

*"Coming together is a beginning.  
Keeping together is progress.  
Working together is success."*

Henry Ford

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### **Building Powerful Teams – Part 1**

Teams are one of the most powerful and results-producing entities within an organization. Creating a highly effective team takes awareness of the differences between a team and simply bringing a group of people together.

The essence of a team is common commitment. Individual egos are consciously "left at the door" in order to focus on the team's agenda. Without this single focus on the team's goals, the group is just a collection of individuals working together - but separately. The performance of a group is a function of what its members do as individuals. Groups are prevalent in large organizations where individual accountability is most important. They may come together to share information, perspectives and to make decisions, but the focus is always on the individual's performance – not the team's performance.

True teamwork, however, is a collaboration of individual and *collective* effort, intention and purpose in the pursuit of excellence... the sum being greater than the individual parts. A team listens, communicates, shares a common set of values, goals and action plans, providing support and working together in a social and enjoyable way.

Empowerment of the individual is the result – and the effectiveness of the team grows exponentially.

#### **The Evolution of Group to Team**

Teams don't just happen when groups of people are brought together. Rather, teams evolve over time and there is a pattern of development that's consistent among the more highly effective teams.

Teams require both individual and mutual accountability. While they also rely on sharing information, perspectives and joint decisions, teams produce results through the joint contributions of its members. They are committed to mutual goals, as well as individual goals, and they share a common purpose.

Team development takes place in four stages:

- **Forming** – the group attempts to define their tasks and decide how to accomplish them. They sort out how the members will relate to each other.
- **Storming** - members establish a pecking order. Leaders and scribes are determined; more vocal participants emerge.
- **Norming** - members accept the ground rules and norms by which the members will cooperate.
- **Performing** - the group has settled relationships and validated expectations and can turn to work for which they are mutually responsible. At this stage, the team is capable of more work in concert than the sum of the individual efforts would have produced.

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*"A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and an approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable."*

Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith  
(*The Wisdom of Teams; Teams at the Top*)

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#### **A Common Purpose**

The best teams spend much effort in exploring, shaping and agreeing on their purpose that belongs to them both individually and collectively. This activity continues throughout the life of the team. Research on failed teams shows that they rarely develop a common purpose.

The best teams also take their common purpose and translate it into specific performance goals. These goals relate to the common purpose and build on each another, moving the team forward towards achievement and creating powerfully motivating and energizing steps to success. The achievement of goals along the way builds momentum, fosters trust among members and helps build continued commitment.



Specific performance goals may be such things as bringing a product to market in record time, a 50% decrease in customer complaints, or achieving a zero-defect rate while cutting costs by 40%. Transforming broad directives into specific goals provides the first steps for forming the identity and purpose of the team. As the team progresses with small wins, they reaffirm their shared commitment.

*“When a team outgrows individual performance and learns team confidence, excellence becomes a reality.”*

Joe Paterno

**Clarity and Focus**

The combination of purpose and specific goals is essential to performance. Each depends on the other. While the clarity of goals helps keep a team on track and focused for accountability, the broader, overlying aspirations of a team’s purpose can provide meaning and emotional energy. When people are working together toward a common objective, trust and commitment follow. Members hold themselves responsible both as individuals and as a team for the team’s performance. This sense of mutual accountability produces mutual achievement and all members share in its rewards.

People who participate in effective teams find the experience energizing and motivating in ways that their usual jobs could never match. On the other hand, groups that are established as a “team” but do not have a clear common purpose rarely become effective teams. Only when appropriate performance goals are set does the process of discussing the goals and the approaches to them give team members a clear choice: they can disagree with a goal and opt out, or they can pitch in and become accountable with and to their teammates.

**Mutual Accountability**

While reading this may not seem like an “Ah ha!” moment, there is certain elegance in the simplicity of the message: Mutual accountability can lead to astonishing results. It enables a team to achieve performance levels that are far greater than the individual bests of the team’s members. To achieve these benefits, team members must do more than just listen, respond constructively, and provide support to one another. In addition to sharing these team-building values, they must share an essential *discipline*.

Katzenbach and Smith in their books about teams (*The Wisdom of Teams; Teams at the Top*) talk about five essential disciplines of effective teams:

1. A meaningful common purpose that the team has helped to shape;
2. Specific performance goals that flow from the common purpose;
3. A mix of complementary skills;
4. A strong commitment to how the work gets done;
5. Mutual accountability.

The challenge for top management is how to build effective teams without falling into the trap of appearing to promote teams for their own sake. **There should be relentless focus on performance.** If management does not put the focus on the link between teams and performance, then there is the risk of teams becoming another management fad.

Look for Part Two of *Building Powerful Teams in the March* issue of the ProLaureate Executive Brief. You’ll find:

- *Eight Keys to Team Performance*
- *The Emotional Intelligence of Teams*
- *The Challenge of Working with Virtual Teams*

*“Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.”*

Ryunosuke Satoro

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*“Thoughts and action,  
aligned fearlessly to purpose,  
become crowning achievement.”*