

# 111 TEAM BUILDING

INSTRUCTOR

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## ***Introduction***

Richard Andersen is passionate about maximizing human potential. As CIO (Chief Illuminations Officer) of Venue Solutions Group, Richard draws upon 35 plus years of experience in professional sports, venues and hospitality management to design and facilitate leading edge training and development programs that deliver those “aha moments.” It’s the “VSG Advantage.”

Andersen was founder of Lighthouse Management where he provided organizational training, teambuilding, and leadership development for a variety of repeat customers. His clients included CEOs of major corporations, senior management of major professional sports teams, and frontline staff of premier venues in North America and around the world.

In his professional career, Andersen served as President and CEO of Seafair, one of the Pacific Northwest’s premier Festival Management organizations, and President and CEO of Northlands, one of Canada’s largest multi-purpose entertainment and meeting complexes. Andersen was also Executive Vice President of the San Diego Padres and General Manager of PETCO Park.

Earlier in his career, Andersen served as President and CEO of Joe Robbie Stadium (now Sun Life Stadium) in Miami, Florida, current home to the Miami Dolphins and then home of the Florida (now Miami) Marlins. He was also on the board of the Super Bowl XXIX Host Committee.

Andersen has volunteered in a variety of leadership roles for the International Association of Venue Managers (IAVM) including as Chair of the Board of Directors in 2012. He has instructed at the IAVM Venue Management School and Graduate Institute since 2004 and was the Chair of its Board of Regents in 2015. He has served on the faculty of the Venue Management Association (VMA Australia Pacific) School and Leadership Institute since 2014.

Andersen holds an MBA from the University of Pittsburgh’s Katz School of Business and an ICD.C from the Rotman School of Business at the University of Toronto.

Andersen’s many professional service honors and distinctions include the City of San Diego’s Gaslamp Quarter “Lamplighter Award,” Virginia Citizen of the Year, Major League Baseball’s Lee McPhail Award for excellence in business operations, and the IAVM Venue Management School Ray Ward Award for his contributions to industry education.

When not shining the light on organizational effectiveness, Richard enjoys still learning how to play the guitar, exploring the trails of the Pacific Northwest and wrestling with grammar.

## ***What is a Team?***

In their book *The Wisdom of Teams*, Katzenbach and Smith make the point that the word “team” conveys different things to different people. Some people think of teams in terms of sport, where personal bests and winning are important. Others consider values such as sharing, collaborating and helping one another as essential to a team effort. The authors define team as: “A small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.”

### **Small Number**

Teams typically range in size from three to twelve. Some organizations have teams numbering fifty or more, however these are usually broken into smaller units or sub teams. The reason for this is that larger numbers of people have trouble communicating effectively, often disagreeing on specific actions and outcomes. Smaller groups are far more likely to work through their differences, agree to a common approach or plan and implement that plan. The simple logistics of even trying to have a meeting can be complicated for larger groups.

### **Complementary Skills**

Teams must incorporate the appropriate mix of skills to complete the tasks assigned to the group. These skill requirements fall into three categories:

#### **Technical and Functional Expertise**

Teams must incorporate the skills necessary to complete the job at hand. For example, a product development group with only marketing experts is less likely to succeed than a group comprised of marketing experts and engineers. The complementary skills of each group enable the team to function.

#### **Problem Solving and Decision-Making Skills**

Teams must be able to make decisions and identify the onset of a problem or opportunity, evaluate the opportunity, and determine an appropriate course of action. Team members usually bring some level of these skills and develop them more on the job.

#### **Interpersonal Skills**

Effective communication and conflict management skills enable a team to develop common understandings of purpose and function. Skills can include risk taking, constructive criticism, objectivity, active listening, giving the benefit of the doubt, support or recognizing the needs of others.

A team simply will not function without these basic skill components. The challenge for any team is to strike the right balance between selecting team members based on pre-existing skills and having skills develop as a result of team membership.

### ***Commitment to a Common Purpose and Performance Goals***

A team's purpose and its performance are closely related. Without a common purpose a team will quickly break down and operate as a collective of individuals or even as smaller teams.

A common, meaningful purpose sets the tone and aspiration. Most teams shape their direction and purpose based on an external demand or opportunity. For example, management assigns a task, which must be completed by the assembled group. Once a meaningful purpose is in place the team creates ownership and commitment to that purpose. Some teams are capable of creating their own direction by creating a meaningful purpose independent of management.

