

Lesson Two: Leading and Launching a Winning Team

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A. Key Learning Points

1. A winning team commits to and focuses on a shared urgent purpose.
2. A winning team commits to and focuses on time-certain, measurable goals.
3. A winning team chooses team members based on the skills, experience, and influence it needs to achieve its purpose and measurable goals.
4. A winning team's first meeting is its most important meeting.
5. Winning teams clarify and commit to well-defined individual roles and responsibilities and shared team beliefs and expectations.
6. Winning teams recognize opportunities for achievement and risks of failure.
7. Winning teams leverage their prospects for achievement and anticipate obstacles to their success.

B. Real World Examples and Considerations for Practitioners

1. A winning team commits to and focuses on a shared urgent purpose.

In a competitive situation, it is often said that the team that wins is the team that truly wants to win most. In many situations, the distinction in technical skills between teams that win and teams that lose is small or non-existent. In some situations teams with poorer technical skills defeat teams with greater competencies. In all situations, a genuine, urgent, passion to achieve a shared purpose is the fuel that increases a team's prospects for measurable success and its associated rewards. This, in large part, is why:

- Americans won their independence from Great Britain
- Macintosh beat IBM
- Microsoft beats almost everyone
- Bill Clinton beat George Bush
- Coke beats Pepsi
- Hertz beats Avis
- FedEx beats everyone else

Lack of a shared urgent purpose also explains why groups with phenomenal pure ability and skills sometimes get beaten by teams with less talent, but more heart. The miserable performance of the over-paid, underachieving 2007 New York Yankees is a good example of this phenomena.

2. A winning team commits to and focuses on time-certain, measurable goals.

If your goals are not measurable, how will you know whether you are making progress and ultimately winning?

Without measurable mutually agreed-upon goals, how will your team resolve inevitable differences of opinion, perspective, and self-interest to accomplish its shared urgent purpose?

Without clear expectations for success within a specified time frame, how can your team be sure that it will not take forever to achieve its winning purpose?

Too many companies these days proclaim a broad general commitment to “world-class,” “best-in-business,” “quality” operations without sufficient specific definition of tangible goals and performance standards. Such broad generic commitments to winning without a specific statement of goals, performance standards needed to succeed, and timelines for success and return-on-investment is nonsense.

Without time-certain wartime necessity, it is improbable that the team of physicists working on the Manhattan Project would have succeeded in collaborative development of the atomic bomb.

Likewise, the Apollo project is one of the most successful and historic contemporary examples of time-certain, results-oriented teamwork. In 1961, President Kennedy did not challenge Americans to develop “the best space program in the world.” He challenged Americans to “land a man on the moon by the end of the 1960’s.” President Kennedy’s goal was specific, publicly known, and tangible to NASA team members responsible for its success. The specificity of the goal and the deadline to accomplish it were critical factors in NASA’s progress toward Neil Armstrong’s winning moonwalk in 1969.

One of the reasons for 3M Corporation’s current market value and reputation as a world class corporation is its specific focus on “achieving 30 percent of its gross sales revenues from products introduced in the last three years.” This time-certain, measurable company-wide goal encourages consistent daily innovation in product research, development, engineering, production, and sales.

Many of the teams, Iris Learning has helped launch and support have adopted the following team framework for clarifying team purpose, vision, beliefs, and priorities.

Iris Framework for Team Performance

Purpose	Vision
<p>Our team's reason for being.</p> <p>Who do we serve?</p> <p>What do we do?</p> <p>Why do we do it?</p>	<p>When our team's work is finished (on X-Date) and we look back on our efforts together, what team results will we be most proud of?</p>
Shared Beliefs	Strategic Priorities
<p>What essential beliefs do we agree upon on our path to team success?</p> <p>What do we believe about the work we do for our customers?</p> <p>What do we believe about how we work together as professionals and teammates?</p>	<p>How will our work together help strengthen our organization's long-term effectiveness and competitiveness?</p> <p>How does our team's work align and support our organization's strategic direction and priorities.</p>

3. A winning team chooses team members based on the skills, experience, and influence it needs to achieve its purpose and measurable goals.

