



## Strategically Creating a Positive Performance Team

The purpose of creating a team is to produce results. Simply having a pleasant team without results is of no use. In the same manner, a team that is focused on achieving the results without attention to having a good working environment will not perform at optimal efficiency. A pleasant environment does not mean everyone is best friends and agrees on everything. There is a need for CONSTRUCTIVE conflict. Nonetheless the best group interactions are those that nurture a positive trusting environment. When team members harbor feelings of distrust and do not address them due to conflict avoidance or a lack of commitment to the productive end result the project suffers.

Teams that have an absence of trust, fear of conflict, and lack of commitment usually don't produce the best results. High-performing teams are both productive and positive. Surprisingly, unproductive teams are actually more common than truly productive teams. If you recall experiences you have had in your organization, you are likely to remember the dysfunctional teams more readily.

Here, I look at John Gottman's Four Toxic Communication Styles that used continually in a team environment will erode the potential for a productive, successful outcome. These four communication styles not only affect the team as a whole but the individuals on a more personal level. Mr. Gottman is a psychologist that is better known for his extensive work on relationships in the home, however the principles apply to any environment where people must interact with each other without nurturing a negative environment that eventually destroys the potential for successful results.

The Four Toxic Communication Styles are as follows;

- 1. Criticism:** attacking the person rather than the behavior.
- 2. Defensiveness:** reacting negatively when being challenged.
- 3. Stonewalling:** includes cutting off communication, silent treatment, refusal to engage, withdrawal.
- 4. Contempt:** includes sarcasm, belittling, cynicism, name calling, and hostile humor.



We support the belief that even the most unproductive group can become a successful team by developing into a STRATEGICALLY Performing Entity. When you think about the teams you are in at the moment - whether it's within your organization, your community or in the home, do you believe that each member is able to input their perspective and thoughts without being criticized or stonewalled? Does everyone fearfully outwardly agree with anything the boss says - even if they know it can harm the end results? These are areas worth pondering and exploring further.

Here are 5 functional pointers for developing strategically positive performing teams;

1. **One Vision.** No team can be set up without a well-defined vision. This must be articulated in multiple formats to ensure progress is in the target direction. The executive leadership must first be clear themselves before representing the vision to the team that is to carry out the project. The project is based on this vision and the vision defines the manner in which the team is formed.
2. **Team Operating Principles.** The team needs to have some upfront dialogue about the culture expected for the team. Topics such as - what will make the team thrive? What ways will the team deal with difficulties when they arise? What specific actions are supported and what behavior patterns should not be endured? This should include methodologies but in place to handle issues that interfere with the productivity of the team.
3. **Role Definition.** Ensuring there are specific roles for each team member clarifies each member's sense of belonging to the team as well as his or her own responsibilities. This is a CRUCIAL point for the dynamic of the team. One such role is that of Mediator. This member is assigned with acknowledging the need for to re-focus on the agenda when discussions get off the subject or debates take on a negative and/or unproductive tone. The definition of roles and responsibilities at the onset of the team formation goes a long way towards avoiding common issues that arise when team members are not sure where the line is between their role and that of another team member. Allowing each member to feel that their role is clear, not only to the leader but to the rest of the team allows for a positive starting point from which to continue throughout the project. This enables each member to offer their perspective based upon the role that has been assigned to them and allows for functional debate on difficult topics.



4. **Accountability Framework.** At the conclusion of a team meeting, follow-up assignments need to be re-clarified. This exercise helps to confirm the assigned roles and verifies the continuation of the existing structure of the team. It is a good idea to have one person responsible for documenting the agreed upon actions and ensuring all team members (including those unable to make the meeting) are provided with the same information. Accountability promotes a sense of responsibility among team members and increases the probability of staying on track with the vision and meeting the team's goals.
  
5. **Off-Site Engagement (Retreat).** The purpose of taking a team out of their familiar environment is to create a new unfamiliar environment where the members finds familiarity with each other, thus bonding the unit. This could be a half-day, one day or a two day event - depending on the size of the team and the scope of the project. The off-site engagement or retreat can utilize a number of team building and coaching exercises designed to strengthen the core of the group and provide a positive boost mid-project.



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