

High-performance team: What do you expect from your colleagues? We need to be able to trust.

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Over the past 26 years, we have asked over 10,000 people working in Switzerland and Europe not only what makes a good boss, but also what they expect from a good team (i.e., what they expect from their colleagues). As with the question “what makes a good boss?” (and a good leader), analysis of the answers given shows clearly that everyone has the same expectations and the same needs. The essence of a good team is the same everywhere. Nine categories were identified: leader, trust, team spirit, openness, values, communication, common objective, expertise, organization. At the centre of this is self-reflection.

Let's look at these categories briefly.

Essentially, when thinking about what the various categories involve, you should take a systematic look at yourself in the mirror and ask the following: “Is this something that I do?” Or: “So how does this work for me personally?”

Leader

In most of the organizational forms we see today, a team will have a manager (a boss). The members of the team expect this manager to be a good manager and that he or she has the ability to lead. This is why we talk of “leaders” and not of bosses. The classic notion of a “boss” is effectively dying out. It is increasingly the case that teams need a leader who establishes a framework within which team members are comfortable, can unfold their potential to their full capacity and have the requisite level of autonomy, all of which facilitates achievement of the desired level of performance. For more background to this topic, please view the video (www.lp3leadership.com), which shows what employees expect of a good boss. Some of these points are also explored in more detail in various articles that have already been published.

Trust

The need that is mentioned most frequently and that is absolutely key is the need for trust. Employees need trust at four levels:

- trust in themselves
- trust in their colleagues
- trust in their line manager
- trust in their company

Wikipedia gives a definition of trust as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another.” Trust is inextricably linked with the concept of having confidence in someone or something. The word is derived from the Latin “*confidere*” (“con” being an assimilated form of “*com-*”, meaning “with” or “together”, and “*fidere*”, to trust) and denotes entrusting something precious to someone, placing your faith in them and relying on their good intentions.

By way of an exercise you can carry out in your team, during a team meeting have the members reflect in small groups on types of behaviours that:

1. build trust

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2. destroy trust

This will give you a schema you can use to analyse how individuals function and will also flag up positive behaviours (positive spiral to be reinforced) and negative behaviours (negative spiral to be neutralized). As soon as you spot such negative behaviours, give constructive, one-on-one feedback immediately. Marshall Rosenberg's method of nonviolent communication will help you with this.

Team spirit

“Helping each other” is the key concept that emerges here. We expect our colleagues to support us, to be attentive, proactive, to encourage us and – above all – to not put obstacles in our path. To quote the Three Musketeers, this type of team spirit can be summed up by the words: “All for one and one for all.”

Openness

The umbrella concept of “openness” groups together expectations linked with the ideas of respecting others and tolerance. I personally like the term “openness” because it denotes an absence of hierarchy. I am on the same level and I am opening my arms to others; in a figurative sense, I am welcoming and receiving others, which is much nicer than saying “I tolerate....” – who am I to tolerate?

Here, I ask you to reflect on the preconceived ideas you have yourself. We all have them. Are you aware of yours, and do you know how they impact your behaviour? Curiosity and interest are two levers that can be used to break down barriers and reinforce openness.

Values

Make sure you have a clear line and clear principles. Individual values are extremely important in your colleagues' eyes. Thus, as with the element of “openness”, respect is something that is often mentioned. Have you ever discussed your personal values with your colleagues? Do you know what their values are and – more importantly – do you know what they mean to them? For example, when someone talks of “respect”, for them that might mean “being on time”, whereas to someone else it might mean “listening”.

Communication

The most classic element of all. You expect your colleagues to communicate openly, transparently and, above all, that they give feedback that is both positive and constructive. Moreover, if something is causing a problem or has been misconstrued, ask questions and don't be afraid to address the matter. This often prevents the issue from escalating unnecessarily.

Common objective

Are we all pulling in the same direction and at the same time? A great deal of the responses given here underline the significance of all working toward the same goal and focusing energies on a common objective. We want our energies to be applied in a coherent manner, by both the other members of the team and ourselves.

What do you do when you realize someone in the team is pulling in the other direction? Do you talk to him/her about it? And if you do, how do you talk to him or her?

Expertise

We obviously expect our colleagues to have the requisite expertise and to be conscientious in carrying out their work. Who is responsible for developing expertise? The individual? The line manager? The company?

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What about “marketability”? Your marketability? When did you last take action to strengthen your expertise? What happens when someone makes mistakes in your team? Who rectifies them?

Organization

Closely connected with the element of “trust” we have already looked at, we expect our colleagues to be organized so that they can be trusted to deliver what they need to deliver. We want to be able to count on them. For this to be possible, the individual needs to be able to manage him- or herself and the tasks to be carried out, and a certain level of discipline is required.

Self–reflection

Lastly, the concept at the heart of the nine elements that make up “a good team” is self-reflection. Each and every one of us should be able to look at ourselves in the mirror and evaluate our strengths, our potential (where we can improve) and what we like. While it is legitimate to expect certain things of our managers and colleagues, we have to begin with ourselves. Think about how you stand with regard to the nine elements of “a good team”, work on yourself, show the way and ultimately it is the entire team that will benefit.

Don't wait for others to take the first step – take it yourself. Be proactive. Sooner or later, everything you give in a positive manner will end up coming back to you.

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