Team Coaching: A Systems View
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Team Coaching: A Systems View

Paul Sherman and Betty Bailey

We have all been part of a team. Some of us have been part of a high impact team while some of us have been on a low impact team— one that couldn’t quite get off the ground. Do you ever think about teams having a unique identity, cultivating their own team leadership agility, and generating a powerful energy? The outcome of team coaching is achieving business results through the factors of energy, agility and identity. The authors illustrate how to create a top performing team and show how team coaching is a powerful intervention to drive business results. They describe the theoretical basis for team coaching, provide a model for team coaching and provide pointers about the sweet spots for team coaching as the intervention of choice. They view team coaching from the vantage point of “team as a system,” a living, breathing organism with characteristics that transcend those of its individual members. Teams evolve, and the role of the coach and coaching techniques supporting the view of team as a system is a core precept. A case study shows the before and after benefits of team coaching.

Team building. The mere mention of these words conjures up images of rope climbing, personality surveys, and choruses of Kumbaya. While there can be a short-term performance blip from such 'events,' sustainable behavior change and real impact on business results are far more rare. A new approach to team development is needed, one that is focused on helping the team to hold itself mutually accountable for accomplishing tangible outcomes over time, while doing so in a way that promotes an affirming and constructive work climate. Enter team coaching. Different in name only? Absolutely not. Team coaching is a unique discipline. Curious? Read on…

MOVING BEyOND TEAM BUILDING TO TEAM COAChING

The word team is used so often that people are often confused about what constitutes a team. Katzenbach (1998) describes a team as a “tightly focused performance unit who apply team discipline to a specific task.” Their discipline entails “small size, complementary skills, common purpose, clear performance goals, explicit working approach (procedures) and mutual accountability.” Team performance is optimized by leadership agility, as Katzenbach (1998) states, “going beyond your personal favorite leadership approach by shifting modes of behavior based on what’s needed to perform.”

What is team coaching?

Team coaching is a six-month-process that develops a team’s capacity to continuously improve its ability to deliver sustainable and inspired high performance. Guided by an external facilitator, team coaching:

- Focuses on attaining a clear set of business outcomes;
- Has a clear purpose which is aspirational, specific and serves to motivate a team’s direction;
- Provides tools for a team to continue enhancing its performance beyond the team coaching process;
- Holds the team’s members mutually accountable for taking action;
• Builds capacity in both the human relations and procedural (task) aspects of teaming;
• Is not a 'team building event';
• Relies on the coach to facilitate an action learning process, not to 'give advice';
• Views the team as a living, breathing system with characteristics and identity that transcend any of the individual team members;
• Does not involve any private and confidential interactions between the coach and individual team members outside of the team setting.

Taken collectively, these guiding principles ensure that by the end of the team coaching process, the team has achieved a measurable business impact and cultivated the self-sufficiency to steer its own ongoing development.

The remainder of this article describes the theoretical framework for team coaching, the differences between teams and workgroups and each of the phases of team coaching. Within the context of explaining each phase, the guiding principles listed above are further explored, along with a sampling of team coaching methodologies.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Philosophers, psychologists and diplomats have all wondered about and explored ways to encourage people to work together. They've explored the roots of prejudice, conflict and group dynamics. Over time some answers have been found. Our framework for team coaching is built on the bedrock of these answers which enables a sound and robust process for coaching teams. Team coaching draws from several theoretical frameworks. Those frameworks include social psychology, motivation theory, quantum physics and the nature of energy and relationship attraction.

Muzafer Sherif conducted the classic, and often replicated, Robbers Cave experiments (Sherif & Sherif, 1969). He was examining a life-long question: Why does prejudice and conflict exist between groups and how might these powerful behaviors be mitigated? This question led to an experiment where twenty-two eleven year old boys were invited to a summer camp in Robbers Cave State Park, Oklahoma. It was a remote and beautiful spot, where the boys were divided into two groups and housed in cabins. The first week, they did typical camp activities such as sports, swimming, hiking and getting to know each other. The respective groups did not initially know that the other group existed.

