

Session 1.6 | 4 Ways to Make a Positive Impact

We have been looking at the 3 essential attributes of The Leader Worth Following:

1. Knowledge (Competency, Expertise, Education, Experience) Relevant Competency
2. Connection (Relationship, Care, Support) who and what matter most?

In this session, we are going to continue talking about Connection and look at 3 Practices for great connection of Every Great Team.

Take just a moment right now to download the Worksheet for this session so you can follow along.

A CFO once said to the CEO, What happens if we invest in our people and then they leave us?

The CEO thought for a moment and said, What happens if we don't invest in our people, and they stay?

'Train people well enough so they can leave. Treat them well enough so they don't want to.' - Richard Branson

Great team culture is less about a list of characteristics and more about understanding your team, discerning their uniqueness, and working together to achieve remarkable results.

Team members bring their own ideas, experiences, education, and skills. You know all the competencies that we looked at when we talk about knowledge. They bring all of those things to the team to enable the team to work toward the common goal. When a new member joins the team, the team and its culture changes.

Every addition or replacement of a team member changes the team and its culture – some slightly, but others significantly.

To complicate matters, it takes one to three years for a new team member to fully integrate with their team and effectively contribute to the team's shared goals.

If that's true, how can teams be effective in the interim? While the team is trying to jell together, while the team is trying to stimulate the new team member, and what if team members are added frequently? How does the team continue to make progress, remain productive, or produce results with a continuously evolving team culture?

Why is it such a challenge to get everybody headed and leading in the same direction? Why do team members get frustrated? How do you get them excited about what you are doing?

These are all great questions to consider.

Years ago, when our daughter was in elementary school, I was driving Madison and her friend to school. To avoid busy traffic, I turned down to this narrow road between her home and her school.

As I was driving we've talked about her morning and her plans for school, and at one point the passenger side tires left the pavement for just a few moments spinning up gravel and grass next to the vehicle. I kind of laughed and told Madison to keep her side on the road – the same thing you say to your kids, right?

She kind of grinned and I could tell she was in deep though for few minutes.

Then Madison asked, "Dad, why does mom always complain about your driving?" For the record, Sarah doesn't always complain about my driving. In fact, she complains less today than she used to.

I responded, "Probably because I drive fast sometimes."

Madison was quiet for a moment. Then she said, "Dad, It's really not all about getting there fast. Sometimes it's about enjoying the trip together."

What about you? Are you having fun? Is your team excited about what you are building and becoming together?

As we've coached teams and leaders across the country, we've learned that there are 3 things every leader must understand about team culture in order to effectively lead the team.

Here's what they are...

1. Do you work with a team or a family?

This is an important question – one that every team member needs to be able to answer, and leaders need to understand if the people they lead function as a team or a family.

Most teams struggle because they haven't answered this question - whether or not they are a team or a family.

Often teams are an intriguing mixture of both.

After spending several years studying executive leadership teams, interviewing scores of executives and managers, analyzing thousands of data points, and writing hundreds of pages on this topic, I found that most working groups truly believe that they are a real team.

Yet most of these "teams" struggle because their leaders and members are not functioning as a real team.

You must be able to answer this one fundamental question, Am I working with a team or a family?

Before you accept that new job or take the leap with that new project. Before you stick your neck out with your colleagues or your organization or before you quit your current job you should be able to definitively answer that question.

If a leader's intention is to develop a team with a family-style organizational culture, there are going to be significant hurdles with relationships and performance.

Mark Miller included a practical example when he wrote on this topic years ago, when illustrating a team he said:

If you are a manager of a baseball team and your second baseman can't catch ground balls you replace him. However, if you've chosen to embrace a family paradigm rather than a team paradigm, you probably leave the underperforming second baseman on the field. In fact, he'll both stay on the team, and likely stay on the field. You'll feel helpless to replace him because he's part of the family.

Family often trumps team

This week I was reminded of a conversation I had a few months ago with a leader of a large organization. We discussed a couple of areas within his organization that we're in decline. He noted that the decline was primarily the result of underperforming leaders in these areas.

