



The 12 Characteristics of High-Performance Teams

When it comes to professional success, the health of your team — the people you work with day in and day out in pursuit of a common, specific goal — is critical.

Here are the 12 common characteristics of teams who work harmoniously, continually meet and surpass their goals, and achieve at high levels. How does your team measure up?

1. **Clear Purpose.** The vision, mission, goals, and tasks of the team have been defined and accepted by all members, and an action plan has been established to achieve them.
2. **Informality.** The climate around a high-performance team tends to be informal, comfortable, and relaxed. There are no obvious tensions or signs of boredom, and fun is a part of daily activity.
3. **Participation.** There's a lot of discussion, and all team members are encouraged to participate.
4. **Listening.** High-performance teams use effective listening techniques, such as questioning, paraphrasing, and summarizing to get out ideas.
5. **Civilized Disagreement.** There's disagreement, but members are comfortable with this and show no signs of avoiding, smoothing over, or suppressing conflict.
6. **Consensus Decisions.** For important decisions, the goal is to reach a consensus through open discussion of ideas and avoidance of formal voting or easy compromises.
7. **Open Communication.** Members feel free to express their feelings on the task as well as on the group's operation. There are few hidden agendas. Constructive communication takes place inside and outside of meetings.
8. **Clear Roles and Work Assignments.** There are clear expectations about roles, and when action is taken, clear assignments are made, accepted, and carried out. Work is fairly distributed.

9. **Shared Leadership.** While there is a formal team leader, leadership functions shift from time to time, depending upon the circumstances, the needs of the group, and the skills of the players. The formal leader models the appropriate behavior and helps establish positive norms.
10. **External Relations.** Members spend time developing key outside relationships, mobilizing resources, and building credibility with important stakeholders in other parts of the organization.
11. **Style Diversity.** Successful teams have a broad spectrum of team player types, including players who emphasize attention to task, goal setting, a focus on the process, and raising questions about how the team is doing.
12. **Self-assessment.** Periodically the team stops to examine how well it is functioning and what may be interfering with its effectiveness.

Is your team currently falling short in any of these 12 areas? If so, schedule a time soon to go through this list together. Establish clear action steps for improving your performance in the areas your team is weakest in, commit to those actions, and set a date in the near future to reconvene and assess your progress. The effort you put into strengthening your team will come back to you a thousand-fold. You will accomplish your objectives with greater efficiency and success. You will enjoy recognition and rewards from the people around you. Best of all, work will become a far more energizing, enjoyable, fulfilling experience for everyone involved.

Your Team Stats:

When it comes to team size, there are no hard and fast rules, but there are three points to keep in mind. First, no one size is best for all situations. Second, more people mean more resources. And third, more people require more skills and effort to coordinate. Your team is typical if it has from 3 to 30 players, although most have 5 to 15.

There's also no precise blueprint for the leadership of a team. You may have no designated leader, you may have a leader elected by the team, or you may have a formal leader assigned by management. Your team leader is not necessarily the person who is the most technically competent, or the best at any single function. It is more important that the leader is skilled at facilitation, meeting management, and bringing out the best in your team. Your leader's most essential role is defining the authority that the team has, rather than allowing you to stumble blindly. Your team is much more empowered when you know how far you can go.