The boys bonded and created bunkhouse names: The Rattlers and The Eagles. Eventually they met each other and competed in sports. It took very little, such as a winner and a loser in a baseball game, for conflict to ensue. The experiments had three phases: (1) group formation where bonds emerged, social norms and leaders arose, (2) group conflict where the two groups competed with each other and clashes began, and (3) conflict resolution to try to lower levels of animosity.

Sherif and his colleagues tried various means to resolve the conflict which escalated. The conflict was only resolved when the groups had to work together to achieve something in which they all had an interest. The conclusion: when superordinate goals are set, ones so large that they require more than one group to achieve them and in turn, stretch beyond the boundaries of one group, then conflict is reduced, intergroup collaboration results, and the group turns their attention to a common purpose.

The notion of superordinate goals provides the capstone for team coaching. When teams have a common purpose, one that is aspirational and has meaning for all, then a team has a joint purpose. The tendency will be to strive toward that purpose (Larson & LaFesto, 1989).
The authors assert that teams encounter one of their biggest problem areas when common purpose is murky. Common purpose is a unifier. Think of the great speeches that galvanized action and were uplifting in history, such as when John Kennedy (1961) said, “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.” These are words that evoked a superordinate goal and inspired many to become participants in achieving that goal. This inspiration led to programs that are still part of life in America such as the Special Olympics, the Peace Corps and broader opportunities for men and women across races and creeds. When a team has leaders who recognize and empower a team to set clear goals and achieve results, the team has a clear task on which to focus.

David McClelland (2003) believed that the most effective leaders are ones who influence the efforts of others to achieve the goals of the organization. Sponsorship is a strong motivating force. Leaders who encourage others to take responsibility for an initiative facilitate a climate for team spirit to evolve. Goleman (2000, p. 7) speaks to the positive influence authoritative leaders contribute. “They have a vision and motivate people by making clear to them how their work fits into the larger vision for the organization… These leaders give people freedom to innovate, experiment and take calculated risks.” The lesson: leaders who provide strong sponsorship, have vision, motivate and empower a team to assume an internal “locus of control.” This is akin to building a runway for new ideas to take flight.

Granted this autonomy, the team can create clear roles, work procedures, processes, and decision-making protocols to focus on performing. Through 15 years of research, Larson and LaFasto (2001) demonstrated that such work structures are critical to a team’s creating the conditions that allow it to accomplish its purpose.

Since grade school, we all have participated in groups, whether they are oriented around sports, clubs, school activities or hobbies. For many of us, these times evoke fond memories of winning a trophy, selling the most items and developing friendships. We’ve all experienced satisfaction, fulfillment and camaraderie from teaming with others. This deep need to work with others and to belong likely harkens to our hunter gatherer ancestral roots, where leading and follower behaviors evolved for solving social coordination, peacekeeping, and conflict problems (Hogan, Van Vugt, & Kaiser, 2008).

When trust and bonds exist in a team, the urge to give and to produce creates its own energy. Highly performing teams do have an electric charge and a positive energy. Jokes are exchanged and phrases like “I love you guys!” become a norm. Lately, quantum physics suggests that our thoughts and energy create the outer world we experience. “Voicing appreciation can be a ‘Miracle-Gro’ for relating” (Butler, 2006).

On the other hand, not all group experiences produce harmony or fond memories. When group climate is not attended to, strains develop that impede teamwork. As Gottman (1994) says, the four horsemen of relationship strain are defensiveness, stonewalling, criticism and contempt. We can understand contempt as a strain so deep that it can predict divorce or the exclusion of someone from a community. The opposite positive aspects of relationships are openness, negotiation, collaboration, conflict resolution, communication and respect. These aspects, in the context of shared leadership, are the keys to building positive relationships, energy and productivity.

