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Team Coaching ROI

Cohesion, resilience and clarity as measures of success

As a coach, I frequently examine the impact I have on my clients as a way of measuring progress. Organizations seeking to justify the investment in team coaching have relied upon employee and customer satisfaction surveys, productivity and retention metrics, and anecdotal evidence. However, the greatest breakthroughs from coaching often elude measurement, and if one were required to assign a price tag, each would be deemed “priceless.”

Coaching teams is a very different proposition from coaching individuals, because the exposure and impact can be far greater. As an ORSCTM practitioner (Organization and Relationship Systems Coach™), I’m often asked to explain what distinguishes my approach from the other schools of thought about team coaching. We know that a team is more than a collection of individuals – its shared

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strengths, weaknesses, skills, knowledge and culture combine to create what we’ve called the Third Entity™. Essentially, this is the “client” with whom we establish the coaching relationship – not individuals on the team.



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

— Henry Ford

When we share this insight with teams, there is often an immediate and visceral reaction of relief: “we knew our team had its own identity, but we just didn’t know what to call it.” The Relationship Systems approach takes the focus away from individuals (John or Mary is the problem with this team), thereby deactivating blame, defensiveness and other obstacles we typically encounter in team coaching. We view individual behaviors as a signal being sent by the “system,” removing the need to scapegoat. Just replacing John or Mary won’t fix the problem – another employee will step in to play that role. The coaching looks deeper, to identify what the system is trying to express through this behavior, and what changes the system is calling for.

Clients come to coaching because they have problems, and your job is to help them find the solutions. The extent to which you do that is how they will measure your impact on the team. The highest levels of satisfaction have been reported when clients have been able to achieve one or more of the following with their teams in pursuit of solutions: Cohesion, Resilience and Clarity.

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impact

Cohesion – created when all team members share a sense of belonging to the group and know their voices are heard and their contributions valued. Behaviors that demonstrate cohesion include a willingness to endure sacrifices for the good of the group and defending against challenges that arise from outside the group.

Example

One of my clients, a non-profit organization, came to me with some serious HR issues: staff members felt they were treated unfairly, gossip and back-biting

icy work. The primary point of contact, to his credit, has internalized many of the team coaching techniques I used and is now applying them with his entire organization.

Resilience – a team’s ability to integrate new members, absorb loss, adapt to meet change and manage pressure, while maintaining a stable, healthy environment for its members.

Example

A successful green energy organization enlisted my aid to address a variety of issues: new staff mem-

“A high-functioning team outlives the ‘lifespan’ of individual team members.”

ensued, which then spilled into the community that the non-profit was serving. In some cases, these issues escalated to lawsuits.

One of the concepts we explored is called Deep Democracy, which requires every member of a team to share his or her voice, no matter how unpopular the sentiment may be. Only when a team has a comprehensive view of its beliefs, knowledge and skill, can it achieve cohesion.

The executive team, after an intensive and sustained coaching intervention, has created a much healthier environment, reduced the number of HR issues, achieved peace among the staff and community, and shifted their energy toward serving the high ideals around which the agency was originally built. They have just successfully launched a new branch of services and expanded the reach of their pol-

bers felt like outsiders, seasoned team members were disengaging, and information and authority wasn’t being shared across hierarchical lines.

Together we worked to create an organizational culture that acknowledges and appreciates all contributions, from the insights and lessons that the founders and first generation hires housed, to the unfiltered and unbiased perspectives of the “newbies.” The team members feel the increased resiliency and are excited rather than demoralized by new challenges.

Working with this group was an important reminder that a high-functioning team (i.e. the Third Entity™) outlives the “lifespan” of individual team members. People come and go, but a resilient team retains its power in the face of change.

Clarity – a team’s shared, lucid, clear vision of the problem or situation and its contributing factors. Once this is achieved, an effective solution can be developed.

Example

We’ve probably all been part of a work team that is lacking clarity: discussions go round-and-round, and a general malaise sweeps the office. People don’t believe that problems can be resolved – nor do people even agree about the nature of the problems. Meetings are fruitless endeavors and morale plummets.

One of my clients was in a similar spot. After several mergers with other organizations, which forced rapid growth on an already strained

system, formerly high-performing people were becoming inefficient, burned out and frustrated. Problems “shape-shifted” from one week to the next, and the team was at risk of losing key contributors.

Through the application of this and other team coaching tools, we were able to identify that the mergers were conducted without establishing clear roles and accountability first. Further, they did not have a clear process for decision-making. The team gained clarity around the new organizational structure and decision-making protocols that would support the workload without compromising quality. They witnessed how quickly solutions can be

developed and implemented once the team has clarity around an issue. This newly optimistic and confident group has since “infected” the rest of the organization with these revelations, creating a nimble and responsive organizational culture that is serving them well today as they complete their latest merger and respond to the changing economy.

I’ve worked with teams for 30 years, and I continue to be surprised and delighted by the immediate and long-term impact this work has on the professional lives of my clients. Even the most ROI-focused manager would have to concede that this work is worth doing. •

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