Once a team's purpose, goals, and time-lines for performance are clear, it seems obvious that a winning business will select the team's members based on their ability to contribute significantly to the team's success.

Sadly, this is not always, nor typically, the case. Team members are too often chosen for the wrong reasons. Sometimes team members are selected without any rationale at all.

Here is a typical sad but familiar scenario. Management decides something important needs to be done by a certain date. They then decide a "team" is the best way to get the work done. They next round up the usual employee "suspects" and perhaps a couple of up-and-coming employees, assign them to yet another team, and tell them to get the job done "whatever it takes." This is sad because 1) a team may not be the best way for management to accomplish the task, and 2) management has not given much/any thought to what skills and resources are truly needed to accomplish the task.

Winning teams chose team members based on their skills, experience, influence and ability to contribute to team victory.

When the Chicago Bulls invited/paid Dennis Rodman to join their not-yet championship team, they were in dire need of a first-rate rebounder and defensive forward. While most of the Bulls could have done without Rodman's absurd personalities, they appreciated and valued his skills as one of the best rebounding forwards in the history of the NBA. Rodman's unique skills were as essential to the team's three subsequent world championships as Michael Jordan's.

The Manhattan Project succeeded because of successful recruitment of the world's most eminent physicists.

Microsoft and Southwest Airlines succeed because they are very clear about the skills, experience, and work styles they seek and develop in employees who they recruit and expect to contribute to their winning, world-class corporate "teams."

4. A winning team's first meeting is its most important meeting.

John Wooden, the great great UCLA college basketball coach (10 NCAA championship teams), believed "if you don't have time to get it right the first time, when will you have time to fix it?"

Even in the best circumstances, effective teamwork is very challenging. Teams that get off to a confusing or contentious start, not surprisingly, decrease their prospects for success considerably. By contrast, teams that successfully clarify shared purpose and mutual expectations and accountability at the very beginning are better-positioned for victory.

A their first meeting a winning team:

- clarifies the team's purpose
- clarifies the team's goals
- clarifies business expectations and specific measures of team success
- clarifies team responsibilities and accountability for performance results
- clarifies team members skills, expertise, experience, influence, ability, and willingness to contribute to team success
- explores commonality and diversity in team members' interests, work and personality styles
- clarifies and develops commitment to team beliefs/values and ground rules
- clarifies resources available to support the team's work
- identifies factors that are critical to the team's success
- anticipates challenges and obstacles to team performance
- identifies specific initial actions/tasks for team to begin its work

Many of the teams Iris Learning has helped launch and support have adopted the following team "charter" as a framework for winning work.

IRIS TEAM CHARTER:

- helps us agree upon and manage our shared purpose, individual and team expectations, and scope of responsibilities
- focuses the energy, attention and initiatives of team members for business results
- helps us communicate our team purpose and initiatives to others

KEY RESULT AREAS

In what areas are results absolutely critical for us to be successful by X-Date?
What outputs are required or expected of us by X-Date?

BOUNDARIES

Who outside our team must we involve, inform or consult with?
What kind of decisions do and don't need approval from others outside our team?

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

What role and area of responsibility does each person have?
What is the team leader responsible for that team members are not?

MEASURES OF TEAM SUCCESS

How will we measure our progress?
How will we celebrate our successes?
How will we learn from our failures?

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

What behaviors will we hold each other accountable for so that we will succeed?
How will we make decisions?
How will we resolve conflicts?
How will we identify and resolve breakdowns quickly?
What are acceptable and unacceptable levels of participation?
How will we monitor our ground rules?
How often and how long will we meet?
How will we achieve an extraordinary level of effectiveness by X-date?

5. Winning teams clarify and commit to well-defined individual roles and responsibilities and shared team beliefs and expectations.

