6 PRACTICAL STEPS TO MOVE ANY TEAM TO PEAK-PERFORMANCE

Hi, and welcome to this short report on **6 Practical Steps to Move Any Team to Peak-Performance.**

If you're reading this chances are two things are true:

1. You are working in teams (no brainer here, since almost everybody works in some kind of team cooperation), and
2. You currently are (or have been) frustrated with having teams that are not performing at the expected level.

The frustration created by underperforming teams travels all the way through the organization: there is the management attention, there are action plans, there are pressures, there is all the stress related to that and, paradoxically, organizations think they hire the best people in the market!

This is the objective of the hiring process: to hire the talents that will best fit the positions that we need.

But, usually, organizations hire these talents for their skill but not for their ability to get results working in teams, and we should not forget that, at the end of the day, the results of one organization are not achieved by individuals but by a collective work of its teams.

Therefore, here we are: hiring very good talents, very good people with the skills we need but many of these people, if not most of them, are not able to perform work in teams so we are not getting the level of results that we want.

What could we then do?

Is there a proven process to follow which would help us to improve the results of our teams?

Which steps could we follow to get a poor performing team and elevate it to the desired performance level which will ensure meeting the results we need?

As a daunting task as it may seem, everything gets simpler by breaking it down into independently actionable events. I provide here six basics steps that, one by one, is not very difficult to implement, they are very easy to understand yet very powerful to improve the performance of any team we may have in our organization that is not at the level of the expected performance.

Let's review these steps and the actions related to them.

STEP1: ENSURE THE TEAM IS COMPLETE AND SELF-SUFFICIENT.

Many times we build teams without any structure: we know that there is a task to be accomplished, so the corresponding managers in the organization pull together the (sometimes) best individuals from their own areas of responsibility; and they tell them that okay, you are a team and you have to accomplish this or that on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

They have to achieve some results, but this process is not structured enough to ensure that all the people that are needed are there, and only the people we need are there, and not anybody else. I mean that there are no overlaps and no gaps on the skills and talents of the people who are part of the team. So, inside this Step 1, we have three actions to do to ensure that the team is complete.

Action 1.1: Create a list of the needed skills and their areas of responsibility.

By being specific on the skills and areas of responsibility that we need to be covered by the team, we will make sure that there are no overlaps and no gaps among team members. So, the actions of this team will be performed in a much smoother and efficient way.

Action 1.2: Agree with the rest of leaders about the best individuals to be added.

We will put a name behind each one of these skills needed.

Usually, a team is a multi-functional, multi-departmental and there are several leaders or managers in the organization who are responsible for the outcome of that team. So, usually, each one of the leaders assigns the individuals from their organization to be added to the team so they can cover the responsibilities of their departments.

The best practice is that all the involved managers have to meet and have to agree about those team candidates. Besides individual skills, a critical factor to be considered is individual personalities. The objective is to ensure the highest level of 'harmonious work' inside the team.

At the end of this process, the involved managers will all agree that the individuals in the team are the proper ones, and all of them will flawlessly support the team activity, minimizing criticism, or groups of influence within the team (a we-against-them-who-are-not-good-enough type of situations).

Action 1.3: Formally kickoff the team and assign a team name.

This is very critical to start creating the team identity.

Many of the teams don't have any name, they don't understand very well where they belong to and they are not proud to be part of that team. The best performing teams, like in sports, have a name and the team members are proud to be part of that team.

I recently worked with a Customer who had named their individual assembly lines after national sports teams. This was giving the members of these teams an 'identity' which proved to improve the way team members behave among themselves and, consequently, increased performance: they felt part of the same team and there were common goals to be achieved together.

So, formally, the management should kickoff the team (have a meeting with the group and involve each one of them in that important task) and ask the members to decide a team name which will represent them.

With these three actions, we will ensure that the team is complete and is self-sufficient to achieve the results the management expects (and needs) the team to achieve.

STEP2: CREATE A TEAM ‘CODE OF CONDUCT: ACCEPTED BY EACH MEMBER.

Usually, as the team start working and interacting, different personalities, different behaviors even different culture from the different team members start being noticed and, in most cases, it becomes a source of conflicts.

To minimize these situations, there has to be an agreement, an agreed ‘code of conduct’, the 10-Commandments type of list those members will agree to follow. That will make sure that any person of the team who will deviate from these team standards could be pointed out by the rest of the team and asked to come to the agreed rules and agreed commitments of how to work together.

To accomplish Step 2, we will complete the following actions:

Action 2.1: Team brainstorming and agreement about their ‘code of conduct’.

It can include things like respect to others opinions, trust, being on-time, meeting deadlines, who will keep the agenda, who will keep the minutes of the meeting, etc. All these kind of things that will determine the team’s working environment and the ‘rules of engagement’ governing the daily interactions.

Action 2.2: Publish the Team ‘Code of Conduct’

The Team’s Code of Conduct has to be immediately published and,

Action 2.3: Make it visible.

Show, print it out, as a big poster, hang it on a meeting room and everybody will see every day which the team agreements are. If / when some team member will not meet any of these agreements, everybody else will be able to point it out. At the end of the day, when the team will work together, it will not be necessary to continuously refer to this code of conduct, everybody will know it and, usually, nobody wants to be continually ‘put on the hot spot’ because he is not meeting his commitments.

STEP 3: IDENTIFY INPUTS AND DESIRED OUTPUT FOR THE TEAM.