Usually however, some form of direction from management creates the momentum for the team to begin operating. Groups that fail to operate effectively as teams have usually failed to develop a common purpose that is owned by the team. This usually means that no measurable goals and outcomes have been formulated by the team.

Specific performance goals are an integral part of the purpose. They allow broad objectives to be broken down into measurable units of achievement.

Specific measurables facilitate clear communications and constructive conflict within the team. A specific goal allows the team to focus or even to consider whether a goal should be changed to fit the outcome desired. The attainability of specific goals allows the team to focus on achieving and often creates compelling reasons to commit to the team.

The combination is essential to performance. A team's purpose and its performance goals are interdependent. One will not proceed without the other. Specific goals allow the team to measure its activities and progress toward achieving the greater team purpose.

## ***Commitment to a Common Approach***

Teams need to develop a clear working approach to ensure members work together to accomplish their purpose. It is almost as important to develop a preferred working style as it is to formulate team goals. In formulating an approach, the team must consider the social as well as economic and administrative details. The next steps are for the team to agree on who in the team will perform specific jobs, how schedules will be adhered to, what skills need to be developed, how the group will make and modify decisions and how continuing membership will be earned.

The social role is often overlooked in teams. However, it is important. The social role helps promote mutual trust and constructive conflict, which is necessary for the team to succeed. In the best teams, different members assume the social roles at different times and contribute their own unique method for energizing and supporting the team. These roles evolve over time to meet the needs of the team as required.

## ***A Sense of Mutual Accountability***

Mutual accountability creates a team. Until this is present the group will remain simply that, a group. This accountability underpins two critical aspects of teams, commitment and trust. By holding ourselves accountable to the team goals we earn the right to have a say in team activities or functional performance and we receive a fair hearing when doing so. This in turn creates trust between participating team members.

## ***Team Building... What's the Point?***

**The Five Behaviors Model** is designed to help team members learn to work together more efficiently and effectively and to ultimately become a more cohesive team.

A productive, high-functioning team has a lot of upside:

- Makes better, faster decisions
- Taps into the skills and opinions of all members
- Avoids wasting time and energy on politics, confusion, and destructive conflict
- Avoids wasting time talking about the wrong issues and revisiting the same topics over and over because of a lack of buy-in
- Creates competitive advantage
- Is more fun to be on!

Participants that effectively incorporate the Five Behaviors Model end up with not only a team building model that drives cohesiveness but also a tool that can provide specific plans to improve performance.

Bringing together everyone's personalities and preferences to form a cohesive, productive team takes work, but the payoff can be huge--for individuals, for the team, and for the organization.

### ***Is the team really a TEAM?***

A team is a relatively small number of people (generally from three to twelve) who meet on a regular basis and are collectively responsible for results. The team members share common goals as well as the rewards and responsibilities for achieving them. Not every group is a team. For example, a group that appears to be a team might simply be a collection of people who report to the same manager, but who have relatively little interdependence or mutual accountability.

If a group does not meet the criteria of a true team, this process is unlikely to produce the results they expect.

- Is this team ready for “heavy lifting”?

The advantages of being a high-functioning team are enormous. But they can only be achieved if the team is willing to invest considerable time and emotional energy in the process. It won't work if the team is interested only in shortcuts and half-measures.

- Is the leader truly committed to building a team?

The fact is, leadership matters. For a team to be successful, the leader must understand the power of teamwork and be prepared to lead the effort in terms of setting an example and dedicating time to it. It's important to note that many leaders who seem uninterested in teamwork are often just skeptical about the possibility of achieving it or afraid that acknowledging the need for it might reflect poorly on them. In these cases, success is possible as long as team leaders are willing to start the process with good intentions.

- Is this the right time?

Certain situations make it difficult to effectively implement the feedback process. You should reconsider conducting the sessions if any of the following situations exist:

- The team is very new. A team should have been together for a minimum of six to eight weeks prior to utilizing this assessment. For new teams, it would be better just to introduce the model and discuss the behaviors of a cohesive team.
- There is about to be a change in the nature of the team. The time is probably not right if a team member will be leaving or the team's responsibilities are about to change significantly. In those situations, it would be better to just give a presentation on the model and then wait to conduct the assessment until the team is stable.
- There is going to be or recently has been a significant organizational change, such as a merger, a reorganization, or a new CEO.
- The team has an unusually heavy workload with impending deadlines.

### ***The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team Model***

Below is a brief summary of the five behaviors.