The lesson of this collective research is that all winning teams have common purpose, positive relationships and well-defined work structures. The work of team coaching is to create and align these forces to yield the energy, team identity and leadership agility required to achieve the sustainable results desired by a team and the stakeholders who charter it. Figure 1 visually depicts this model.
When a team is a team, and when team coaching is appropriate

Before delving into the specifics of the team coaching process, it is important to first explore the circumstances under which this methodology is warranted. A Team Coaching program undertaken absent certain conditions will yield frustration and disappointment. To ensure success, it is imperative to first verify that the group of people targeted for coaching either truly is a team or needs to become a team. This sounds obvious. However, all too often, businesses are overly quick to anoint any group of people who work together as a ‘team.’ To ensure that Team Coaching is in fact, the appropriate course of action, the following two questions must be answered affirmatively:

- Does the group of people to be coached share a common purpose and set of mutual goals?
- Does the achievement of these shared goals require the players to work interdependently?

If the answer to either of these questions is “no,” don’t fool yourself...what you have is a work group masquerading as a team. For team coaching to be effective, there must be a compelling reason for each and every person on the team to want to learn how to work with one another. Each team member must believe, “I need you and you need me for all of us to succeed in reaching our shared goals.” Back to Sherif’s work. The heart of teaming is having superordinate goals, with several groups stretching their boundaries to join up into one group, and then building unity toward a common purpose.

Strong teams need strong team members with the skills and knowledge to perform (Larson & LaFasto, 2001). By sharing knowledge and relying on each other’s skills, teams create breakthroughs and leverage the total team’s creativity. Shared creativity builds an agile team, one that is interdependent, leverages information, and shares leadership to develop innovative solutions. The team coach provides the team members with feedback so they can reflect, gain insight, learn from their actions and build a momentum and energy that is unique and is a ‘team signature.’

In contrast, a work group is a collection of people who are related in some way and may share ideas or contribute to a project. A team is a group expected to accomplish something together. Figure Two compares teams and workgroups (Fowler-Woodring, 1997).
The following steps and illustrations about team coaching approaches describe how team coaching creates a sustainable coaching intervention in an organization. Team coaching begins by defining the team, their aspirations and the results they want to create. As Figure 2 illustrates, the operative word is team.

A process, not an event
Changes in behavior and attitude take place over time and require continual reinforcement. Think about diet and exercise regimens. The odds are slim (no pun intended) that a single visit to a personal trainer will transform long ingrained habits. So it goes with a single team building event. Sole team events do not produce miracles. An ongoing program is in order. The diagram in Figure 2 demonstrates the suggested components of a six month team coaching program. The role of the coach reinforces growth and change. The coach helps the team understand team dynamics and the ingredients for a strong beginning, such as how to form, get oriented toward their purpose and what they need to accomplish. Teams may have 'storming' moments and disagreements (Tuckman, 1965). The coach helps work through differences and provides tools the team can use to resolve conflict which encourages an environment of trust. The coach is an ongoing force to encourage progress, be a sounding board, and help the team evolve into an interdependent system. Coaching is directed toward interventions to build energy, identity and team leadership agility in order to achieve its purpose.

Phase 1: Discovery. As already emphasized, the critical first phase in a Team Coaching initiative is to work with the program sponsor (e.g., executive, manager, team leader) to identify a compelling business reason for why the team needs to up its game. Typical places to look include responding to changing market dynamics, developing and deploying new strategies, launching new products, developing new information technology applications, conducting organizational restructurings, merging or acquiring new companies, and implementing process redesigns.

Having identified the “why” of team coaching, it naturally follows to determine the “who.” Sounds easy, right? Not always so. Who is the 'core team?' What about 'non-core' members? How many reporting levels should be included? What about the administrative assistant? What about the human resources generalist? There are no easy answers to identifying the participants. What’s important is to be extremely deliberate in selection, always coming back to the question, “To what degree does the individual in question play an interdependent role in the achievement of the shared performance goals?”

