Say goodbye to team building "events." A new approach to team development is needed. One that is focused on helping the team to hold itself mutually accountable for accomplishing tangible outcomes over time, while doing so in a way that promotes an affirming and constructive work climate. The time has come for Team Coaching.

Moving Beyond Team Building to Team Coaching

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Team building. The mere mention of these words conjures up images of rope climbing, personality surveys, and choruses of *Kumbaya*. While there can be a short term performance blip from such "events," sustainable behavior change and real impact on business results are far more rare. A new approach to team development is needed. One that is focused on helping the team to hold itself mutually accountable for accomplishing tangible outcomes over time, while doing so in a way that promotes an affirming and constructive work climate. Enter Team Coaching. Different in name only? Absolutely not. Team Coaching is a unique discipline. Curious? Read on…

WHAT IS TEAM COACHING?

Team Coaching is a 6-month process that develops a team's capacity to continuously improve its ability to deliver sustainable and inspired high performance. Guided by an external facilitator, Team Coaching:

- *Focuses on attaining a clear set of business outcomes*
- *Provides tools for a team to continue enhancing its performance beyond the Team Coaching process*
- *Holds the team mutually accountable for taking action*
- *Builds capacity in both the human relations and procedural (task) aspects of teaming*
- *Is not a "team building event"*
- *Relies on the coach to facilitate a learning and action process, not to "give advice"*
- *Views the team as a living breathing system with characteristics and identity that transcend any of the individual team members*
- *Does not involve any private and confidential interactions between the coach and individual team members outside of the team setting.*

Taken collectively, these guiding principles ensure that by the end of the Team Coaching process, the team has achieved a measurable business impact and cultivated the self sufficiency to steer its own ongoing development.

The remainder of this article describes each of the phases of a recommended Team Coaching process. Within the context of explaining each phase, the guiding principles listed above are further explored along with a sampling of Team Coaching methodologies.

WHEN IS TEAM COACHING APPROPRIATE?

Before delving into the specifics of the Team Coaching process, it is important to first explore the circumstances under which this methodology is warranted. A Team Coaching program undertaken absent certain conditions will yield frustration and disappointment. To ensure success, it is imperative to first verify that the group of people targeted for coaching either truly is a team or needs to become a team. This sounds obvious. However, all too often, businesses are overly quick to anoint any group of people who work together as a "team." To ensure that Team Coaching, is in fact, the appropriate course of action, the following two questions must be answered affirmatively:

- *Does the group of people to be coached share a common purpose and set of mutual goals?*
  AND
- *Does the achievement of these shared goals require the players to work interdependently?*

If the answer to either of these questions is "no," don't fool yourself…what you have is a work group

masquerading as a team. For Team Coaching to be effective, there must be a compelling reason for each and *every* person on the team *to want* to learn how to work with one another. Each team member must believe, "I need you and you need me for all of us to succeed in reaching our shared goals."

A PROCESS, NOT AN EVENT

Changes in behavior and attitude take place over time and require continual reinforcement. Think about diet and exercise regimens. The odds are slim (no pun intended) that a single visit to a Personal Trainer will transform long ingrained habits. So it goes with a single team building event. Sole team events do not produce miracles. An ongoing program is in order. The diagram in figure 1 demonstrates the suggested components of a 6-month Team Coaching program.

or acquiring new companies, and implementing process redesigns.

Having identified the "why" of Team Coaching, it naturally follows to determine the "who." Sounds easy, right? Not always so. Who is the "core team?" What about "non-core" members? How many reporting levels should be included? What about the administrative assistant? The human resources generalist? There are no easy answers to identifying the participants. What's important is to be extremely deliberate in selection…always coming back to the question: "to what degree does the individual in question play an interdependent role in the achievement of the shared performance goals?"

Discovery	Team Assessment #1	Team Offsite (2 days)	Virtual Team Coaching (6months)	Team Assessment #2 and Offsite
Week 1	Weeks 2–3	Week 4	Weeks 5–28	Weeks 28–30

Figure 1: Team Coaching Process

STEP 1: DISCOVERY

As already emphasized, the critical first step in a Team Coaching initiative is to work with the program sponsor (e.g., executive, manager, team leader) to identify a compelling business reason for why the team needs to up its game. Typical places to look include: responding to changing market dynamics, developing and deploying new strategies, launching new products, developing new information technology applications, conducting organizational restructurings, merging

STEP 2: ASSESSMENT

Once identifying the rationale for Team Coaching and selecting the participants in the effort, the next step is to assess the current state of the team. This preliminary assessment provides the team and their coach a starting point for the performance improvement effort. Traditional approaches to team development usually involve conducting individual interviews with team members to determine the team's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. In a Team

Coaching approach, the team coach should not use individual interviews as an assessment approach. Why? Because Team Coaching views the team as a single entity that goes beyond the views and experiences of any particular member. No matter how self-disciplined the coach, given their natural human biases, private contact between the coach and the individual team members compromises the coach's objectivity to sense what is happening in the system as a whole. To circumvent this unintended consequence, data should be collected and compiled anonymously via an on-line survey instrument.

