

HOW TO

BY DOUG PACKARD

Lead your team from good to great

One of the most important skills business leaders need to cultivate is the ability to build and maintain high-performing teams. Given the ever-increasing rate of change in the world, organizations need effectively functioning teams today more than ever. Otherwise, their company will not be nimble enough to survive and team members will burn out as they try to succeed without effective collaboration.

Many team leaders don't realize they have done a poor job until a major problem arises — and by then it may be too late to fix it. In some cases, leaders have a gut feeling there's an issue but find it difficult to define the problem so it can be addressed.

The five stages of team development

Bruce Tuckman, a psychologist and former college professor, researched group dynamics and published a theory that outlines five stages that groups go through. In working with my clients, I find the structure helpful for leaders to refer to as a guide to determine which stage a team is at. Doing so often helps identify the barrier to team success that exists.

- 1. Forming:** During this stage, the group establishes goals and roles. Each member needs confidence in each teammate's ability to perform. Better yet, an appreciation (or at least an acceptance) of the diversity of teammate behavioral styles and backgrounds is built.
- 2. Storming:** After forming, the leader may discover the necessary commitment level is not there from all members, or some members may feel they or others cannot perform to the required levels. Disagreement over values or behaviors could occur, or personal goals may conflict with the team goals. Ironing out bumps early minimizes

wasted efforts and increases the chances of long-term success.

- 3. Norming:** Groups that reach this stage have obtained consensus, know how to resolve conflicts efficiently and start to function effectively. The deliverables may not yet be churning out at the desired pace, but members are working together on the same side of the table.
- 4. Performing:** At this stage, the team functions as a coordinated, well-run unit and requires only periodic check-ins to review results, capture learnings and adjust the plan going forward. The team also effectively identifies new conditions that impact the mission and adjusts its approach accordingly.
- 5. Adjourning:** This stage occurs when it's time to close the team down, which may create sadness if the team has functioned together for an extended time. Partial adjourning may occur in cases where one person leaves the group. This could change the whole dynamic and require moving back to the forming stage.

As you work your way through leading one of your teams, you will likely go through the stages multiple times as conditions change and as members of the group change. It's important to clarify with members where they think the group is at along the five-stage journey. You may run into cases where the overall group is at one stage, but an individual member may feel he or she is in a different stage.

Take time to reflect on team accomplishments

If your team goes through a major effort that drains a great deal of mental effort, you might also need to consider a restoring stage vs. an adjourning stage. Every team has

varying energy levels and may need to pause and reflect. This should include celebrating accomplishments, documenting what's going well and not working well, and discussing lessons learned to evolve into an even better team going forward.

We all want our teams to thrive, not just survive. To raise performance levels, you need to understand the team's strengths and opportunities for improvement. Asking the tough questions, and then acting on the answers, is the only way to lead your team from good to great.



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