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Dear Reader,

Working in teams is as much a challenge as a necessity, because of the diversity of the membership of teams. The differences between members are many, and they include personality, preferred pace of work, a focus on analyzing or on finding solutions, a need to share personal feelings or to avoid them, family culture, and the personal history of each individual. All these differences form the background against which managers struggle as they attempt to form teams that work seamlessly and effectively. Is this an impossible dream?

Perhaps. Or may be not, if we pay sufficient attention to the little things that can make a big difference. Ernie Turner, President of LIM LLC and Team Coach for over thirty years, says team coaches have many opportunities to help. He calls it "**Gentle Interventions**", the title of his upcoming book. This month we share with you one such intervention.

Enjoy the reading,

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month

*"A man with a watch knows what time it is.
A man with two watches is never sure."*

Segal's Law



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Norms: Rules of Engagement

By Ernie Turner

Alberto (not his real name), the CEO of a newly merged company was having a difficult time engaging his recently formed Executive Team. As a Latino he was very attentive to the personal needs of his staff, sometimes at the cost of being punctual to his Executive Team meetings. His Executive Team consisted of 6 other members — two Americans (the CFO and VP for HR), one British man (President of the American subsidiary), two Dutch (President of the Dutch subsidiary and his Commercial Director), and one French (head of the Swiss subsidiary). I had been invited to attend one of their Executive Team's off-site meetings in New York City with the intent of supporting them in becoming a higher performing team.

We had dinner together the evening before the formal meeting began so we could all get to know one another at a personal level. Our dinner meeting went very well — good food, good conversation, a good start. It was the next morning where the ambience of the night before became derailed.

The two Dutch members of the team arrived at 8:15, 15 minutes before the meeting was scheduled to begin, and all the others showed up on time with the exception of Alberto. As we patiently waited over several cups of coffee and small talk, I could sense the uneasiness of the team, especially the two members from the Netherlands who were frequently looking at their watches and exchanging whispers in Dutch. Finally, around 9 o'clock the CEO comes in with a big smile and a hug for everyone and an invitation to help ourselves to a cup of coffee. All politely declined except Hans who couldn't help himself by saying, 'Alberto, we've already had three cups while we've been waiting for you.' Alberto let the comment fade away without as much as an apology and simply said, 'then let's begin our meeting.'

I briefly reiterated my contract with the team that I had spelled out the night before — to observe them while they worked on their business agenda, paying attention to their level of participation, how they took decisions, how they shared in the leadership of the meeting and offering any 'just in time' suggestions, tools or feedback for improvement. I got a quick acceptance of my offer from everyone and then pulled my chair away from the table so I was as invisible as possible while still able to hear and see what was going on.

The late start was obviously still an issue with Hans and his commercial director as the two of them were reticent to get engaged and hide their disappointment. I could sense that the others were not nearly as optimistic and involved as they had been over dinner the night before.

So just before the morning break I pulled myself up to the table and asked if I could lead a very quick 'feedback' session that would only take 10 minutes. Alberto welcomed my offer and the others nodded in agreement. I said, "I have two questions for you — the first question is 'What's been working well so far in our meeting?' The second question is 'What do we need to improve upon in order for us to be a more engaged and higher performing team?'" I asked them to take two minutes and jot down their suggestions before we heard from everyone. We began with the appreciative question first and everyone was able to find something good to say — even Hans. Then I asked for the suggestions for improvement. We went around the table. When we got to Hans he said, 'Alberto, with all due respect, we never begin our meetings on time. I've calculated that just this morning we wasted \$40K just in the lost half hour from 8:30-9:00 — multiplying 30 minutes by our respective salaries. This is not the way to run a business.' I had always heard that the Dutch were direct and now I experienced it first-hand.

Alberto, looked surprised and taken aback; he turned to me and said, 'Ernie, now what do we do? You've just opened a can of worms!' I responded by asking if as a team they had agreed upon team norms yet. Alberto said 'No, what's that?' "Rules of Engagement" was my quick response. "And, if you're interested I can help you establish your own 'rules of engagement' after the break. Alberto's quick reply was a simple — 'Please!' I asked them all to think of one rule or norm that they felt was critical for them to become a higher performing team during the break and that we would quickly hear what was on everyone's mind and come to quick consensus on 'rules of engagement'.

During the break Hans and several others came up to me and thanked me for this timely intervention. After break I facilitated a quick norm-setting session that served as their team's rules of engagement.

Norms:

What? Team Norms are expected behaviors that everyone on the team accepts and commits to adopt.

Why? To make implicit expectations explicit, and thus reduce ambiguity that often leads to frustration, anger, hurt feelings and poor engagement.

How?

1. Inform the team what norms are and why they're so important for teams that aspire to work at a higher level of performance.
2. Invite everyone to write down one norm / rule (preferably something that is visible or audible) that s/he believes will lead to higher team performance, i.e. 'we begin our meetings on time and end on time'; 'we put our mobiles on 'off' during our meetings'.
3. Exchange what everyone has written and document this for all to see.
4. Ensure that everyone understands the meaning of each norm.
5. Adopt these norms using a decision-making process that is simple and clear.
6. Post these norms so everyone is constantly conscious of their norms.
7. Adapt these norms into a High Performing Team Instrument by simply putting a rating scale next to each norm and apply this instrument periodically (2-3 times a year) so everyone gets an opportunity to provide feedback on how they're working as a team.

So What? Take the time to set team norms in every team you belong to. This will dramatically increase the level of participation and engagement. Review them periodically; add, subtract or edit.





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