> ## *In a Team Coaching approach, the team coach should not use individual interviews as an assessment approach.*

Considerable research has been conducted that has identified the characteristics and attributes of high performing teams.[1] These include a combination of procedural and relationship traits. Procedural attributes are the more tangible aspects of how a team functions, including such elements as role clarity, decision making, reward systems, work processes, planning, and results orientation. Relational characteristics are those qualities that refer to the emotional climate of the team and how people treat one another. These include: trust, respect, collaboration, fun, and conflict management.

The assessment process in Team Coaching should consist of quantitative measures of a team's aggregate perceptions of the presence or absence of these sorts of traits. That way, the team has a starting point for coaching and a focus for its improvement efforts. In addition, qualitative data in the form of open-ended questions provide the coach and the team invaluable texture for what's happening on the team. There are a number of off-the-shelf instruments available for conducting team assessments.[2] They vary in price and level of certification required to use them. Alternatively, it is also relatively easy and inexpensive to design a custom survey using tools readily available on the internet.[3] Whatever assessment approach is used, the most important feature is that it measures the team as a whole, rather than the individual members. In addition, the assessment should allow for a written report to be generated that can be shared with the team during the coaching sessions.

STEP 3: TEAM OFFSITE… JUMPSTARTING THE TEAM COACHING INITIATIVE

Having collected, compiled and reviewed the data, it is now time to conduct a first Team Coaching session in the form of an offsite meeting. Critical to the success of this first Team Coaching session is that it occurs over at least two consecutive days. It takes every bit of two days to:

- *Create a fertile environment for candid discussion*
- *Pry open the metaphoric can of team issues and opportunities*
- *Pour the contents on the table through team member disclosure*
- *Shift the dynamics through straight talk and overnight reflection*

• *Restore the newly churned team to its container, and*
• *Determine actions for improving the team.*

The consecutive nature of the days generates a rhythm and crescendo for maximum impact.

OFFSITE DAY 1: EDUCATING THE TEAM

The first day should be spent initially educating the team to recognize and experience the elements of high performing teams. Through carefully constructed interactive exercises, team members will begin to develop an orientation to see the team as a living breathing entity, and to listen for the "voice of the team"[4] rather than being overly focused on their own individual perspectives. (see sidebar)

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As human beings, it is quite natural for us to "personalize" how we receive messages communicated by our teammates. Because of this tendency, the message may be lost, as teammates are focusing on the messenger who is delivering the information, rather than the message itself. Valuable input may be lost or
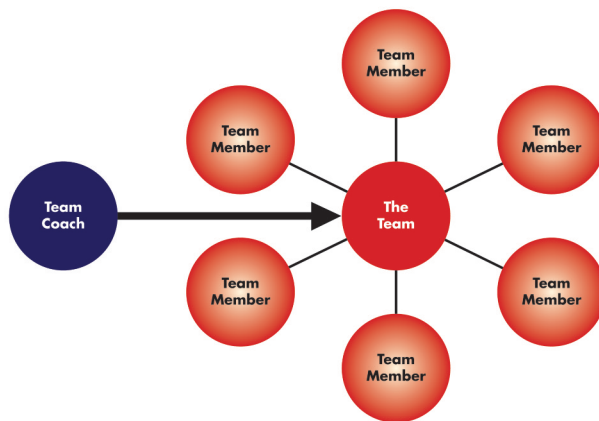
In a "systems approach" to coaching teams, the coach is focusing on the team as its own entity, not just a collection of parts. In this way, the team itself is the client, not the individuals on the team. (see figure 2)

In contrast, most current organizational and executive coaching paradigms focus on coaching the team as a collection of individuals. In this more traditional model, the coach works with how team members interrelate based on each individual's unique work and personality profile. The shortcoming of this approach is that the team is represented as a set of discrete data points rather than the system as a whole. Team members view themselves in a comparative fashion, looking to see how they work vis a vis the characteristics of the other members. This personal filter separates the individual team members from the system.

