

Winning Teams:



What Championship Sports Organizations Know About Performance —And Most Commercial Launderers Don't

Follow these five critical elements to take your team to the next level

Championship sports teams know it. So do the casts of hit Broadway shows, as well as our incomparable military.

But most commercial laundry owners don't know it, and it's costing them dollars, customers and good employees.

Sports teams, theater groups and the military have designed processes to improve their individual and group performance as a way of improving overall outcomes. In the military it begins with "boot camp." Then you graduate to "training" and "war games." In sports, this group improvement process is called "practice" and in theater, "rehearsal."

Groups vs. teams

For the most part, there is no formal practice to improve group performance in business. You either have groups or you have teams. Typically, you have groups. A group is made up of individuals, each accountable for and focused on doing their own job. In a group, there is no common work agenda, other than working for the same company.

In teams, a number of people with complementary skills are focused on and mutually accountable for the same agreed-upon result. This mutual accountability is a very significant difference between leadership teams and leadership groups.

In a quarter century of coaching, counseling and speaking to TRSA members and other commercial launderers, I have seen two areas where using a high-performance leadership team construct has paid big benefits.

The first is in sales. Typically, leadership teams are departmentally focused to an extreme. However, there are huge breakthroughs when leadership sees new sales as truly a team event. This happens when the service coordinators and route drivers are woven into the sales process. Owners and general managers also can be highly involved in working with new prospects and differentiating the company.

Using a high-performance leadership team also improves overall

By Bruce Hodes

The commercial launderer, watching his favorite sports team win on Sunday, may think he's escaping from work.

Actually, he's seeing the results of the approach he should take Monday morning when he tries to build his own work team for winning performance

—but probably won't.

It's what builds a "group" into a true high-performance team.

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The nature of the relationship of employees on the team is different from that of guests at a barbecue. At the barbecue, the social contract is "Let's all just get along." The employee team contract is, "Let's get something remarkable done and perform together so that specific results occur," such as getting the sale against some very real competition.

customer service. Customers experience the laundry as an entity and not as departmental silos and can truly enjoy great service. That's because the parts of the organization collaborate, coordinate and solve problems together.

A team at the top ensures alignment with the groups that are delivering service and touches the product that affects the client. For a group of business individuals to perform together as a team, they need practice and group conversation. They need to understand the best way to organize for team performance, then take action and perform together.

I have seen many teams that started as groups go through a formal process of business team practice and development. True performance breakthroughs resulted from this learning and practice endeavor.

For example, The Roscoe Co., a Chicago industrial launderer, has received a tremendous payoff by creating leadership teams. Their teams meet five essential criteria that leaders must pin down to manage performance: purpose, approach, products, interpersonal relations and customer service. They've established themselves as a viable competitor against the nationals. They've grown their business in a tough market, and they've succeeded in implementing dramatic service improvements to their customers.

Critical elements for developing high-performance teams

Following are the five elements that are critical to make business leadership groups grow and develop into high-performance work teams.

1. Members of a high-performance work team have a common performance agenda that all members subscribe to and support.

The essence of a good work team is a focus on performance. Managers kid themselves if they think good communication or good relationships alone are the keys to team effectiveness. Focus on team performance and an agreed-upon appreciation of what this means are what allow a team to get results. The good communication and good relationships are outcomes of a team that is performance driven.

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2. Teams enjoy and are engaged in what they are doing. They are into it.

The vast majority of employees go to work because they have to

in order to survive. Often they are victims of work and are useless as high-performance team members.

This is different than the world of amateur sports, drama and dance. People voluntarily play sports because they like the game. When team members don't like or feel connected to the game the group is playing, there will be real performance issues. For results to get produced, the team has to be into the game.

3. High-performance teams are "a small number of people with complementary skills who are equally committed to a common purpose, goals and a working approach in which they hold themselves mutually accountable."

I agree with the above definition from *The Wisdom of Teams* by John Katzenbach and Douglas Smith. Real teams are basic units of performance. The real mischief comes in when members of the team are mutually accountable for the result. This is quite different than how most of the working world is organized.

4. High-performance teams develop in stages.

Teammates should be aware of these stages because they normalize the experience of developing into a high-performance team. Groups can be asked to find themselves in this model and then design what they need to do to reach the next stage:

- **Stage A:** The exciting "first-date" stage. There is typically some excitement and anticipation about the group's potential and possibility. There is a lot of uncertainty, but also optimism.