Phase 2: Team assessment. Once identifying the rationale for team coaching and selecting the participants in the effort, the next phase is to assess the current state of the team. This preliminary assessment provides the team and their coach a starting point for the performance improvement effort. Traditional approaches to team development usually involve conducting individual interviews with team members to determine the team’s strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. In a team coaching approach, the team coach should not use individual interviews as an assessment approach. Why? Team coaching views the team as a single entity that goes beyond the views and experiences of any one member. No matter how self-disciplined the coach, given their natural human biases, private contact between the coach and the individual team members compromises the coach’s objectivity to sense what is happening in the system as a whole. To
circumvent this unintended consequence, data should be collected and compiled anonymously via an on-line survey instrument.

As cited earlier, considerable research has been conducted that has identified the characteristics and attributes of high performing teams. These include a combination of work structure, procedural and relationship traits. Procedural attributes are the more tangible aspects of how a team functions, including such elements as role clarity, decision making, reward systems, work processes, planning, and results orientation. Relational characteristics are those qualities that refer to the emotional climate of the team and how people treat one another. These include trust, respect, collaboration, fun, and conflict management.

The assessment process in team coaching should consist of quantitative measures of a team’s aggregate perceptions of the presence or absence of these sorts of traits. That way, the team has a starting point for coaching and a focus for its improvement efforts. In addition, qualitative data in the form of open ended questions provide the coach and the team invaluable texture for what’s happening on the team. There are a number of off-the-shelf instruments available for conducting team assessments. These include 5 Dysfunctions of a Team\(^1\), Team Diagnostic\(^2\), and KTEP\(^3\). They vary in price and level of certification required to use them. Alternatively, it is also relatively easy and inexpensive to design a custom survey using tools readily available on the internet (e.g., Survey Monkey, Zoomerang). Whatever assessment approach is used, the most important feature is that it measures the team as a whole, rather than the individual members. In addition, the assessment should allow for a written report to be generated that can be shared with the team during the coaching sessions.

**Phase 3: Team offsite...jumpstarting the team coaching initiative.** Having collected, compiled and reviewed the data, it is now time to conduct a first team coaching session in the form of an offsite meeting. Critical to the success of this first team coaching session is that it occurs over at least two consecutive days. It takes every bit of two days to:

1. Create a fertile environment for candid discussion.
2. Pry open the metaphoric can of team issues and opportunities.
3. Pour contents on the table through team member disclosure process.
4. Shift the dynamics through straight talk and overnight reflection.
5. Restore the newly churned team to its container.
6. Determine actions for improving the team.

The consecutive nature of the days generates a rhythm and crescendo for maximum impact. The first day should be spent initially educating the team to recognize and experience the elements of high performing teams. Through carefully constructed interactive exercises, team members will begin to develop an orientation to see the team as a living breathing entity, and to listen for the “voice of the team” (Fridjhon & Fuller, 2002) rather than being overly focused on their own individual perspectives.

In a ‘systems approach’ to coaching teams, the coach is focusing on the team as its own entity, not just a collection of parts. In this way, the team itself is the client, not the individuals on the team (Fridjhon & Fuller, 2002; see Figure 3).

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\(^1\) Developed by Patrick Lencioni (www.patricklencioni.com).

\(^2\) Developed by Alexis Phillips and Phil Sandhah (www.teammdiagnosticassessment.com).

\(^3\) Knowledge Team Effectiveness Profile developed by Jane Lowther and Robert Marshall.
In contrast, most current organizational and executive coaching paradigms focus on coaching the team as a collection of individuals. In this more traditional model, the coach works with how team members interrelate based on each individual’s unique work and personality profile. The shortcoming of this approach is that the team is represented as a set of discrete data points rather than the system as a whole. Team members view themselves in a comparative fashion, looking to see how they work vis-à-vis the characteristics of the other members. This personal filter separates the individual team members from the system.

