LIM
Leadership in International Management

Dear Reader,

Based on some positive feedback we received on our last issue, we decided to continue sharing some real-life stories about team coaching. In this issue, we have contributions from Katyayni Kumar, a participant in a LIM Leadership Development Program in India, and Ruby Palma from LIM Philippines.

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month
"Let us rise up and be thankful."   Buddha

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Today I Am Feeling Very Good

by Katyayni Kumar[1]

I have recently started my operation in a plant in Ahmedabad, India. Ours is a very new plant, which was started just before the recession, so the factory management team is "blessed" with different types of challenges: loss of business, high fixed costs, little success, which in turn adversely impacted the teamwork and spirits.

The factory Management Team consists of 11 managers, and for some reason it was the general

tendency to shift the locus of control outside the sphere of our own influence. This resulted in a lot of blaming others, something we lived through every day in our morning meetings. The Factory Manager, with his best intentions, used to repeat the same instructions to the individuals, but things were simply not moving at the desired speed. People became reluctant to attend these morning meetings, and they took place only when the factory manager was present. At the same time, in private conversations the managers frequently criticized each other.

Observing all these challenges, I proposed that the team have a weekly meeting on each Friday (in place of the morning meetings), where each manager would present two things:

1. A weekly plan for the coming week

2. An indication of what support he needed from others, specifying what he needed and from whom

Today we conducted our first planning meeting, and as we started I could read in their faces the feeling of individuals that it was going to be a useless activity. To make things worse, the majority of the managers did not even come with their weekly plan, as I had requested.

So I suggested that the team devote the first 10 minutes of our meeting to developing the weekly plan for their respective function. The Team members worked on the plans and shared them with the whole team, also indicating what support they expected and from whom.

That was when I observed a very surprising thing: people were not criticizing nor blaming each other; on the contrary, they were telling up-front "I need this support from you", and the individuals were accepting it, replying "Yes, I will give you the support". We had a very fruitful discussion where everyone was participating, and the intervention of the Factory Manager was very minimal. The atmosphere was very positive. At the end of the meeting, I suggested a process for voting if we should continue with this type of meetings in the future. I have to add that we used the Fist Five process, where people close their eyes so they don't get influenced by what others vote, and just raise one, two, three, four or five fingers. On a scale of 1 (no way) to 5 (absolutely yes!) the rating was 4 except for one person, who voted 3.

This is just the beginning, and the process has to go a long way before we can be certain of the result. But I was touched by the positive energy that flew within the team. I did this utilizing my learned team coaching skills, and it worked!

Developing Trust

by Ruby Palma[2]

I was called to work as a Team Coach with an accounting team at an energy corporation in the Philippines. The team was composed of senior staff with an average of 15 years tenure, and of junior staff, who have an average of 1 year. I designed a two-day workshop to help them become a high performing team. Their current situation was not bad but not ideal; while working side by side for almost a year now, the senior member had been tolerant of the junior member while the junior member had been a bit wary of the senior member. There was not much interaction and very little collaboration.

Given the new challenges of the company the team is faced with the requirement of stepping up and embracing the role of a "business partner". As a business partner, the team members are expected to go beyond the numbers and move from a transactional mode to a proactive, customer- and solution-oriented mindset.

The session started on a high note with everyone expressing high expectations. Each one shared one question they wanted to have addressed during the workshop, which indicated a high level of engagement.

I knew, and so did they, that in order for the team to collectively move towards a higher team performance, each member had to work with the other members of the team in a different way. However the reality was that the "old" behaviors kept the team from working together in a collaborative and meaningful way, and among several reasons, I noticed they didn't trust each other. The Comptroller (overall leader) thought that this mindset, if not improved, would keep the team from moving forward.

I designed a session where the team members had to share past accomplishments, which helped the newer members learn about the organization, and also created an appreciative atmosphere. During dinner, I invited them to each select one personal question they would like to both answer themselves and to hear others' answers; this was a welcome activity, very different from traditional dinners where people talk sports or business. The team exchanged stories and everyone had fun. That activity gave both the old and the new employees an appreciation of each others' uniqueness, contributions and gifts. The senior appreciated the technical savvy and storytelling skills, and energy of the new members while the new members admired the innovativeness and the wisdom of the senior members. Hearing personal stories of pain, sacrifice and joy manifested the members' willingness to share and to trust each other. They began to see each other with a different perspective and gained a deeper respect.

Another activity that helped in developing trust was a 'talk and walk' session, where they had, in pairs, the opportunity to exchange insights and share a memorable moment with each other.

After the session, the team leader indicated to me that she had noted an openness to change in the group, and she heard people give commitments and support to other members. I had noted that too, and also the other members of the team expressed hope and excitement about the future of the team and the company.

This left me thinking. For teams to become high performing, trust is a basic and critical ingredient. However, in most cases, developing trust amongst members is not only elusive but also difficult to teach, and is therefore, best demonstrated and experienced in order to be learned. Giving people the opportunity to share personal, and memorable stories, in a non threatening atmosphere engages people because stories people tell show their human side, reveal a lot of strengths and lessons learned in the past, but most often taken for granted at work. It sends a message that people are willing to be open and share a part of themselves, to express deep feelings and thoughts with another because they are sincere and willing to trust. Trust begets trust, removes the perceived barriers a lot of teams bring with them (i.e. junior/senior) and in most cases, translates in more energized, more committed members — manifestation of a team on its way towards higher performance.

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