- Trust One Another – When team members are genuinely transparent and honest with one another, they are able to build vulnerability- based trust.
- Engage in Conflict Around Ideas – When there is trust, team members are able to engage in unfiltered, constructive debate of ideas.
- Commit to Decisions – When team members can offer opinions and debate ideas, they will be more likely to commit to decisions.
- Hold One Another Accountable – When everyone is committed to a clear plan of action, they will be more willing to hold one another accountable.
- Focus on Achieving Collective Results – The ultimate goal of building greater trust, conflict, commitment, and accountability is one thing: the achievement of results.

### ***Building Trust***

The first and most important behavior is to build trust. Trust is all about vulnerability. Team members who trust one another can be comfortable being open and even exposed to one another regarding their failures, weaknesses, and fears. **Vulnerability-based trust** is predicated on the simple and practical idea that people who are willing to admit the truth about themselves are not going to engage in the kind of political behavior that wastes everyone's time and energy and, more important, makes it difficult to achieve real results.

Team members who lack trust often exhibit the following behaviors:

- Conceal their weaknesses and mistakes from one another
- Hesitate to ask for help or provide constructive feedback

- Don't offer help to people outside of their own areas of responsibility
- Jump to conclusions about the intentions and aptitudes of others without attempting to clarify them
- Fail to recognize and tap into one another's skills and experiences
- Waste time and energy managing their behaviors for effect
- Hold grudges
- Find reasons to avoid spending time together

Team members need to be comfortable being vulnerable around one another so that they will be unafraid to honestly say things like "I was wrong," "I made a mistake," "I need help," "I'm not sure," "You're better than I am at that," and "I'm sorry." Unless they can bring themselves to readily speak these words when the situation calls for it, they will waste time and energy thinking about what they should say and wondering about the true intentions of their peers. For a team to establish real trust team members, including the leader, must be willing to take risks without a guarantee of success. They will have to be vulnerable without knowing whether that vulnerability will be respected and reciprocated.

### ***Mastering Conflict***

Trust is a prerequisite for addressing the second behavior, mastering conflict. Only team members who trust one another are going to feel comfortable engaging in unfiltered, passionate debate around issues and decisions. Otherwise, they are likely to hold back their opinions.

That's not to say that some teams that lack trust don't argue. It's just that their arguments are often destructive. Team members aren't usually listening to one another's ideas and then reconsidering their points of view; they're figuring out how to manipulate the conversation to get what they want. Or they don't even argue with their colleagues face-to-face; instead, they vent about them in the hallway after a meeting is over.

When we speak of mastering conflict, we are talking about productive, ideological conflict - passionate, unfiltered debate around issues of importance to the team.



Teams that fear conflict:

- Have boring meetings
- Create environments where back-channel politics and personal attacks thrive
- Ignore controversial topics that are critical to team success
- Fail to tap into all the opinions and perspectives of team members
- Waste time and energy with posturing and politics

Even among the best teams, conflict is always at least a little uncomfortable. No matter how clear everyone is that a conflict is focused on issues, not personalities, it is inevitable that at some point someone will feel personally attacked. It's unrealistic for a team member to say, "I'm sorry, but I don't agree with your approach to the project" and not expect the other person to feel some degree of personal rejection. But if team members are not making one another uncomfortable at times, if they never push one another outside of their emotional comfort zones during discussions, it is extremely likely that they are not making the best decisions for the organization.

### ***Achieving Commitment***

Like trust, conflict is important not in and of itself but because it enables a team to work on the next behavior: achieving commitment. When team members are unwilling to weigh in and share their opinions, there is a high likelihood that they are not going to commit to whatever decision is made.

A team that fails to commit:

- Creates ambiguity among team members about direction and priorities
- Watches windows of opportunity close due to excessive analysis and unnecessary delay
- Breeds lack of confidence and fear of failure
- Revisits discussions and decisions again and again
- Encourages second-guessing among team members

Teams that commit to decisions and standards do so because they know how to embrace two separate but related concepts: buy-in and clarity.

Buy-in is the achievement of honest emotional support for a decision. Too often, consensus is not real. False consensus arises when, instead of discussing the conflict, team members just nod their agreement and move on.

Commitment is about a group of individuals buying in to a decision precisely when they don't naturally agree. In other words, it's the ability to defy a lack of consensus. When people know that their colleagues have no reservations about disagreeing with one another and that every available opinion and perspective has been unapologetically aired, they will have the confidence to embrace a decision.

