



What is a Team?

Almost all managers will have a group of people to manage and coach and there will be many occasions where the manager will have the opportunity to "team coach".

This is an area of coaching skill, and in many cases, it is a far more difficult skill to grasp than just coaching an individual. I have seen many managers who have grasped the skill of one to one coaching fail in team situations and in many cases return to their old "dictatorial" ways simply because they did not know how to coach effectively in a team situation.

So where do you begin? There are numerous things about teams.

What specifically is a team? What makes a good team? What about team roles and mix of personalities? Team dynamics? Team Development? Problem Solving? Facilitation of the team?

In this chapter we will start with the basics and look at the few first steps the coaching manager can take in order to start to lead and coach their team.

It is important to firstly understand specifically what a team is. I have been amazed by the number of people I have encountered over the years that claim they know what a team is and when challenged to come up with a definition, struggle to do this. Many people think that just by working with a group of people that they are a team but if that group does not have a collective goal or objective then they are not a team, they are a work group. A team is a collection of people who are working towards a common goal or objective. There are two aspects to teams - the task or objective and the process or the way the individuals are going to work together to achieve the team's goals or objectives.

If the team is a new team, or if the manager is new to the team, then it is important that before any further discussions take place, a contract is drawn up between not only the team and the manager but also between the team members. You will remember the importance of contracting in coaching. It is as important in teams!

How are you all going to work together? What are acceptable and unacceptable behaviours? How is the manager going to work with the team? Expectations? The coaching manager will not only contract with each individual they will also contract with the team. Some teams actually draw up a formal written contract outlining what they are going to achieve, how they are going to achieve it, and what behaviours are needed to be observed by the team members if they are going to be successful.

The first task of any coaching manager is to ensure the team know why they are a team! Each individual must know what the overall team goal is and also what specific part they will play in the quest of that goal. A coaching manager can lead a team session and outline the goals and the respective roles to the group "en masse" but they should also check on a one to one basis both in the meeting and then again with each individual outside the meeting. The second meeting is essential in order to fully check that the individual fully understands the goals and their part in the process towards hitting that goal. You would be amazed by the number of people who confirm that they fully understand what has been agreed and discussed in the meeting when actually the reality is that they don't! They are not prepared to own up in the meeting that they don't know what is happening because they do not "want to make a fool" of themselves. A good coaching manager will check understanding in the meeting and then again with individual after the meeting. Only when all the individuals in a team know the team goal and their part in supporting the team to achieve the goal will the team move forward.

So, to begin with, in summary:

- When first working with a team contract with them. How are you all going to work together?
- Identify the goal or objectives of the team.
- Work out how you are going to work together to achieve the objectives. Does the contract that you discussed still fit, or does it need adapting in order to achieve the objectives?
- Check the team's understanding of what the objectives are and then check again on an individual basis ensuring that everyone is 100% clear about what is needed to be achieved and about how it is going to be achieved. Check individual motivations as well.

These may seem simple steps but you would be amazed how many managers rush into dictating what has to be achieved without first drawing up a working contract and ensuring everyone fully understands the objectives and their part in the team achieving these objectives.

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