

Developing GREAT Teams

Over the past few weeks, we have considered some of the characteristics of BASIC and SMART teams, as well as, some potential leadership strategies that can be used with them. The final type of team in the BASIC, SMART, GREAT Team heuristic framework is the GREAT team. We begin by considering the characteristics of GREAT teams based on the following acronym:

GREAT Team Characteristics

Group results are powerful
Responding to personal growth
Enabling shared leadership
Acting collaboratively
Team trust very high

Let us take a closer look at the above characteristics.

Group results are powerful

When teams have worked together for some time and they have learned to collaborate effectively, the results can be very impressive. In fact, when people have shared with me their reflections about the great teams they have served on they often report that they were able to reach their common goals and go well beyond the mandate that they had been given. They also report that they really enjoyed being members of the team and they felt that they had made significant contributions to the organizations that sponsored them. Quite simply, great teams do great things and enjoy themselves as they do it!

Responding to personal growth

An important characteristic of great teams is that the people on them care about the personal well-being and professional growth of their colleagues. On several occasions, I have had the opportunity to be a member of a great team. During the time that I served on those teams, as well as after we had completed our work, my colleagues would send me articles that they thought I would enjoy reading. Moreover, when and if I needed their help they were very willing to extend their support to me. In fact, one of the sad things about leaving a great team was that I missed the interest and support that my colleagues so generously provided. If you have served on a great team, I am sure that you know exactly what I mean.

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Enabling shared leadership

Another characteristic of great teams is the way that members share the leadership of the team. After working together for some time, shared leadership seems to simply emerge from the team. At different times and circumstances, a variety of people assume important leadership functions. In fact, if one observes a great team, it is often difficult to determine who the leader is. In other words, depending on the demands of the situation, people with the required skills in a given situation simply take on the leadership role. Hence, serving on a great team facilitates the acquisition of leadership skills, which is an excellent example of capacity building quietly at work!

Acting collaboratively

Responding to the personal and professional growth of teams members, sharing leadership, and producing impressive results are important characteristics of great teams; however, perhaps the most important reason why teams are great is that they have learned to perform their work in a highly collaborative manner. Over time, the leaders of the team and its members exhibit increased skill in planning and chairing their meetings. They employ collaborative problem solving and decision making strategies and they maintain a sensible balance between focusing on getting things done and creating a positive and productive work environment. Moreover, when they need expertise that existing team members do not have, they actively try to find new members who have it or help members acquire the competencies that are needed so that they can work efficiently.

Team trust very high

People who have served on great teams routinely report that team members were very committed to the team. They agreed with the shared goals that the team created and they felt personally motivated to help reach those goals. Hence, they took the time and put in the individual effort that allowed the team to be truly effective. Most importantly, they almost always report that a tremendous feeling of trust developed on the team. Trust develops when people have the commitment and competence to do what they say they will do and the personal discipline to actually do it. Team trust is really the lubricant that allows a great team to produce powerful results in pleasant, positive and productive ways.

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