

Secrets of Successful Teams

From *TeamWork* by Larson & LaFasto (Sage Publications)

The research reported in this book contains much wisdom about what creates team success. It's based on a three-year study of a wide range of teams seeking to determine what really separates **exceptional performing teams** from average performing teams. Teams studied included business teams (e.g. management teams, McDonald's McNugget launch team, IBM-PC team, Boeing 747 team) and other special teams (e.g. sports teams, mountain climbing teams, Center for Disease Control epidemic teams, cardiac surgery teams, military units, GAO investigation teams.)

Their unsurprising conclusion: "**Training alone is not enough to make a great team!**" Well, what is enough? Ignore these 8 factors associated with exceptional high performing teams at your own peril:

1. CLEAR, ELEVATING GOAL – Top teams have a clear understanding of purpose and a belief that the goal is very worthwhile. This is *the most important factor* associated with high performing teams!
2. RESULTS-DRIVEN STRUCTURE – The team process is matched to the overall logical demands of the work. **Problem Resolution** work requires trust and a process with a focus on issues rather than predetermined positions. **Creative Challenge** work requires a process supporting autonomy that allows exploration of possibilities. **Tactical Implementation** work requires role and task clarity with well-defined methods.
3. COMPETENT TEAM MEMBERS – Both technical skills and collaborative thinking/communication skills are important.
4. UNIFIED COMMITMENT – Team members are loyal and dedicated to the team goal. Intense loyalty is found when individuals are dependent on help from the team for their success. An elevating goal helps here, too!
5. COLLABORATIVE CLIMATE – Competitive climates and the pursuit of individual agendas are associated with low performing teams. (Teams with an effective process will collaborate more easily and successfully.)

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6. STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE – Leaders are responsible for setting high standards of performance and they support the team members by ensuring they're accountable and honor ways of working together.
7. EXTERNAL SUPPORT / RECOGNITION – Incentives (especially money) are properly aligned, resources are allocated in a timely fashion, and kudos support good ideas and inspire high performance.
8. PRINCIPLED LEADERSHIP – Leaders of top teams give a consistent message, avoid compromising team objectives with political issues, avoid diluting the team energy with too many priorities, are open to new ideas, and are willing to confront inadequate performance of any team member.

Only two of the eight factors of exceptional performance can be directly addressed by training (i.e. are skill-based, not personality-based, culture-based or resource-based). Both factors are addressed very well by our workshops.

First factor, **2. results-driven structure**, is direct validation of our critical thinking framework that includes cause analysis, decision making and planning. These tools provide the results driven structure high performing teams need to succeed.

The second factor, improving **3. Competent team members**, is another benefit of the **BPI** training. In addition to technical skill, **team members** must be competent at **thinking together**. In fact, thinking collaboratively is the real work of business teams. When teams can share their thinking with each other by using a common process, collaboration is easier, and more effective and satisfying.

Defining a worthwhile project with the right people, the right skills (team, leader, technical), with good leadership (principled, focused) and properly deployed resources (incentives, people, materials) produces successful teams. Use this list of factors as a checklist for the next project you do. Have your team members rate their team on all eight factors. We thank you, Larson and LaFasto, for defining the factors so clearly!