We have already discussed the importance of selecting the most appropriate team members to accomplish the team’s purpose based on their skills, experience, influence and ability to contribute to team victory. Many Iris clients use the skills matrix below to clarify and document team members’ individual assets and needs for support.

Team Player Skills Matrix

Team Member	Experience	Expertise/Skills	Interests	Needs for Support
Who are you?	What have you accomplished professionally that will make you a valued contributor to this team’s success?	What do you know and/or what can you do that will contribute to this team’s success?	What are you most interested in working on?	What are you least interested and/or skilled at? How can the team support/back you up in this area?

Low-performing teams often suffer from lack of shared beliefs or from conflicting or misunderstood team values.

Winning teams clarify and commit to beliefs that are acceptable enough so that all members can support them; and, no member opposes them. In the spirit of true, manageable “consensus,” all team members:

- support the team’s beliefs 100 percent
- agree at least 75 percent with the team’s beliefs
- are responsible for proposing alternative beliefs when they are unable to support or agree with the team’s proposed values

Many of the teams Iris Learning has helped launch and support have used the following Green Card/Red Card approach to clarifying and building consensual commitment to shared beliefs.

Instructions for GREEN CARD/RED CARD

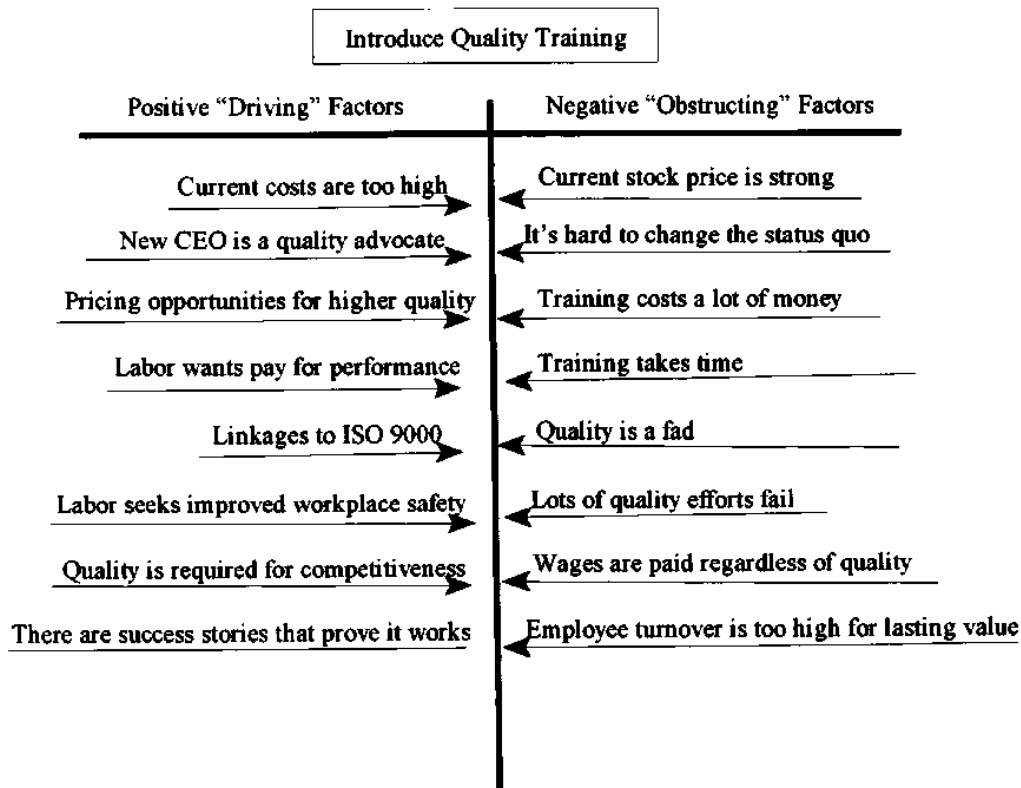
- give each participant a green index card and a red index card
- identify an issue, action, or belief that requires consensus
- begin dialogue
- propose consensus
- check for consensus by asking 1) participants who agree to hold up a green card, and 2) participants who disagree or need more discussion to hold up a red card