He acknowledged that the decline in these areas was also adversely affecting the organization and the leadership team as a whole, and he had addressed the deficiencies with the leaders on numerous occasions.

Then he said this, I can't just go in there and fire them.

When I asked why he wasn't willing to hold them accountable, he thought for a moment and said, Would you like to go with me to sit down with their families and explain why I am firing their dad?

Immediately, I understood this leader and his organization operate from the perspective that team members are "family" members. As a result, they're more interested in supporting the family than developing a team. That's not necessarily a bad thing. They just need to understand it. The team will continue to underperform its full potential and productivity.

I don't want you to misunderstand. Neither option – team or family – is inherently better or worse. That's not the point, and regardless of the discomfort you are feeling in your current situation, it's more important to know whether you are working with a team or a family than it is to try to change the group from one to the other.

Every leader and every team leans one way or the other, and if you are going to serve your team and your organization most effectively, you must know if you are part of a team or a family.

Worksheets for this session:

There are 10 questions to help you evaluate your team and your organization.

1. Are people strategically selected for each role or are roles created for people to move into?
2. Are team members encouraged to specialize in key areas or are their roles more generalized?
3. Is competition normal or is it discouraged?
4. Is conflict productive or is it avoided?
5. Are goals common or uncommon?
6. Is performance primary or is it generally a non-issue?
7. Is under-performance addressed or tolerated?
8. Are expectations clear or often unspoken?
9. Is feedback given freely or often withheld?
10. Is measurement vital to the organization or is it absent?

The first part of each question is characteristic of a real team. Take a look at those questions and then determine how does your group measure up – do you serve with a team or with a family?

Now, I want to think about something else here for few minutes.

Some might say that you can't have a team without genuine concern for the team members. After all, doesn't every leader need to serve the team with patience, passion, and care? Isn't that were talking about when we're talking about connection and relationship?

In fact, that's true. I have observed these relational qualities in nearly every high-performing team, and it's these qualities that become catalysts for higher levels of performance. They represent authentic team community.

So shouldn't family be a part of team culture?

There's a distinction and here's why – being a family member is unconditional but being a team member is conditional.

Mark Miller's recommendation was to treat your family like family and your team like a team.

We're looking at three things that every leaders must understand about team culture to effectively lead the team.

2. How do you define success?

Every organization and every team define success differently, so leaders and team members must clearly understand what success looks like for their team. Only then can team members begin working toward shared goals.

When you clearly and specifically define success, you'll get better results as a leader.

Make sure you and your team understand how you define success.

3. What is the team culture?

To lead a team to grow and improve performance, leaders must understand the team culture.

What does your team do well? What do others say about your team? Does the team regularly execute successful strategies?

There are a number of questions every team leader can use to identify team culture included in your worksheet.

Take a few moments and review those nine questions to evaluate your team culture.

Pause the session for just a few moments until you review them.

1. Do team members value other's opinions?
2. Do they respect management and their peers?
3. Do they desire to see each other succeed, or are they jealous of another's accomplishments?
4. Do they have a genuine concern for each other?
5. Do they have and appreciate a sense of humor?
6. Do they work hard?
7. Do they have the freedom to participate in decisions, or do they wait to be told what to do?
8. Do they trust each other?
9. Does your team possess the experience, passion, and skill to do the job well?

How did you do? How well do you know your team? Do you know if you're leading a team or a family? Does the team understand what success looks like? Is everyone doing their part to achieve success?

Those are the 3 Practices of Every Great Team.

Next Session

In the next session, we'll continue with our discussion about Connection, one of the 3 essential attributes of the leader worth following, and we're going to look at 4 Ways to Make a Positive Impact with people.

If you haven't already, take just a moment right now to download the Worksheet, review the questions that we've talked about, and complete the action steps for this session.

Remember, when it comes to connection and relationship, you don't have to get it perfect, you just need to take the next step.

I'll see you in the next session.

Fast Action Steps

1. Take the time now to answer the questions listed under point 1 and 3.
2. Clearly and specifically define success.