Usually, after the team members have been sent by their manager to be part of one team, they know what they have to do, or they think that they know what the management expect them to do.

Oftentimes, this is done verbally and not very specifically transmitted to the team, so the important thing here would be to be clear with the members of the team which are the inputs that they will receive from outside the team and which is the output of the work as a team that is expected. How can we easily do it? Following these simple actions:

Action 3.1: Create the list with the information the team will get from external sources.

This information will consist of:

1. Files, records or data,
2. From where/who it will come,
3. How often the team will receive that information, and
4. Who from the team will receive that information.

These are the things that need to be clearly identified.

Action 3.2: Create the list with the output the team has to produce.

This is what the management expects the team has to accomplish, in terms of:

- Quantity,
- Quality, and
- Time / Frequency

to be considered a good work.

Action 3.3: Understand and agree on the output format required.

We have to be specific on what the team will deliver: format, sent to whom (distribution list), warning to the management, warning to the Customer, etc. Being clear on expectations, the team will know what quality of work means.

STEP 4: CLEARLY IDENTIFY AND AGREE ON THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

When there are some responsibilities that are not clearly identified, we will find gaps and overlaps that create tension and disruption of the normal flow of work among the members of the team. At the end, these situations are a source of discussions, arguments, and frustrations, impacting the team's efficiency and results.

How can we easily address them?

Action 4.1: Map out the major steps/activities the team has to perform.

There are major things that the team has to do on a regular basis to achieve the expected results. Which are these activities? Which is the priority of these activities? Who will agree about whether the activity is good, is not good, the input, the quality is good or is not good. All these kind of things need to be perfectly identified.

Action 4.2: Break down these activities to the lowest level required to avoid confusion.

So we will have the steps and activities that the team has to perform; and let's get them in as much detail as possible so as all the members of the team perfectly understand what they have to do and in which order or in which priority this has to be performed.

Action 4.3: Assign 'owners' to each one of these activities.

After defining the lowest level possible of each activity, who will do that? It will be attached the name of the team member who will be responsible for that specific activity. By doing it this way, all the rules and responsibilities will be clear and everybody will know what they have to do, everybody will know what everybody else has to do, and this will avoid these kinds of personal frustrations and arguments that diminish the efficiency of the team.

STEP 5: ESTABLISH A CLEAR ESCALATION PATH TO GET EXTERNAL SUPPORT.

Sometimes happen that, even though the team is receiving inputs and the team knows clearly the output they have to deliver, they face complex situations where the team need support from outside. Maybe the input data they receive is not workable, maybe they receive wrong inputs or, maybe they receive inputs that are not possible to be transformed into the desired output because of different external situations.

So, at some point in time, the team get stuck.

In these situations, they have to be able to know who they can ask help for, who inside the organization has the power, has the knowledge and has the ability to help them in the most efficient way; and this, usually, is some upper-level management or some other senior employees who will be engaged to some extent.

Action 5.1: List the major causes of disruption to get the desired result.

Just list them. What we know at the present moment. This list is going to be a 'live' and dynamic list: over time, some of the things can get off the list, and we can add more causes of disruption as they appear. But let's make a list at the beginning, so all the team members will be aware of these potential problems.

Action 5.2: Identify whom and when they have to be addressed to get support.

This is related to this higher level management or senior persons in the organization that, whenever an 'unsolvable' situation arises, will be the first contact points and where the team can go for support.

Action 5.3: Define who is the team member responsible for this task.

Who is the member of the team responsible to escalate or get support from outside the team for each specific situation? There has to be some structure and somebody, depending on the nature of the problem, will be responsible to address this request for support to someone else externally.

And, finally, after all these steps are done, the team has clear rules and responsibilities, we know specifically what was requested from them, we know the inputs that they will have.

STEP 6: SETUP CLEAR RECOGNITION PROCESS FOR TEAM RESULTS.

Most organizations have nowadays a recognition process for individual performance, although we know that results come from teams. In this way, in addition to the individual performance appraisal, organizations should also include a recognition of team performance.

Action 6.1: Define the weight of team results appraisal for each individual.

At the end of the year (every six months, or aligned with the organization's appraisal process) there will be a percentage of the reward for each individual that belongs to his performance in teams.

If I'm a very brilliant employee and I'm able to get results by myself, but in the teams where I'm participating I'm not able to get the same level of results, my individual reward has to be lower. By doing it this way, we will recognize and appreciate people working in teams, and achieve results in teams, what is the best way to ensure that the organization is focused on working together, cooperating and not creating those individual silos where accusation between departments or functions tend to occur.

So, here we have, the six simple steps that, if we apply them, we will very easily be able to improve the performance of any team that is below our expectations.

And remember, no idea works if we don't do the work. Move to action and you will see the results.

NEXT STEPS

If your priority is improving the results of your team and your organization, and you would like to get more free information based on research and personal experience from me and my Clients, I suggest you to visit the members area of Human for Human Consulting website, where we will keep publishing tips, case studies and recommendations on personal, team and organizational performance improvement.

About the author

Eduard Lopez works with individuals and organizations with the objectives of increasing the level of performance and improving the results.

Knowing that individuals are the most precious assets in any organization, Eduard, using his career-long experience as Director on multibillion-dollar Companies, is dedicated to maximizing the individual and team achievement through coaching and consulting.

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