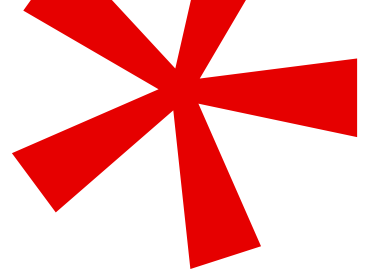# Five Ways to Build a
Productive and Passionate Team

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BEYOND KNOWLEDGE*

Why is Team Building So Important?

It's hard to avoid being on a team. Whether at work, or outside work, we are almost all on one or more teams and this trend is only increasing:

Deloitte report that 62% of companies have moved from traditional functions to networks of empowered teams

Gallup research shows 84% of US employees work on multiple teams

"Business is the ultimate team sport" according to Jack and Suzy Welch

Although being on many teams is now common, being on great teams is not. Cornerstone On Demand report that 38% of workers feel there isn't enough collaboration in the workplace. In Cegos team building workshops when we explore the good and bad team experiences of the attendees we hear many stories of feeling ignored, disrespected or frustrated. Below are simple, but powerful, methods to build more passionate and productive teams.

Build Personal Insights

We normally have a working style which feels natural and comfortable to us, but could be alien to a teammate. This can create difficulties where we feel like either we aren't being listened to or respected, or don't understand where the other person is coming from.

There are a range of tools which can create an insight on how people work in different ways, and these include MBTI, DiSC and SDI. In Cegos workshops we create an overall map of everyone on the team to show how some people work in a similar style, while others take different approaches. Attendees find them eye-opening and one recently commented:

"Suddenly I got why he works the way he does. It never made sense before, and I guess he felt the same way about me."

Once you build a map it's useful to consider the situations people should flex their style to adapt to the other person. It doesn't have to be a complete transformation, which could feel too uncomfortable, but a few small steps could make a significant difference.

Give Everyone a Voice

Most people agree that communication in a team is important, but what is the best way to do this? Some teams operate by most of the input coming from a few team members, perhaps those with the most experience or personal energy, and some teams have a more equal contribution from different team members. The MIT Human Dynamics Laboratory monitored teams' communication using smart badges to understand how different communication maps affected team performance. The best performing teams had even mixes of different people commenting and talking to each other, and poorer performing teams had only a few people giving a lot of input.

This finding might seem intuitive, but how many times have we all been in meetings where a couple of people dominate the conversation? The next time this happens it's worth finding ways to break that pattern and involve the whole group.

Build a Safe Environment

To understand what created the best teams Google took a typically big data approach and analysed the performance of over a hundred of their teams across different parts of the business in a variety of different metrics. Only two aspects made a significant difference:

* All teammates contribute to the discussion

* People feel safe to be themselves and take risks

The first finding mirrors the MIT Human Laboratory study, and the second links to what's known as psychological safety. This was described by Harvard Business School Professor Amy Edmondson as:

"A sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject or punish someone for speaking up"

The team leader can help to create this by framing the work as a learning situation, and being open about their own weaknesses and failures. Instead, a leader who panics and tries to take control from the teammates whenever anything goes wrong will discourage people from speaking up and create a less safe environment.

Beware of Glorifying the Star Performer

Every organisation has high performers and they sometimes gain much of the limelight. While this is natural, it can make other team mates feel that their contribution is unrecognised. This raises the question: would the star performers achieve as much without the support of familiar teammates? Harvard Business School wanted to answer this by looking at the performance of heart surgeons across different hospitals. They found that the elite surgeons performer much better than the average cardiologist, but only when working at their own hospital in a familiar team. They concluded that a team who had worked together and developed good relationships and routines would outperform an unfamiliar team of more capable individuals.

It's best to recognise and reward the whole team instead of a few star performers who wouldn't perform as well on their own.

Create the Right Sort of Conflict

Conflict is a double-edged sword. A high level of negative conflict can create a toxic work environment in which people are scared to say or do the wrong thing. There would be no psychological safety in this environment. If there is no conflict at all then different options are not properly discussed, and people withhold their opinions to avoid upsetting their teammates. So, how can we find the right sort of conflict?

Pat Lencioni, team building guru, writes in Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team:

"When I talk about conflict on a team, I'm talking about productive, ideological conflict: passionate, unfiltered debate around issues of importance to the team. Any team that wants to maximise its effectiveness needs to learn to do this…"

The right sort of conflict focuses on the ideas, plans or proposals to reach the best result for the team. Healthy conflict doesn't involve personal insults or overly aggressive behaviour, but different teams can still have different ideas for what are acceptable behaviours.

At Cegos we use a variety of conflict exercises in our workshops to understand the appropriate conflict norms for a team. A group of London stock traders might be comfortable in a much higher conflict zone than a team of research scientists. The right level of healthy conflict creates a passionate dialogue where everyone has a voice and the knowledge of every team member is used effectively. Once you have established the right conflict zone for your team then all of the team members can accept this and use conflict as an effective tool.

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