Focus

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Building High-performance Teams - I

High-performance teams are difficult to build, but they are well worth the effort. A large portion of my consulting time is dedicated to helping leaders improve the performance of their senior management teams, and I'm going to share insights to help you build better teams.

Kindergarten students outperform CEOs

Great teams have diverse skills sets and flexible approaches to challenges. In a design exercise called the Marshmallow Challenge, Peter Skillman at TED (as in, "TED Talks") discovered recent kindergarten graduates outperformed all adults except architects & engineers and teams of CEOs *and* executive assistants. Teams consisting solely of CEOs fell short of the kids. The worst performers were recent business school graduates. Why? They were trained to create a *single* right plan, and had no time for a do-over when that failed.

Kindergarten students work differently. First, they're not constrained by rigid hierarchies and silo mentalities. Second, rapid prototyping is natural for them; they call this activity "play." They learn quickly from failures and build upon successes without drama and finger pointing.

Thankfully, architects and engineers win a design challenge! But what about the teams of CEOs and executive assistants? Just a single executive administrator brings facilitation skills to the team, improving communication and encouraging exchange of ideas. So, great teams have specialized skills *and* facilitation skills.

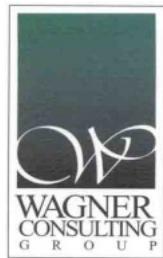**Shared vision, goals, and purpose matter**

Great teams trust each other, in the sense that they know their teammates' intentions are to

help the team succeed. Other important attributes are clarity of vision -- where we want to end up, goals -- mileposts to foster accountability, and purpose -- a shared sense of how we're connected to each other.

Acknowledge elephants in the room

High-performance teams embrace passionate, unfiltered debate about ideas, but they don't criticize each other. Leaders set the stage by being vulnerable (for example, "I don't know the answer yet.") and teammates openly acknowledge personal biases and shortcomings. Trust is the foundation, and respect is the cornerstone of great teams. A high-trust environment is a huge performance booster of speed and quality.

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Visit my Fun Stuff website page for a link to the Marshmallow Challenge

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