When thinking about the 'team as a system,' it can be helpful to think of the following metaphor. Like a team, a human hand is a system. Each digit on the hand (member of the team) is having a personal experience. For instance, the small finger may be sprained. The index finger may be arthritic. The thumb may be quite flexible. While each of these digits (team members) is having a personal experience, these personal experiences are impacting the hand (team) as a whole. When coaching a team, it is critical that the coach keep their awareness on the whole of the team ('hand') rather than the wants and needs of any one individual member ('finger').

Team coaching is not a replacement for individual executive coaching. The two services are highly complementary in nature. Best practice prescribes that the individual coaching the team be a different person from the coach or coaches who are working with any individual on the team. That way, the team coach is not unduly influenced by any one individual or individuals on the team.

Figure 3. Team coaching framework

As human beings, it is quite natural for us to 'personalize' how we understand messages communicated by our teammates. Because of this tendency, the message may be lost, as teammates are focusing on the messenger who is delivering the information, rather than the message itself. Valuable input may be lost or ignored. In order to overcome this propensity, the skilled coach should invite the team to think about one another as 'voices in the system' (Fridjhon & Fuller, 2002), rather than as specific persons or personalities delivering messages. That way, the points will be heard without being interfered with by the listeners’ interpreting who is presenting the information.

By orienting the team members to see themselves not as individuals, but as 'voices in the system,' each person learns to put their attention on "what's trying to evolve in the team as a whole" rather than fixating on “who’s saying what” and 'who's doing what to whom' (Fridjhon and Fuller, 2002)." This perspective encourages shared leadership and team agility.
Once this initial team awareness training has occurred, the team should review its assessment data and use this review as a jumping-off point for a candid dialogue about the team’s current state. It is here where the skillfulness of the coach is of paramount importance. Although tempting, during the first day of a team coaching session the coach should deliberately keep the team from identifying and moving into problem solving actions. Instead, the coach 'marinates' the team in its existing conditions, surfacing all views (voices), even the most marginalized. In this way 'a (metaphorical) mirror is held up' that reveals a shared awareness of the complete portrait of the team. The coach should continue to ask the question, “How is what you are seeing in your reflection (e.g., team dynamics, processes, and behaviors) serving you in attaining sustainable business results?” In other words, to quote pop culture icon, Dr. Phil McGraw, the coach continually asks “How’s that working for you?” By consistently inviting the team to examine how it functions through the lens of how its dynamics support the business, the coaching is less 'personally focused' and creates the motivation for the system as a whole to want to change.

The approach of deferring action planning during the first day of coaching can prove challenging, as people want to 'just get on with it.' The danger of moving to action prematurely is that if all underlying issues have not been raised, then action will be built on an incomplete and unstable platform, and the unaddressed challenges will reappear at a later time. The coach must be skillful in educating the clients about the hazards of a hasty move to action and be vigilant in using a 'parking lot' to capture ideas for later exploration. In addition, often at this point in the process, many teams will look to the coach as 'the expert' and request that “you tell us what to do to fix the problem.” This is not the coach’s job. Why? The more the coach tells the team what to do now, the less self-sufficient the team will be after the coach is gone.

The first day of a team coaching off-site typically concludes with team members left in a state of contemplation. A shared team dinner that evening provides an ideal setting for continued relationship building and ongoing dialogue. The team should be assigned 'homework' to review any portions of the written assessment report that have not been covered during the day. In addition, the coach should challenge team members to reflect on the discussions from the day and come to the morning session ready to share any additional thoughts or feelings about the workings of the team. Another interesting overnight assignment is to ask each team member to find an object that represents a metaphor that signifies when the team is operating at its best. Each team member then presents and describes their object the next day. Though this exercise sounds contrived, it does, in fact, 'work' to create positivity with even the most 'left brain' types of people.