When thinking about the "team as a system," it can be helpful to think of the following metaphor. Like a team, a human hand is a system. Each digit on the hand (member of the team) is having a personal experience. For instance, the small finger may be sprained. The index finger may be arthritic. The thumb may be quite flexible. While each of these digits (team members) is having a personal experience, these personal experiences are impacting the hand (team) as a whole. When coaching a team, it is critical that the coach keep their awareness on the whole of the team ("hand") rather than the wants and needs of any one individual member (finger).

Team Coaching is not a replacement for individual executive coaching. The two services are highly complementary in nature. Best practice prescribes that the individual coaching the team be a different person from the coach or coaches who are working with any individual on the team. That way, the team coach is not unduly influenced by any one individual or individuals on the team.

ignored. In order to overcome this propensity, the skilled coach should invite the team to think about one another as "voices in the system"[5] rather than as specific persons or personalities delivering messages. That way, the points will be heard without being interfered with by the listeners' interpreting who is presenting the information.

Figure 2: Team Coaching Model

By orienting the team members to see themselves not as individuals, but as "voices in the system," each person learns to put their attention on "what's trying to evolve in the team as a whole" rather than fixating on "who's saying what" and "who's doing what to whom."

OFFSITE DAY 1: CANDID CONVERSATIONS

Once this initial team awareness training has occurred the team should then review its assessment data and use it as a jumping off point for a candid dialogue about its current state. It is here where the skillfulness of the coach is of paramount importance. Although tempting, during the first day of a Team Coaching session, the coach should deliberately keep the team from

identifying and moving into problem solving actions. Instead, the coach "marinates" the team in its existing conditions, surfacing all views (voices), even the most marginalized. In this way "a (metaphorical) mirror is held up" that reveals a shared awareness of the complete portrait of the team. The coach should continue to ask the question, "how is what you are seeing in your reflection (e.g., team dynamics, processes, and behaviors) serving you in attaining sustainable business results?" In other words, to quote pop culture icon Dr. Phil, the coach continually asks "how's that working for you?" By consistently inviting the team to examine how it functions through the lens of how its dynamics support the business, the coaching is less "personal" and creates the motivation for the system as a whole to want to change.

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The approach of deferring Action Planning during the first day of coaching can prove challenging, as people want to "just get on with it." The danger of moving to action prematurely is that if all underlying issues have not been raised, then action will be built on an unstable platform, and the unaddressed challenges will reappear at a later time. The coach must be skillful about educating the clients about the hazards of a hasty

move to action and be vigilant in using a "parking lot" to capture ideas for later exploration. In addition, often times, at this point in the process many teams will look to the coach as "the expert" and request that "you tell us what to do to fix the problem." This is not the coach's job. Why? The more the coach tells the team what to do, the less self-sufficient the team will be after the coach is gone.

OFFSITE DAY 1: CONCLUSION

The first day of a Team Coaching offsite typically concludes with team members in a state of contemplation. A shared team dinner that evening provides an ideal setting for continued relationship building and ongoing dialogue. The team should be assigned "homework" to review any portions of the written assessment report that have not been covered during the day. In addition, the coach should challenge team members to reflect on the discussions from the day and come prepared for the next day ready to share any additional thoughts or feelings about the workings of the team. Another interesting overnight assignment is to ask each team member to find an object that represents a metaphor that signifies when the team is operating at its best. Each team member then presents their object the next day. Though this exercise sounds hokey, it does, in fact "work" to create positivity with even the most "left brain" types of people.

OFFSITE DAY 2: GOING DEEPER

In the quiet of overnight reflection, there is a particular phenomenon that occurs in which the team usually undergoes powerful breakthroughs. Experience shows that the enormity of these

advances is only possible when the second day of coaching immediately follows the first. Team members typically arrive for the second day of coaching eager to share additional insights and bring the conversation of the current state to a deeper level. During the morning of the second

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day, the coach should intensify their approach by pushing for a deeper level of vulnerability and challenging of the status quo. As the dialogue progresses, the coach needs to guide the discussion from covering how it is today on the team to how the team would like things to be. Having stewed in the current state for over a day, the team as a whole has cleared the air and is excited to create a vision for the future. By lunchtime, the team is well on its way to articulating its aspirations for how it wants to work together.

OFFSITE DAY 2: MOVING TO ACTION

Given that this 2-day in person session is a jumpstart to a 6-month-long coaching process, it is imperative that the team leave the session with a roadmap for moving forward. The post lunch session on the second day creates this deliverable. The roadmap comes in the form of two documents: 1) a Team Contract and 2) an Action Plan for moving the business forward. The Team Contract

is a one to two page custom document that articulates the attitudes and behaviors for which the team will hold its members mutually accountable. Informed by the dialogue from the previous 1.5 days of discussion, the Team Contract answers questions including[6]:

• *What will allow this team to flourish? What kind of culture does the team want to create?*
• *What can the team members count on from one another?*
• *How do team members want to be together when things get difficult?*

The second deliverable, the Action Plan, articulates the short term and long term activities and milestones to which the team will hold itself mutually accountable (see sidebar) for furthering its progress to achieving its goals. The short term components of the plan should have due dates no more than 30 days from the conclusion of the coaching session. That way the team can build immediate momentum.

