

Can You Coach a Team?

WHAT EXACTLY IS “TEAM COACHING”?

Let's clear up one misconception first. **Team coaching is not the same as “team building”**. “Team building” tends to be one event and is usually quite social. Team building is usually done as a retreat where the leader is taking the team offsite for a day or two. The objective of team building is to create greater trust and camaraderie within the team. Trust and camaraderie is obviously important for a team's effectiveness but it is not enough to create an effective team.

Team coaching takes a much **broader and more customized approach**. Team Coaching covers all aspects of effective teams while focusing on what the team needs most.

Effective teams have a number of characteristics.

- First, good teams have an **effective leader** who believes the team is necessary to his or her success.
- Second, good teams have **members who know each other relatively well** and spend significant time together (either in person or remotely).
- Third, effective teams engage in **“good group process”**. They have regular, well run meetings. They engage in healthy debate and discussion. They get things accomplished.
- Fourth, an effective team has a **focus**. That focus can be a task or an objective or a set of goals or a vision statement. Whatever the form, the focus must be clear to all members.

Team coaching involves coaching an entire team on these four factors: coaching the leader, building trust and understanding between members, refining group process and creating a clear focus for the team. Like individual coaching, team coaching will be **tailored to the team's greatest need in one or more of these four areas**.

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE LEADER

One more misconception: **teams are not solely reliant on the leader to be successful.** Leaders can certainly create team success but the team needs to participate in its own success. Teams that rely on the leader to make them effective are not teams and will not be effective. Hence the beauty of team coaching—**team coaching is about coaching the whole team not just the leader.**

HOW DOES TEAM COACHING WORK?

The Team Coaching process follows the individual coaching process. It follows the same three basic steps usually over a much longer time period.

1. The first step is **contracting**. Contracting involves agreeing between coach and client on the coaching objectives and coaching process. With a team, contracting is usually done with the leader but it can also be done with the whole team.
2. The second step is data gathering or **assessment**. Data gathering involves finding out how well the team manages all four factors listed above (team leadership, trust and camaraderie, group process, vision or focus). It also involves collecting some data on the individual styles and preferences of each team member. The assessment process usually re-enforces and often expands the coaching contract but even more importantly, **it drives buy-in** for team members.
3. Step three is **“coaching conversations”**. These conversations between the coach and the team and the coach and the leader usually occur as part of planning for and conducting regular team meetings. An important component of these coaching conversations will be getting to know individuals on the team in more detail particularly each person’s work preferences and core values.

As with individual coaching, these conversations help to raise awareness, practice skills and move the team forward on its objectives to continue to improve as a team.

4. **Re-evaluation and re-contracting.** Here the coaching contract can end or can be –re-contracted to work on some new objectives.

The Benefits of Team Coaching

- Like individual coaching, team coaching is **practical**. It is focused on real life issues and done in real time with the team.
- Team coaching gives the leader “another set of eyes”. Both the external coach and the assessments give the leader **objective data** that allows the leader to better evaluate and manage his or her own team.
- **Time is dedicated to building the effectiveness of the team.** Team effectiveness is not left solely to the leader or to happenstance.
- The team becomes aware of their strengths and challenges as a team and **creates and manages their own action plan** with the help of a coach.
- There are **no additional meetings**. The process works best when it utilizes regular team meetings for the coaching conversations.