- require participants holding red cards to lead further discussion and to propose alternative solutions
- continue the green card/red card process as needed until all participants agree

6. Winning teams recognize opportunities for achievement and risks of failure.

While we have discussed the importance of commitment to an urgent purpose, we have not yet addressed the reality of team progress toward the desired results. Despite good intentions and strong team commitment, even the best teams lose heart when they believe their goals are unrealistic and unattainable. Many of the teams Iris Learning has helped launch and support have used force field analysis to clarify prospects for winning and primary obstacles to success.

A Force Field Diagram is a picture that illustrates the positive and negative forces working on a system that both drive and obstruct performance improvement. The force field diagram below was prepared by a team responsible for leading business-wide introduction of quality management methods and tools. The left hand column summarizes the factors the team believes will contribute to its success. The right hand column describes factors the team believes will negate its best efforts. Since winning teams leverage their prospects for achievement and anticipate obstacles to their success, this quality team used its force field analysis to decided to 1) emphasize workplace safety; 2) communicate examples of successful quality improvement; and 3) emphasize fast-track, just-in-time training and application of quality methods and tools.



C. Recommended Reading Assignment & Highlights

Selections are from Harvey Robbins and Michael Finley, *Why Teams Don't Work*. Part Two: Why Teams Come Apart

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"(When) we've heard colleagues say ... 'My boss sets such unrealistic expectations/goals/objectives/targets' they are really saying one of three things:

- *They don't believe in the outcome ...*
- *They don't believe the outcome is reachable ...*
- *They can't figure out what the boss really wants as an outcome ...*

Whichever of the three it is, people are stuck in the blocks, unable to start the race."

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“Teams seeking to create trust and instill a sense of strong leadership must clearly define and then link their goals or objectives. This isn’t a maybe, it’s a have to. After all, if you don’t know where you’re going, any road will take you there

Work is too often confusing, cluttered, and inconvenient. People are always people, with all the variation and inconsistency that humanity implies. Given the inherent disorder of most team tasks, teams simply must insist on diamond-like clarity at the onset of a mission, with a hard-edged understanding of the impending task.”

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“Goal-setting often fails because people get hung up on the long-term aspect of the primary goal. ‘Retake Granada’ was an overarching goal that took Spain 500 years. It might have been achieved quicker had ‘el grande objecto’ been broken down into component mini-goals from the start.

That is what proper goal-setting is - you start with a grand supergoal that the entire team is striving for, and then you chart a path toward achieving it, with team members assigned to a series of short-term steps.”

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“One final element is critical to good goal-setting – passion.

The world is full of boring visions. Whole organizations drag themselves from quarterly report to quarterly report pursuing them. It is as if the leadership has read all the right books and has made up its mind not to make any obvious mistakes but neglected to make the goal interesting in any way.

A dull goal lacks originality, personality, sizzle. A good goal goes beyond setting a numerical target or quota. It goes beyond some lame mission statement language about becoming world class, or best-in-breed, or worm-free, or whatever the fad phrase in the consulting community is this week.

Because people want to be turned on by their work. A good goal gives them something to respond to. Something to buy into and claim ownership over.”

D. Additional Resources and Links to Others Sources

Andrew S. Grove (former President of Intel), *High Output Management*. (Vintage, 1995)

Tracy Kidder, *The Soul of a New Machine*. (Avon, 1982)

John P. Kotter, *Leading Change*. (Harvard Business School Press, 1996)

Gordon Sullivan and Michael V. Harper, *Hope is not a Method*. (Broadway Books, 1996)

E. Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Describe a “winning” team that you have contributed to. What specific factors contributed most to the success of this winning team?