The two-day Team Coaching session concludes with a declaration of commitment by the team to honoring the Team Contract and following through on the identified actions. The team leaves the session with a new level of awareness along with the ability to be more intentional about the choices that it makes.

ONGOING COACHING

The 2-day offsite is only just the beginning of the coaching process. Once the team is back in its native environment and faced with genuine challenges, the real work of developing team muscles begins. Like any learning process there will be both triumphs as well as disappointments.

Note the use of the term "mutual accountability." In a systems-based approach to Team Coaching this concept is key. It means that each and every member of the team 1) takes ownership for honoring the Team Contract, and 2) supports their colleagues in following through on committed to actions. For example, if one member of the team observes another member treat a fellow teammate in a way that violates the Team Contract, the witnessing team member is accountable for pointing out the unacceptable behavior, even though he or she has not been the direct recipient of that behavior. In another example, a team member may commit to taking a certain action on which he or she does not follow through. In a mutual accountability scenario, the other team members feel an ownership for their teammate's failure and are of the mindset to constructively ask "how can we support you so that next time you succeed." Mutual accountability is about each and every team member taking personal responsibility to create the most productive and positive climate possible.

To leverage these learning experiences and ensure ongoing progress, the coach should conduct monthly coaching sessions with the entire team. Best practice advises a series of 6 monthly follow-on sessions of ninety minutes each. Throughout this process, there is continued adherence to the ground rule that the coach will not privately interact with individual team members. If, by chance, conversations do occur between the coach and any individual team members outside of the team setting, the content of these exchanges is brought back to the team. This parameter insures that the coach continues

to coach the team as a single entity with no "secrets."

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A typical coaching session in the 6-month-long ongoing coaching process begins with a general "check in," on how the team has functioned in the last 30 days. One powerful check-in tool is to ask each team member to respond to the following: "If this team were a weather system, what is the current weather on this team?" Once everyone has responded, the coach should then facilitate a dialogue about what has lead to the "weather" as reported. The coach then explores how the team is living up to its contract and checks in on the Action Plan accountabilities. In each of the follow-on sessions the coach needs to be vigilant in inquiring about the team's follow through and progress toward its measurable business goals. Celebration occurs where warranted. Learning discussions take place where needed along with the identification and commitment to course correcting actions. Each session ends with an agreement on next steps that will further the performance and sustainability of the team.

Throughout the 6-month coaching process the coach should look for opportunities to present tools and practices that will enhance team performance. Examples include: roles and responsibilities charting (RACI), decision making matrices, conflict management processes, listening skills, visioning processes, project planning templates, and receiving/delivering feedback. The team can then assign itself "homework" between sessions to practice with the tools that have been introduced by the coach.

COMPLETION SESSION

On the back-end of the 6-month coaching process is a one-day offsite coaching session designed for the team to formally evaluate its progress and to determine a plan for ongoing sustainability. As with the initial offsite, an anonymous team assessment should be administered prior to the session. The same protocol used in the pre-assessment should be used in the post assessment in order to paint a comparative picture.

The tone of the completion session should be one of celebration and acknowledgement of the team's progress over the past 6 months. Time is spent looking at the team's performance against its common goals and examining the behavioral attributes that contributed to the team's success. There is an eye toward the future, with the team identifying how it will continue to grow to meet ongoing business challenges once the coach has departed. The final coaching session should conclude with a symbolic closing ritual that reinforces team members' commitment to one another.

CONCLUSION: WHY TEAM COACHING AND WHY NOW?

In conclusion the question is begged "in these difficult economic times, why Team Coaching and

why now?" Market forces in the 21st century have changed the very nature of how work gets done. Functional silos that were once the hallmark of organizations have been replaced by horizontal business processes and integrated vertical business units that demand tight interdependency among a diverse set of disciplines. Whether in the financial services, high technology, healthcare, manufacturing, retail, hospitality and not-for-profit sectors, the ever-increasing global economy is calling forth people to work across cultures and differences in pursuit of excellence. Teaming must now be recognized as a discipline and competency as critical as any technical knowledge or skillset. Henry Ford stated this eloquently by saying: "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

CASE STUDY:
PROCTER AND GAMBLE

After 18 years in development and millions invested, Procter and Gamble was in jeopardy of missing a critical launch date of a blockbuster new product. The issue? The 17-person Product Development team was in disarray. Characterized by turf protection, lack of trust, and a silo-mentality, this geographically dispersed team was even unable to agree on the volume of product to be produced by the ship date. Decision-making processes were nebulous at best, and a toxic finger-pointing environment was the norm. After two failed intervention attempts to align this team, Procter and Gamble engaged in a year-long Team Coaching process.

