the prestigious HSBC Group Service – Global Talent Management Member two years in a row. Anton currently works as a consultant focusing on efficiency and productivity improvement and process optimization for local and regional Clients.