



LeadPeople

TOTAL Team



OVERVIEW

The most cohesive, productive, and vibrant teams are unmistakably much more than the sum of their parts. They have a culture that fills the space between all the individual contributions.

But what is it about these teams that make them so successful—so effective, resilient, and collaborative? If you've ever been on such a team, you'll appreciate just how hard it is to put your finger on it. *"There's just something special about this team,"* you might describe. Somehow, all the ingredients have come together.

What are the "active ingredients" for a high-performance team? What is it that creates the chemistry? Fortunately there are some knowns in this area of unknowns.

If you boil it down, there are five critical elements that when appropriately combined and managed supercharge individual and team performance. These team dynamics are what LeadPeople calls the "We" factors. They are the collective contributions individuals. The individual members' characteristics like personality and behavior patterns are the "Me" factors. The Me factors that help the team be effective are called **Accelerators**; those that slow or harm team performance are **Decelerators**.

TEAMWORK

High-performance teams obviously don't go it alone. They take advantage of opportunities to work together and harness the power of relationships and patterns of individual strengths to get things done together. They don't just get in the same room and talk; these teams create synergy when they get together. Simply, they team up. They are motivated to join forces, break functional silos, collaborate, and work as a united front to achieve things greater than themselves—even when there are disagreements amongst members. In simple terms, they avoid sole reliance on individual contributions.

Make no mistake, however; individual efforts, including precision, initiative, honesty and work ethic, are highly valued Me factors. But there are times to keep your head down, be quiet, and work hard on your own piece of the collective puzzle.

For peak-performance teams, progress and victories both large and small are celebrated more at the team level—especially when there has been collaboration. On high-performance teams, teammates care more about the success of the team than even about their own personal results.

OPENNESS

Being frank, honest, and candid with people is not easy. Giving feedback takes courage. For most people, it's "human nature" to avoid conflict with those you care about, including your teammates. But in the end, peak-performance teams care more about achieving success than they worry about making waves, upsetting the applecart or ruffling feathers. (It's interesting how many idioms or colloquialisms there are for this!) For a team to make it to the highest levels of performance, they must learn to say what's really on their minds.

Why is unvarnished candor so difficult to give? Basically, it makes others defensive. People often feel judged or devalued. They take it the wrong way. They get upset. So in the short term, it is easier to let the

uncomfortable truths stay unsaid. People prefer to let sleeping dogs lie, pick their battles, and ignore the elephant in the room. (More idioms!)

But in the end, speaking the hard truth—whether people want to hear it or not—is a success factor for teams. It just has to be done diplomatically and with finesse. It helps to have a gift-giving attitude when giving feedback too.

When disagreements, unconventional opinions, and divergent perspectives can be aired and discussed, better ways to get things done are able to emerge and the opportunity for break-through innovations will materialize.

As you might suspect, it is the ingredient of Openness where teams effectively harness constructive conflict. Teams that leverage this ingredient are both comfortable and productive during conflict – they know it's not personal when there are disagreements; it's a battle over ideas and data, not character.

TRUST

Trust is the foundation of high-performance teams. But interestingly, trust doesn't have to come first in building a high performance team. Often, execution (the Accountability factor below), comes before trust is built. While simple trust is often given freely at the beginning of a relationship, more complex versions of trust must be earned through experience. For long-term sustainable patterns of performance, the more complex versions of trust are essential.

Peak-performance teams stand by each other when someone stumbles; there's a rock-solid "team first" mentality that permeates the team and gives evidence that trust is justified. People on the team trust the character, reliability, competence and empowerment of one another.

When teammates know at a visceral level that they can count on each other during tough times, there's a foundation of trust. This reliability aspect of trust is dispersed and amplified over time, strengthening all other "active ingredients" that create the chemistry.

When there are high levels of trust, teammates reciprocate in how they take care of each other; they have each other's backs and take turns doing the heavy lifting. They trust in the character of one another. There is no backstabbing, destructive gossip, ulterior or political motives, and other trust-destroyers. They also trust in the competence and empowerment of each other; they know the job will be done with top quality, on time, and within budget.

ACCOUNTABILITY

All people tend to perform at higher levels when there are clear goals, milestones and deadlines. Even those who don't *want* to be held accountable will actually do better when consequences are real. Most of us need to be reminded, nudged, and held accountable at times.

The best teams find a balance between giving one another space and fostering empowerment on the one hand, and calling each other on the carpet for not getting it done on the other. These feedback functions are in the spirit of high performance. Accountability is just a part of the process of achieving great things. Teammates should expect to be nudged and prodded if they are falling behind, and do the same in return.

Having a results-focused attitude is part of healthy accountability thinking. Teammates hold both themselves and each other accountable when failure or a lack of follow-through occurs. Excuses are just not acceptable. Rational explanations will be heard—but not murky excuses.

Peak performance teams don't just "try hard," they find a way to get it done. They work hard and smart...and they *do* win. They reach the goals they've committed to, honor perseverance and tenacity, and avoid busyness in favor of work that adds real value. They meet their objectives, role model results-focused attitudes and behaviors, deliver on commitments, and find the balance between "think...don't react" and "Just Do It!"

LEADERSHIP

When leadership is demonstrated on teams, it might come from the formal leader who has positional power or from *any* empowered individual.

Leadership, therefore, can be both a role and a process shared by anyone who steps up to lead the way. Basically, peak-performance teams share leadership at times. Why? Certain team members know the terrain better than others in certain situations. They have access to critical data, and need to step up and step out in front.

Sharing or distributing team leadership is challenging, however, because in the end the formal leader has a unique and important role with responsibilities that cannot be delegated. Blame for failure will be amplified for the individual leader, whereas success will be shared, and minimized for the leader.

Strong team leaders care about both: where they are going and how they are going to get there. They constantly keep their mission in mind and keep centered on the ultimate goals during tough decisions. They stay focused on achieving results that matter. They avoid being lured or distracted by flash in the pan opportunities that are off-purpose. They drive toward results and are committed to achieving them the right way. They look for sustainable methods to attain results, rather than quick fixes or symptom-level solutions.

They ask themselves "what will it cost us long-term if we don't do this?" They are willing to suffer short-term pain for the long-term gain.

NOTE

For permission to distribute LeadPeople's TOTAL Team Model summary, just email me. Chances are I'll say "*of course!*" The world needs more effective teams after all. curt@leadpeople.com

If you are looking for a custom-designed TOTAL Team experience, give me a buzz at 703.889.5038 and we'll figure out the details from there.



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