4 Actions for Building High Performing Teams

By Linda Sasser

I've been asked how I've been able to create teams that have achieved such high levels of performance. I've been fortunate to lead several unique and differently conditioned teams in my career, including:

- New Start Up – a team built from scratch for a new business
- Declining Business – reviving and re-organizing a team
- Purchased Business – taking over an established team
- Two Teams Combined – uniting two headstrong teams into one
- Split Up and Rebuild – Separating one high performing team into two separate areas

Each team called for slightly different adjustments or leadership actions because you create, grow, and lead teams based on the current conditions your business is encountering.

However, there are four actions that have been consistent for my style of building high performing teams in any condition.

1. Build a high level of trust.

This is non-negotiable if you're aiming for a high performing team that is sustainable through the good times and the bad. A high performing team, at any level, has a high level of trust for each teammate's competence and integrity level. Trust must be earned. It can't simply be asked for or boldly demanded or naively assumed. Great teams grow through stages of trust as acts of sacrificing, serving, and protecting one another happen. However, trust can also be damaged if politics and self-serving acts take place.

2. Intentionally build complementing talents and strengths.

The exciting aspect of building a high performing team is being intentional with your diversity. I'm not necessarily referring to diversity in gender or ethnicity, although this is important. I'm referring to diversity in talents. An individual's strength can be freed to excel when another team member has the balancing strength. For example, a futuristic and visionary thinker will always be out ahead of the current conditions. He or she won't be as concerned with where things are today, as they are always conditioning and arranging for success in the future. These futuristic teammates are crucial to have on the team, but they become frustrated and can be a nuisance if an action-oriented person is not present. This creates an environment of action and movement towards a well thought out future.

3. Base your hiring decisions on building a high performing team.

When I make hiring decisions I keep in mind that I'm adding talent and capacity to the team. I'm not just making a random, résumé-looks-good hire. This is where some business leaders falter. It's common and frankly very understandable to hire an individual with a great-looking résumé, but remember, you're creating a high performing team, not hiring high performing individuals to work solo.

4. Establish high expectations.

Knowing the role you play on the team is important. It keeps everyone accountable and brings clarity to meeting or exceeding performance standards. As the trust level grows, high performing teams create a culture of high expectations. Some of them are:

- Debating subjects, strategies and plans are expected and should not be taken or delivered as personal maliciousness.
- Speak up or don't serve on the team. Every thought and opinion counts.
- Deal with issues inside the team, not outside. What I mean is don't leave a meeting bad mouthing an idea or person to others. Like it or not, that is considered gossip, and it will tear a team apart. Address issues within the team *with* the team.
- We are a team that holds a lot of influence. Use it wisely for good, not for power.

Linda Sasser is the founder and CEO of Impacting Leaders, a leadership development and organizational growth firm. Connect with her on Twitter, @LindaSasser, on Linkedin, or on her blog at www.leadershipwithsass.com.