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Editorial

Team building workshops which focus on fun activities may momentarily raise morale within a group, but they cannot bring about lasting change if key issues remain unresolved.

In all too many organizations, the difficulties experienced within teams are underestimated or poorly understood and a training solution is adopted where it can only produce partial results. A seminar dedicated to creating cultural awareness, for example, will have limited impact on local teams who are “doing their own thing” because they do not share a common vision with the head office.

In a study of 268 task-performing teams in 88 organizations, Wageman, Hackman, & Lehman discovered that the activity leaders spent the least time on was coaching their teams. This may be because they don't believe in the benefits of team coaching, but a more likely explanation is that they don't fully understand what it is, when it's called for and how to do it.

Denise Guillon writes this month about our use of coaching techniques to raise the performance level of a global team.



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Coaching High Performance Global Teams

by Denise Guillon, Senior Consultant

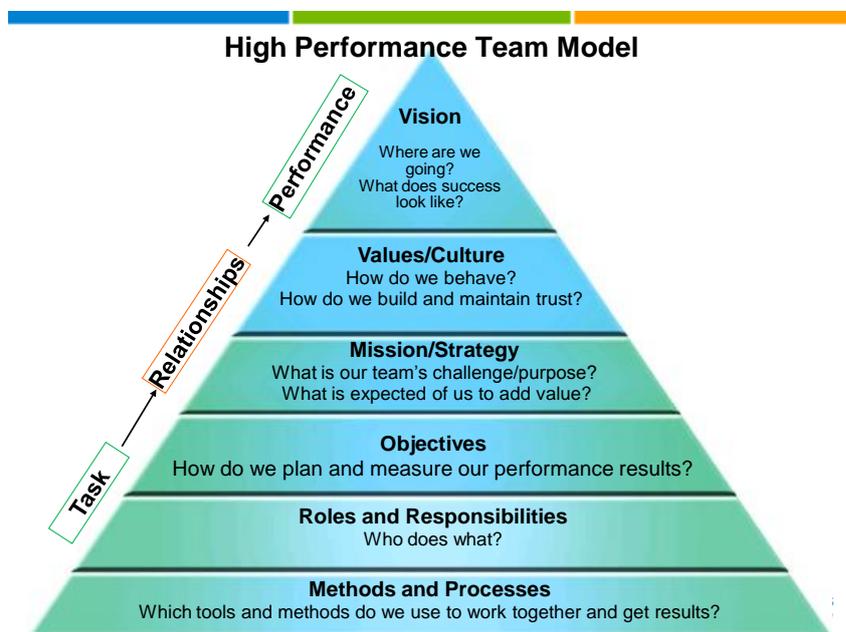
I was recently asked to conduct a team building session for a global team because it had become increasingly diverse culturally, it had a highly global responsibility of overseeing company services in developing markets, and there was shared perception that the larger team was not functioning well.

In many large organizations today we hear the use of the word “team” or talk about being a member of a “global team”, but few people seem to have really experienced what real team working actually is, not to mention how to create a high performance team.

So I asked my client if it would be possible to interview the management team individually to see what they perceived to be the major difficulties. This very simple process revealed much more than intercultural challenges: In addition to tensions between the different nationalities, there were intense interpersonal difficulties between people from the same country, and open conflict was not uncommon. There was a general lack of trust and information sharing, local teams were working in silos and the entire management team felt stretched to breaking point.

This example contrasts starkly with **High Performance Teams** who consistently demonstrate an uncompromising commitment to **continuous improvement** and the enthusiastic pursuit of **creative solutions** and **accelerated learning**. These teams continually challenge their limits with new and far reaching goals. They are collectively challenged to go further **driven by a vision which inspires their ability to innovate and their passion for excellence**. But how does a team develop these characteristics?

Striking the right balance between task and relationships in a team is imperative. This is why team coaching engages team members in analyzing group processes on two levels simultaneously: (1) Tasks—to analyze how human processes are affecting work on specific organizational problems—and (2) Relationships – to better understand the team's own interaction processes and the ways those processes foster or impede effective group functioning.



Phase 1 – Coach the leader on their role and strategy

Using the model above, I began by working with the team leader to look at where she saw the difficulties. Our discussions revealed that there was a very strong task focus in the team and very little space for interaction at the interpersonal level. Indeed there were a lot of unspoken taboos against sharing opinions and giving feedback. Although local teams had clear performance objectives, there was no common vision or measurable goals for the larger team. This work led the leader to understand why great teams don't happen by accident! For several weeks we focused coaching sessions on clarifying her leadership role, vision, looking at 360° results and building a strategy to strengthen the team.

Phase 2 – Coach the leadership team to lead the larger team

I next started coaching the management team kicking off with a one-day workshop to explore their key challenges and how they functioned as a team. This initial face-to-face session was essential to building trust and paved the way for us to hold future highly productive sessions by videoconference. Over several months, a colleague and I combined individual and team coaching sessions to help the management team answer the questions in the High Performance Team Model. We worked on the challenges and opportunities they saw for themselves as well as for the larger team. Through various exercises and facilitated discussions we dug into what builds trust, the team's values, vision, mission and objectives while also developing interpersonal effectiveness and understanding. The team gradually began to come together and to build the success factors in the Global High Performance Team Model. The leadership team realized how balancing task and relationships is the key to ultimately building high performance.

Phase 3 – Leading the larger team towards high performance

The time was now right to organize a teambuilding session with the larger population, incorporating the previous work on vision, values, mission and objectives of the leadership team. This also gave the overall team an opportunity to participate in building team values and interpersonal skills, along with a team charter to guide team behavioral norms and reconcile cultural differences. **The larger team was able to make enormous progress in a very short time due to the underlying work their management team had achieved beforehand.**

There is more work that needs to be done to support this team as it matures and grows into a truly High Performance Team. But while this work is still ongoing, what's important is that the management team now believes that they can grow and improve and most of all become effective team coaches for their own management team as well as the sub-teams which make up the larger one.

To make international teams effective in today's networked, virtual organizations, high levels of collaboration are required at all levels. Working in cross cultural matrix organizations and, thus highly complex challenges, managers need support in learning how to coach and build the high performance teams required for success in today's challenging global business environment.

Mini bio: Denise Guillon

Denise is an American born, bilingual consultant and coach based in France. She has over thirty years of business experience, more than half of which has been devoted to coaching and training in global leadership development, high performance teams, virtual teams, effective communication, performance management and intercultural effectiveness.



Tips for Building Global Teams

- 1 – Don't assume that only cultural differences are responsible for a global team not functioning well.
- 2 – Resolve collaboration issues within the management team before bringing the larger team together.
- 3 – Define a vision and the high performance team success factors that will unite people all around the globe.
- 4 – Involve team members in analyzing and improving trust and interpersonal relationships.