The Team Coaching process began with the deployment of an anonymous 80-item Likert questionnaire followed by 5 open-ended questions. Results of the assessment were then delivered in a live two-day Team Coaching session. This first Team Coaching session consisted of:

- *Creation of a "safe" environment that allowed for unfiltered "straight talk" about the state of the team as surfaced in the team assessment.*
- *Open and creative conversation about the mission, goals and priorities for this team on two levels: the compelling business issues and the dynamics of the team itself.*
- *Development of a "Team Contract" with rules of engagement for times when there is conflict or differences of opinion or approach; communication styles training to increase positivity and decrease negativity and improve collaboration.*

- *Training in listening with a "systems" ear to de-pressurize the environment as the team brings to the surface important underlying issues*
- *Creation of Action Plans and an accountability structures to ensure follow through on the issues uncovered in the session.*

Following this initial Team Coaching session, the team engaged in an ongoing series of live and virtual sessions focused on setting goals, clarifying roles and responsibilities, tracking accountabilities, making decisions, and nurturing strong relationships among the team members. At three different occasions in the year-long coaching process, the team assessment was re-administered as a means to foster the team's awareness of the environment it was creating to catalyze critical conversations to ensure continuous improvement in the functioning of the team.

Today, the Procter and Gamble team is proud to have met its critical delivery dates, and continues to thrive as it works on the next phase of product development.

Matt McGoff, Technical Program Director describes the impact as follows: "It is hard to describe in one sentence or even one paragraph everything the Team Coaching provided. The Team Coaching was the key to our team gelling. This project had a reputation for operating with a Functional Silo mentality—and people played their parts true to character. With the Team Coaching, the exercises helped everyone view their position on the team through a different set of lenses. We dropped the focus on individuals and began to

focus on the Team. We also aligned on the Common Goal—so that everyone is now pulling for the same end point. Finally, the Team Coaching allowed everyone to clear the air, drop the baggage from previous insults or slights, and start from a clean slate. Without trying to sound too dramatic—I'd credit the Team Coaching as the turning point on this project."

PROCTER AND GAMBLE TEAM CONTRACT

CREATING A POSITIVE TEAM ENVIRONMENT
- *Open, honest communication*
- *No gossip*
- *Go to the person you have an issue with*
- *No filtered honesty*
- *No fear of sharing problems*
- *Ask for help*
- *Seek/listen to understand*
- *Celebrate those who move on; welcome newcomers*

OPERATING WITH INTENT
- *Believe in the strength and capability of team members*
- *Operate with good intent*
- *Assume benign intent*
- *No surprises*
- *Hold up the truth*
- *Think holistically—no turf*

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY
- *Actively listen*
- *Seek regular and timely communication*
- *Make scheduled time for building the team (that honors commitments)*
- *Focus the conversation on how we will make the goals happen*

PLANNING THAT LEADS TO ACTION
- *Get clear on the issues*
- *Allow time for data analysis before decisions are made*
- *Joint understanding of how we will get to the goal*
- *Work from data*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Described by Forbes Magazine as a "miraclemaker—or, more precisely a miracle medium," Paul Sherman is a pioneer in the emerging field of Team Coaching. For two decades he has brought his unique blend of people and business acumen to over 50 major corporations and government agencies worldwide. His clients include: Bank of America, Procter and Gamble, and the U.S. State Department. As a senior executive, workshop leader, consultant, and certified professional coach Paul's passion is helping individuals and organizations be their best. Paul holds degrees in psychology and human resources management from Harvard and Boston Universities.

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[1] Katzenbach, Jon R. and Smith, Douglas K. *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization.* Harvard Business School Press. 1992; Marshall, R.J., and Lowther, J.M., *Teams in the Test Tube: Building Team Performance in R&D Organizations.* 1997.

[2] Examples include: 5 Dysfunctions of a Team, Team Diagnostic Assessment, KTEP

[3] Examples include: www.zoomerang.com; www.surveymonkey.com; www.surveyconsole.com

[4] Center for Right Relationship

[5] Center for Right Relationship

[6] Center for Right Relationship