- **Stage B:** The "poop-hits-the-fan" stage, when reality sets in about how team life can be hard and demanding work. It is no longer fun, and there is finger pointing between employees. Most see mutual accountability as an empty concept and team members look at whom to blame for their results.

This is where most leadership teams die without the general manager's or owner's support and focus to generate commitment to work through the issues. This is also when employees need to love the game. For most groups, Stage B is where focus and discipline are critical for success.

- **Stage C:** Getting behind the game stage, when everyone begins to align behind group performance and what needs to happen for the group to succeed. Discipline and focus arise with the group following the same ground rules and work approach. For the first time, real group performance results are seen.

- **Stage D:** The high-performance stage, where the team is using its group structure to produce remarkable results. Typically, the team gets recognized internally and externally by customers for its business results. Team members also typically like this structure and feel connected to each other. The team is winning their game.

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logo tees and sweatshirts.”

Topornicki adds that, “I think the opportunity with these types of businesses is to get their staff into a shirt with a nice apron that’s pressed and cleaned by you—much the same as they do in the auto trade when you go into the service department. That’s the opportunity that we miss as linen suppliers; we look for the kitchen area and the dining area, but we miss that middle market.

“But the opportunities abound for people that are actually serving you the food,” Topornicki says. “That’s the opportunity that we need to look at continually. Customizing. Customizing the image, bringing up the image of these people, instead of them showing up to work in some sort of a T-shirt, by providing services to them on a lease-to-own basis. Noncancelable items that they can give to their staff to portray a more clean, professional image. Where would you rather eat? A place that you walk in with a guy that’s been wearing the same T-shirt for three days with a crappy apron on or somebody that has a nice crisp shirt on with a logo on it and a nice apron that you’ve provided.”

In addition to logo apparel, there also are opportunities for other products bearing the company logo, such as floor mats. Restroom products are another area that could be tapped into. The opportunities for expansion are endless in this growing market.



“Casual eateries open the door for more diverse choices in apparel to outfit the staff. This includes T-shirts, performance polos and caps. Also, many of these establishments are selling branded apparel, including logo tees and sweatshirts.”

Barb Herman, industrial laundry national manager for SanMar Corp., Preston, WA.

“In the past, basic bar towels and aprons, as well as a few mats, represented the total opportunity,” Kallenbach says. “Now, this sector is growing in both volume and breadth of offering to now include some napkins, logo mats, logo wear and expanded restroom supplies.”

Herman adds that, “There is an opportunity to fulfill the promotional product needs of these eateries. Suggesting a gift shop concept that may include T-shirts and other products that will help the eatery promote their brand. Also, offering ideas that fits their casual environment is always a plus. Putting together a few spec samples with their logo can go a long way toward helping them see the possibilities.”

Despite dwindling revenue in the full-service sector of the F&B industry, opportunities are out there for textile service operators to take advantage of the growing fast-casual segment of the business. With the restaurant industry trending toward affordability, textile service companies can enhance their bottom lines and expand their businesses by actively pursuing this market. **TR**



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5. A high-performance team designs its own high-performance structure.

How can companies create high-performance teams? They do so by pursuing a step-by-step process. First, I have teams create their Purpose Statement. This is much less abstract than the company’s mission or Vision Statement. It’s a few simple and real statements in business terms about what the object of the team is and how they are going to work together to achieve definable results.

The essence of a good work team is a focus on performance. Managers kid themselves if they think good communication or good relationships alone are the keys to team effectiveness. Focus on team performance and an agreed-upon appreciation of what this means are what allow a team to get results.

I then have the team create 1-3 simple metrics by which they will measure themselves as well as determine who will measure and when they tell the team how they are doing. The team then outlines no more than 6-8 clear, measurable objectives and results that it is committed to doing in the next six months to a year, with a “by when” date for achievement. Monthly milestones and action plans also may be necessary to focus action.

The next step is to design a meeting structure: When will the team meet and for how long? Who leads the meeting? Are notes taken and distributed? How does the agenda get set and by whom?

Finally, the team sets ground rules—behavioral expectations—for how they will interact. These include things like: if you have an issue with someone on the team, deal with him or her directly. Gossiping about team members isn’t permitted. If an issue is being discussed and you are quiet, you are telling the group you agree. These ground rules can be quite confrontational for some team members.

I have found that having a team design this type of structure really allows them to develop and perform much more quickly. So don’t delay! Get cracking and apply these five critical elements of creating a high-performance leadership team. It has proven to be worth the effort. **TR**



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