Good leaders drive commitment among the team by first extracting every possible idea, opinion, and perspective. Then, comfortable that nothing has been left off the table, they have the courage and wisdom to step up and decide, one that is sure to run counter to at least one of the team members, and usually more.

The fact is, however, that most people don't really need to have their ideas adopted (a.k.a. "get their way") in order to buy in to a decision. They just want to have their ideas heard, understood, considered, and explained within the context of the ultimate decision. Clarity requires that teams avoid assumptions and ambiguity and that they end discussions with a clear understanding about their final decisions.

When it comes to commitment, the most critical ground rules that team members must agree to relate to timeliness at meetings, responsiveness in communication, and general interpersonal behavior. They must also commit to other principles such as purpose, values, mission, strategy, and goals. At any given time, all the members of a team must also know what the team's top priority is and how each of them contributes to moving it forward.

### ***Embracing Accountability***

The fourth behavior of cohesive teams is embracing accountability. Members of effective teams hold one another accountable, and they don't rely on the leader to do so. That's because asking the leader to be the primary source of accountability is inefficient and breeds politics. It is far more effective when team members go directly to one another and give frank, honest feedback.

Teams that do not hold one another accountable:

- Create resentment among team members who have different standards of performance
- Encourage mediocrity
- Miss deadlines and key deliverables
- Place an undue burden on the team leader as the sole source of discipline

When it comes to teamwork, accountability means the willingness of team members to remind one another when they are not living up to agreed-on performance standards. Direct, peer-to-peer accountability is based on the notion that peer pressure and the distaste for letting down a colleague will motivate a team player more than any fear of authoritative punishment or rebuke.

The key to making accountability part of a team's culture is the willingness of the team leader to model the behavior by stepping right into the middle of a difficult situation to remind individual team members of their responsibilities, in terms of both behavior and results. Accountability starts with the leader. Although the leader should not be the primary source of accountability, he or she should be the ultimate source.

Perhaps the most important challenge of building a team on which people hold one another accountable is overcoming the understandable reluctance of individuals to give one another critical feedback. The most effective way to overcome this reluctance is to help people realize that failing to provide peers with constructive feedback means that they are letting them down personally. By holding back, we hurt not only the team, but also our teammates. Sometimes this is the only compelling argument that can convince a well-meaning and caring teammate to step into the discomfort of telling someone what he, she or they need to hear.

### ***Focusing on Results***

The only way a team can be certain it will remain focused on collective results is to ensure that team members are holding one another accountable for what they need to do.

When a team fails to focus on results, it:

- Rarely defeats its competitors
- Loses achievement-oriented employees
- Encourages team members to focus on their own careers and individual goals
- Becomes easily distracted
- Stagnates and fails to grow

Truly cohesive teams focus obsessively on the collective results of the entire organization. They are intolerant of actions and behaviors that serve the interests of individuals but that don't promote the common good. As a result, team members are willing to make sacrifices in their organizations in order to drive the collective results.

What is it that makes it so hard to stay focused on collective results? We have a strong and natural tendency to look out for ourselves before others, even when those others are part of our families and our teams. Once that tendency kicks in, it can spread like a disease, quickly eroding the roots of teamwork until eventually trust has been destroyed.

The key to avoiding this problem lies in keeping results in the forefront of people's minds. A good way to focus attention is to use a visible scoreboard of some kind. A scoreboard focuses everyone's efforts on one thing: winning. It provides unambiguous information about how the team is doing, and how much time the members have left if they want to improve the final outcome.

Results-oriented teams establish their own measurements for success. They don't allow themselves the wiggle room of subjectivity ("Is the CEO happy with us this month?"), feelings ("I feel like we're doing pretty well right now"), or outside opinions ("Did you see what that analyst wrote about us in his industry report?"). They commit early and publicly to what the team will achieve and continually review progress against those expected achievements (a.k.a. the scoreboard).

### ***Wrap-up***

In the end, functional teams are built on a foundation of trust (vulnerability trust) between all team members. If you have it on your team, it's all you need to know to build the rest of a successful "team" oriented organizational structure. And if you don't, well it's also all you need to know in that you cannot successfully establish a high-performing team.

It is a fact, for a team to maximize its production and effectiveness, trust matters most. Once it is established, working in an environment where conflict (healthy debate) is encouraged, commitment exists from all members to the agreed upon idea or direction, there is collaborative accountability with complete focus on results is completely achievable.

## ***References and Suggested Reading***

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