In the quiet of overnight reflection, there is a particular phenomenon that occurs in which the team usually undergoes powerful breakthroughs. Experience shows that the enormity of these advances is only possible when the second day of coaching immediately follows the first. Team members typically arrive for the second day of coaching eager to share additional insights and bring the conversation of the current state to a deeper level. During the morning of the second day, the coach should intensify their approach by pushing for a deeper level of vulnerability and challenging of the status quo. As the dialogue progresses, the coach needs to guide the discussion from covering how it is today on the team to how the team would like things to be. Having stewed in the current state for over a day, the team as a whole has cleared the air and is excited to create a vision for the future. By lunchtime, the team is well on its way to articulating its aspirations for how it wants to work together.

Given that this two-day in-person session is a jumpstart to a six month long coaching process, it is imperative that the team leave the session with a roadmap for moving forward. The post-lunch session on the second day creates this deliverable. The roadmap comes in the form of two documents: 1) a team contract, and 2) an action plan for moving the business forward. The team contract is a one to two page customized document that articulates the attitudes and behaviors for which the team will hold its members mutually accountable. Informed by the dialogue from the previous 1.5 days of discussion, the team contract answers questions including (Fridjhon & Fuller, 2002):

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What will allow this team to flourish? What kind of culture does the team want to create?
What can the team members count on from one another?
How do team members want to be together when things get difficult?

The second deliverable, the action plan, articulates the short-term and long-term activities and milestones to which the team will hold itself accountable for furthering its progress to achieving its goals. The short-term components of the plan should have due dates no more than 30 days from the conclusion of the coaching session. That way, the team can build immediate momentum.

The two day team coaching session concludes with a declaration of commitment by the team to honoring the team contract and following through on the identified actions. The team leaves the session with a new level of awareness, along with the ability to be more intentional about the choices that it makes. The case study below in Figure 4 briefly describes how one client’s Global Production and Research Team went through a team coaching experience and was transformed.

After 18 years in development and millions invested, this Fortune 50 company was in jeopardy of missing a critical launch date of a blockbuster new product. The issue? The 17-person Product Development team was in disarray. Characterized by turf protection, lack of trust, and a silo mentality, this geographically dispersed team was even unable to agree on the volume of product to be produced by the ship date. Decision-making processes were nebulous at best, and a toxic, finger-pointing environment was the norm. After two failed intervention attempts to align this team, the company engaged in a year-long Team Coaching process.
The Team Coaching process began with the deployment of the Team Diagnostic Assessment (Phillips & Sandahl, 2002), an anonymous 80-item Likert scale questionnaire followed by five open-ended questions. Results of the assessment were then delivered in a live two-day Team Coaching session.

Following this initial Team Coaching session, the team engaged in an ongoing series of live and virtual sessions focused on setting goals, clarifying roles and responsibilities, tracking accountabilities, making decisions, and nurturing strong relationships among the team members. At three different occasions in the year-long coaching process, the team assessment was re-administered as a means to foster the team’s awareness of the environment it was creating to catalyze critical conversations that ensure continuous improvement in the functioning of the team. Today, the team is proud to have met its critical delivery dates, and continues to thrive as it works on the next phase of product development.

Note the use of the term ‘mutual accountability.’ In a systems-based approach to team coaching this concept is key. It means that each and every member of the team takes ownership for honoring the team contract, and supports their colleagues in following through on committed to actions. For example, if one member of the team observes another member treat a fellow teammate in a way that violates the team contract, the witnessing team member is accountable for pointing out the unacceptable behavior, even though he or she has not been the direct recipient of that behavior. In another example, a team member may commit to taking a certain action on which he or she does not follow through. In a mutual accountability scenario, the other team members feel an ownership for their teammate’s failure and can constructively ask, “How can we support you so that next time you succeed?” and “What is your recovery plan to get back on track?” Mutual accountability is about each and every team member taking personal responsibility to create the most productive and positive climate possible.

