

# Creating Extraordinary Teams:

## A Quick Start Guide for Leaders

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# How to Jump-Start Your Teams: 4 Fundamental Questions

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In every organization, there are cross-functional and inter-departmental teams who enjoy a reputation for team performance that outshines other teams. These teams aren't necessarily smarter or more experienced, or even harder working than their peers. But in their day-to-day activities, they constantly demonstrate a spirit of cooperativeness and willingness which sets them apart from other teams.

As an Extraordinary Leader, your job is to set each team up for success. While time is always at a premium, it is important that a team invest time up front to ensure smooth sailing as they progress. There are four fundamental questions a leader can facilitate with the team before they begin working on any issues. The more experienced team members get at using these questions to jump-start their process, the easier it becomes to move through them quickly. And the bonus: once team members know how to use these tools, they take those skills with them to every team in which they participate!



# The Four Fundamental Questions



## **FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION #1: What is our purpose?**

Why has this specific group of people come together as a team? What deliverables or outcomes will this team produce? It is important that the team have a shared vision of their purpose, which has been articulated clearly. Never assume that any team member automatically knows the purpose for the team.

## **FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION #2: How will we operate as a team?**

What are the Key Operating Behaviors for working on this team? What are acceptable and unacceptable behaviors? How will the team handle lack of participation by one or more members, disagreements, inability to reach consensus, and other interpersonal issues? How will team members be held accountable? How will leadership be managed? To whom are we responsible as a team?

## **FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION #3: What are our roles and expectations?**

What skills/knowledge/information does each team member bring to this team? What is the expected commitment level? What does each person need from other team members in order to fulfill their responsibilities?

## **FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION #4: What will success look like?**

How will we all know we have achieved success? What will we use to measure our outcomes? How will we celebrate? What is our timeline for success? Who outside the team is involved in critiquing our success? How can we clarify the expectations of those outside the team?

Teams who make time to go through this process consistently outperform teams who just jump in and start attacking issues. While it may feel like a lot of time up front, the return on investment is astronomical! And here's something that may really surprise you: We have found that the PROCESS of discussing these four fundamental questions is nearly, if not more, valuable than the outcome! So carve out time now to ensure powerful, effective, results-producing teams that will outperform themselves!

# How to Create Key Operating Principles

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There are a few critical questions every person on a team must be able to answer, in order to ensure a well-functioning, highly productive and engaged team:



- What are acceptable and unacceptable behaviors?
- How will the team handle lack of participation by one or more members, disagreements, inability to reach consensus, and other interpersonal issues?
- How will team members be held accountable?
- How will leadership be managed? To whom are we responsible as a team?

The answer to all those questions can be found in the Key Operating Principles.

### **How to Create Your Key Operating Principles**

1. Brainstorm a list of behaviors team members have experienced in past team settings that facilitated a positive team experience.
2. Brainstorm a list of behaviors team members have experienced in past team settings that got in the way of a positive team experience.
3. Develop a list of 5-12 specific behaviors that will generate a positive experience for the team. Don't get hung up on the wording. The key here is to get total team buy-in on principles you all agree to work by in this team setting.
4. Keep Key Operating Principles posted, and review them before each meeting. Use them to keep team members "honest." At the conclusion of each meeting, take time to critique team processes based on these principles.

### **Here's a sample of one team's Key Operating Principles:**



*We agree to:*

*Arrive on time, fully prepared;  
Honor the agenda;  
Treat each other with respect;  
Participate fully;  
Communicate clearly and honestly ~  
listen with the intent to understand;  
Bury "dead horses;"  
Have fun;  
Honor agreements and commitments*

As a team leader, you might be asking: “Couldn’t I just go ahead and create the Key Operating Principles myself, then share them with the team?”

Well yes, you could — of course! But why would you? You would be missing out on the most incredible benefit of the whole process! My experience is that the process of the team working together to share team experiences, discuss the high points and disasters of past teams, and communicate to create their own Key Operating Principles is almost more important and valuable than the Principles themselves! It is a mini team building activity with huge paybacks in the real work setting. It doesn’t get much better than that!

And, as my speaking and training colleague Bob Pike always says, “People rarely argue with their own data!”

Now, power up your engagement by creating Key Operating Principles with your team(s) — and be extraordinary!



## 5 Reasons Team Members Don’t Play Well — and How to Fix It!

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As leaders, we rely so much on teams to accomplish the myriad of things that must be done. For some of our folks, team work comes naturally and they thrill at the challenge of using their skills and creativity in conjunction with others to create a synergistic result. But my hunch is, we’ve all experienced those individuals who just don’t play well on the team. It can create havoc, result in missed deadlines and disastrous interpersonal relationships, and eat huge holes out of your limited time as you struggle to patch the holes these disruptive team members cause.



What if you were able to quickly identify why certain team members weren't playing well with others, and through that discovery, know immediately how to fix it? Here's a model that might help!

There are basically only five reasons team members don't play well on a team. Any of these five reasons can be masked by poor or inappropriate team behavior ... but the good news is, you can actually provide what is needed to improve four out of the five! Take the time to evaluate why a team member is acting out:



### How to Fix It

- If they don't know WHAT they are supposed to do, you can sit down and clarify roles and expectations.
- If they don't know HOW to do it, you can identify the appropriate training, coaching, or mentoring.



- If they don't know WHY they are doing it, you can clarify how their role impacts the overall success of the team, and how the team's work supports the overall mission of the organization.
- If they are NOT CAPABLE of performing the role they have been assigned, you can look for ways to resign roles, set up some pairings to give the person someone to help them, or have the person moved off the team to a place where their skills are better utilized.
- Now comes the tough one! If they just plain WON'T do it, you are dealing with a team member who is actively disengaged. Their negative attitude, cynicism, and disruptive behaviors are dragging the whole team down. You can talk with them about their attitude issues, but I strongly recommend you begin documenting performance issues so you can get this person off your team and out of your organization as quickly as possible! Do not be tempted to simply move them to another department, where their distractive attitude can continue to create problems. By releasing them to find a work environment better suited to their needs, you are not only helping them ... you are giving a huge gift to all the other, actively engaged members of your team. You will be glad you made the effort!

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Few people are so uniquely qualified to combine the skills of speaker, trainer, consultant, and group facilitator into one dynamic bundle of energy. With a flair for the dramatic and a focus on practicality, Cher Holton helps corporate and association clients enhance bottom-line results using cutting edge employee engagement techniques. Her keynote speeches, turbo-training, and coaching sessions are practical, grounded in research, and lots of fun to boot! She and her business partner/husband Bil are prolific authors, and take "Indiana Jones" vacations to continually stretch their limits!



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