

5 ways to build a high-performing team

by Lauren Ruef

Meshing diverse working styles and personalities harmoniously on a team can be tricky. It takes time to build the right team for the job. But it isn't just about picking the right people. Building an interdependent team means relying on each other's specialties. Trust-building activities enhance the likelihood of your team relying on one another for their strengths—instead of insisting on doing things themselves.

Leaders need to be proactive in building trust within their teams. It isn't just about having regular check-in meetings or asking for feedback, but paying attention to the subtle nuances of how team members communicate or the environments that set them up for success.

1. Emotions are allowed

A special report on emotional intelligence from the Harvard Business Review shares the importance of being emotionally in sync with one another. The report explains: "Personal competence comes from being aware of and regulating one's own emotions. Social competence is awareness and regulation of others' emotions."

Reading the signs of frustration on your coworker's face and asking about it is one example. Or providing a coworker space to vent, knowing they can trust you with the information they are sharing. Along with empathy, emotional intelligence also requires harder tasks, like calling a team member out when they're late or **providing honest feedback** when a piece of work isn't quite up to par.

A team comfortable enough to let one another know when their behavior is affecting the group has healthy emotional intelligence. The report reinforces why these small behaviors engender trust among teammates.

"Trust, a sense of identity, and a feeling of efficacy arise in environments where emotion is well handled, so groups stand to benefit by building their emotional intelligence."

Not all emotions are positive ones, but they still have a place for expression in the workplace. Teams who look out for one another's emotional states create a collaborative work environment that quashes negativity.

2. Encourage face-to-face interaction

The human face has over 20 expressions which is why face-to-face interactions are the gold standard for meetings. But it's not always possible. Managing remote staff is more common than ever. Some companies operate entirely from a workforce of telecommuters making in-person interactions infrequent.

Management consultant Peter Drucker **once said**:

"There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which shouldn't not be done at all."

We could apply this statement to sending messages in an office when we're sitting two feet away from the person we need to speak with. Speed doesn't always equal impact, especially when it comes to important conversations. Save those for face-to-face interactions if possible.

How something is conveyed is the difference between a smile or a surprised look. Without context, things get easily misconstrued. And while it's not always feasible for on-site conversations, take it as the first option if presented to you. Phone calls, messaging apps, and video conferencing are second-best.

3. **Cultivate environments that lead to success**

People do their best work when their environments help them get work done. But the modern workplace hasn't come that far in helping us be productive. Author James Clear has tips on [designing an environment](#) that makes the choice to work easier.

"Life is a game and if you want to guarantee better results over a sustained period of time, the best approach is to play the game in an environment that favors you. Winners often win because their environment makes winning easier."

[Designing collaboration into the workplace](#) is the goal. Sit people next to one another who work well together or have similar roles. This allows for organic problem-solving conversations. Limit distractions for your team by encouraging them to use software that blocks social media sites or challenging them to limit time spent checking emails when they need to intensely focus on a project.

If the office proves more of a distraction than a help, encourage them to find a place offsite that they enjoy and give them time to complete a project there.

4. **Encourage team members to admire (and leverage) each other's strengths**

Praise and encouragement from leadership, while important, is expected. What's less expected and often more meaningful, is praise from your peers. Many companies have peer recognition programs for this reason. When team members express appreciation for another coworker's talents or accomplishments, they build rapport with one another. Leadership expert Dale Carnegie said, "Appreciation is the legal tender that all souls enjoy." Help your team put this into practice.

Use the time during group meetings for peers to come forward and mention "above and beyond" effort of their peers. Compliments have an expiration date, though; use it before the power is gone.

5. **Sponsor creative outings for higher energy levels**

Sometimes the perfect place to inspire new connections is outside the office. It could be a trip to the local art museum or an outdoor trail or garden. Maybe it's on a boardwalk along the river. Anything that gets your team enjoying each other's company in a dynamic setting. Take a day to complete a community service project. Anything that gathers your team and prompts them to start thinking differently. Hitting the reset button on the daily work grind can do wonders for your team. Encourage them to participate in group opportunities outside of work.

True collaboration is more than just an open office plan or gathering team feedback. It requires an inherent trust that is proven over time through the right interactions. Use these strategies to encourage your team toward a more cohesive workflow.

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