

Team Health Indicators

By Ed Oakley and Doug Krug

The power teams can be equated to draft horses. One can pull 5,000 pounds, but together they can pull 30,000. Yet too often teams are implemented as an end versus a means to an end. Teams have, in some circles, become a trend, implemented “because it’s the thing to do.”

While teams can create dynamic results, poorly implemented teams can produce disastrous results.

The purpose of this article is to provide a checklist on how well your teams are doing. Here are some ideas for renewal.

Renewal doesn’t come from carefully written words, framed and hung on the wall. Renewal comes from your actions, the way you spend your time day in and day out. Let’s look at five indicators of team health.

Mission

Is there a clear purpose? Is everyone on the team engaged in a common goal? Is the team focused on the original objectives? What has changed since we started? Do we need to modify the original team charter or operational guidelines?

Problem vs. Solution Orientation

Are your problems more important than solutions? Healthy teams spend more time working on solutions than defining problems. What’s the difference? In a world of finite resources (time, energy and money), the more you concentrate on analyzing problems, the fewer resources you’ll have to develop solutions that will propel your team forward. How much time does your team spend on these positive activities:
Deciding how to close the gap between where the team is now and where it wants to be
Understanding what the team does best
Determining how successes can be built upon for greater success

Avoid “The Swamp”

Healthy teams celebrate success as soon as it happens and as often as it happens. All too often the purpose, scope, or tasks of a team change, leading to an environment that can be unfulfilling because the target changes. We’ve heard this dynamic called “the swamp.”

Not every champagne moment needs to be celebrated with a bottle of bubbly! But even small results deserve a moment of recognition, and the team can be rewarded for successes during the journey.

This fosters continuous improvement, encourages their continued efforts, and leads to higher performance because they see that their efforts won’t be taken for granted. Celebration confirms the sometimes taken-for-granted fact that success doesn’t just

happen; it's the result of initiative and follow through on the part of team members. Look around your office:

Does your team track daily accomplishments on a prominently displayed sign where people can share their results?

Does your team start meetings with a review of recent successes?

Does your team recognize accomplishments by all team members, not just a favored few?

Are people being heard?

Do people listen as much as they talk? Texas oil tycoon H.L. Hunt said that he learned most of what he knew by listening! Healthy teams are made of up of people who have as much to hear as they have to say.

A critical part of communicating is listening to what's being said so that you can respond to input with information that is appropriate in terms of both content and spirit. And sometimes, an effective listener is all that another person needs to clarify their thoughts or release frustration.

Do people make the mistake of trying to listen and do things at the same time?

Does body language indicate that people are open to input and non-judgmental?

Is there an open and trusting environment in which people are given a fair hearing for their thoughts and ideas?

Is There a Rumor du Jour?

A subtle but solid indicator of team health is: how still are the jungle drums, how quiet is the rumor mill? Healthy teams operate in an environment where issues are openly discussed and no one is excluded from the discussion. Individuals can inspire long lasting, positive result by what they do not say in casual conversations. An Enlightened Leader models this behavior by only speaking what is true, what is kind, and what is useful.

Do people speak in whispers around the copier, coffee pots, or water coolers, giving others a negative feeling about what they're discussing?

Are team members kept abreast of important issues and are concerns openly addressed in regular meetings so that rumors aren't necessary?

Work Environment

A lot of searching has gone into defining the kind of environment that enables people go to work at peak performance. What percentage of the day is your team actually performing at its peak? It would be unreasonable to expect a sustained performance of 100% effort, but what can be done to make the environment more like the one you've envisioned?

Is everybody clear and following the team's operational guidelines for each individual?
Are people empowered? Does each person understand his or her role in accomplishing the objectives?

Do they have what they need to succeed?

Review your values; is there mutual respect for every individual and is there a high degree of trust and openness?

After reviewing these Team Health Indicators, you may want to change some things in your workplace. That's OK! Healthy teams are in a process of continuous improvement. Follow the principles of Enlightened Leadership and your team will enjoy a long and healthy life.

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