**Phase 4: Ongoing virtual team coaching.** The two day off-site is only just the beginning of the coaching process. The next phase of team coaching is conducted virtually via teleconference – thus its name, ‘Virtual Team Coaching.’ Executing this phase virtually accommodates real-life business geographical circumstances, as often team members reside in various locations or are traveling.

Like any learning process, there will be both triumphs as well as disappointments. To leverage these learning experiences and ensure ongoing progress, the coach should conduct monthly coaching sessions with the entire team. Best practice advises a series of six monthly follow-on sessions of ninety minutes each. Throughout this process, there is continued adherence to the ground rule that the coach will not privately interact with individual team members. If, by chance, conversations do occur between the coach and any individual team members outside of the team setting, the content of these exchanges is brought back to the team. Adherence to this parameter insures that the coach continues to coach the team as a single entity with no 'secrets.'

Once the team is back in its native environment and faced with real-life challenges, the rigor of developing team muscles begins. During the 2-day live workshop, the team had learned a number of tools for optimizing its performance, developed ways of working together, and agreed to actions to move the business forward. The hallmark of the ongoing Virtual Team Coaching is therefore to keep the team focused and accountable on honoring its commitments from the intensive 2-day live workshop, given the pressures of real-life business situations. What distinguishes this phase is an action-learning approach in which the team is coached on real-time business challenges that it brings to each session.

A typical coaching session in the six month ongoing coaching process begins with a general 'check in' on how the team has functioned in the last 30 days. One powerful check-in tool is to ask each team member to respond to the following question: “If this team were a weather system, what is the current weather on this team?” Once everyone has responded, the coach should then facilitate a dialogue about what has led to the 'weather' as reported. The coach then explores how the team is living up to its contract and checks in on the action plan accountabilities. In each of the follow-on sessions the coach needs to be
vigilant while inquiring about the team’s follow through and progress toward its measurable business goals. Celebration occurs where warranted. Learning discussions take place where needed, along with the identification and commitment to course correcting actions. Each session ends with an agreement on next steps that will further the performance and sustainability of the team.

Throughout the six month coaching process, the coach should look for opportunities to present tools and practices that will enhance team performance. Examples include roles and responsibilities charting (RACI), decision making matrices, conflict management processes, listening skills, visioning processes, project planning templates, and receiving/delivering feedback. The team can then assign itself “homework” between sessions to practice with the tools that have been introduced by the coach.

Phase 5: Team assessment and completion session. On the back-end of the six month coaching process is a one day off-site coaching session designed for the team to formally evaluate its progress and to determine a plan for ongoing sustainability. As with the initial offsite, an anonymous team assessment should be administered prior to the session. The same protocol used in the pre-assessment should be used in the post-assessment in order to paint a comparative picture.

The tone of the completion session should be one of celebration and acknowledgement of the team’s progress over the past six months. Time is spent looking at the team’s performance against its common goals and examining the behavioral attributes that contributed to the team’s success. There is an eye toward the future, with the team identifying how it will continue growing to meet ongoing business challenges once the coach has departed. The final coaching session should conclude with a symbolic closing ritual that reinforces team members’ commitment to one another.

CONCLUSION: WHY TEAM COACHING AND WHY NOW?

In conclusion, the question is begged, “In these difficult economic times, why team coaching and why now?” Market forces in the 21st century have changed the very nature of how work gets done. Functional silos, once the hallmarks of organizations, have been replaced by horizontal business processes and integrated vertical business units that demand tight interdependency among diverse sets of disciplines. Whether in the financial services, high technology, healthcare, manufacturing, retail, hospitality or not-for-profit sectors, the ever-increasing global economy is calling forth people to work across cultures and differences in pursuit of excellence. Teaming must now be recognized as a discipline. Team competencies are critical—no less important than any technical knowledge or skill set. Henry Ford stated this eloquently: “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”

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