

DREAM CATCHER CONSULTING

Teams Work! But How?



M. Beth Page

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Dedication

*This book is dedicated to my family.
You have taught me about people and relationships.
Thank you for your support and encouragement.*

About The Author

Beth Page, the founder of Dream Catcher Consulting, is a published author, international consultant, and coach who is dedicated to working with people who want to enhance performance and improve relationships.

Beth, who founded Dream Catcher Consulting in 2004, also is on the Faculty of Business and Management at University Canada West, a private university in Victoria, BC.

Previously, she held Organization Development and Human Resources positions with such firms as JDS Uniphase, Export Development Canada, and OmniMark Technologies Corporation. Beth also worked at Carleton University, Texas Tech University and Western Illinois University.



Education

Beth has a Master of Science in Organization Development from Pepperdine University, as well as a Master of Science Degree in College Student Personnel from Western Illinois University. She is a licensed consultant in the Hogan Personality Assessment, and certified as an Emotional Intelligence Coach (EQ). She also completed the Advanced Human Resources Management program at the University of Toronto, and holds a Certificate in Management Development from the School of Business at Carleton University, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Carleton University.

Professional Affiliations and Accomplishments

A Canadian Human Resources Professional (CHRP), Beth is a member of the British Columbia Human Resources Management Association and served on the Board of Directors of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers. She has been a featured speaker at a number of venues in Canada; in 2005, she was the keynote speaker at the HR and Capital Management Conference in Cyprus.

As an author, Beth wrote *Done Deal: Your Guide to Merger and Acquisition Integration*, which was based on her personal experience in post-merger integration of a number of high technology acquisitions and two years of academic research with top M&A experts in the field. She also is a contributing expert author to *Awakening the Workplace* published in 2006.

Acknowledgments

I am delighted to be offering this workbook as a practical tool for people who are working in teams. I am both a student of teams and a facilitator of what I have learned. Family, teammates, volunteer activities, employment relationships and school activities all offer rich learning opportunities about what helps Teams Work. I am grateful to each of the team experiences and the people I worked with who taught me the importance of team maintenance, team relationships and the opportunities for team success.

This book has benefited from the involvement, assistance and support of two incredible individuals. First, I offer my sincere thanks to my editor Phyllis Kennelly, who is the first reviewer of what I write. Her comments, suggestions and edits make my meaning and my message clear. A second thank you is extended to my business partner and friend Laura Min Jackson for her efforts to continue the dialogue and ensure that I have fully articulated my message. My message becomes stronger as a direct result and involvement of these two collaborators.

To my family and friends who encourage and support me as I approach each project, thank you.

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Teams Work

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Introduction

Teams Work! But How? This is a question that I often have been asked by clients who are feeling bruised by a particularly memorable and unpleasant “team” experience.

Too often, we find ourselves working in groups, yet lacking the experience or knowledge to cultivate the various qualities necessary to create a high-performing team.

Those of us who played sports while attending school may have picked up a few notions of what it takes to make a team work. However, team work while engaged in our organizational and volunteer activities requires different skills. Unlike school sports, we aren’t likely to find ourselves running drills as a group punishment because someone showed up late for a meeting (and having participated in several running drills when teammates showed up late for basketball practice), I can attest to the fact that it didn’t do much for building camaraderie on the basketball team, nor would it likely be viewed positively in an organizational environment. Working teams require effective communication processes, a clear set of common objectives and mutual accountability to truly leverage team performance.

This workbook has been written to offer you practical guidance and wisdom to help your team function more positively and productively. It includes actual group tasks that will help you progress towards your goal of becoming a high-performing team while at the same time paying attention to the process and interpersonal considerations that often cause teams to stagnate.

This workbook also features specific reflection and discussion exercises. I encourage you to complete them, and to share your responses with members of your team.

Enjoy the team experience!

Relationships Within Groups and Teams

Let's start by exploring the relationships within groups and teams. Throughout the workbook, you'll find tips, tools, exercises and strategies for creating and working with others in groups and teams.

Whether we're volunteers for a good cause, or employees in organizations, we find ourselves working as members of a group or a team to complete projects, organize events and provide services.

For the purposes of our exploration, Groups and Teams are defined below:

Groups: Two or more individuals, interacting and interdependent, who have a stable relationship, a common goal, and perceive themselves to be a group.

Teams: Groups that work closely together toward a common objective, and are accountable to one another. The accountability that members have to one another is the key element that defines a team and results in the potential for team performance.

Exercise:

List a few groups in your work and volunteer life _____

Assess if these are groups or teams, according to the above descriptions.

As you reflect upon your history, which might include membership on sports teams, volunteer activities, projects at work and/or membership in organizational departments, do you recall a particular instance where the group you worked with was tightly knit and highly productive?

If so, what were the characteristics of the experience that made it special?

Keep this list. Next, we'll be looking at some of the key activities that help to establish highly functioning teams. Please send me an email with any questions about working with groups and teams at beth@dreamcatcher-consulting.com.

Go Team Go - Working Within a Team

Our universe of possibility expands when we work in high-performing teams. Working together with shared accountability toward a common goal can be an exhilarating and worthwhile experience.

Here are a few keys to help create a high-performing team:

1. Have a preliminary discussion about group goals, values and ground rules for accomplishing the task or project. Regularly revisit this discussion to ensure that articulated standards are in place.
2. Allow for individual strengths and contributions to be leveraged.
3. Ensure that status updates are a regular part of meetings; consistent communication keeps people updated, motivated, and cohesive.
4. Create helpful structures for monitoring how the work is getting done, such as check-ins that allow each team member to comment on their feelings about progress.
5. Maintain a relentless focus and accountability on shared goals.
6. Have fun – great team experiences are often characterized as having two memorable components – hard work and a great time shared with team members.
7. Create ongoing connection opportunities that maintain and strengthen the lines of communication.
8. Encourage the building of interpersonal communication skills to ensure that everyone within the team can constructively address conflict before any issues escalate.

Working within a team offers tremendous opportunities for achieving great results. What are your experiences with groups and teams? What questions or comments do you have? Email me at beth@dreamcatcher-consulting.com

Beginnings

Having a great experience as a member of a group or a team begins with preliminary conversations. It is very tempting to dive into the task at hand without first setting aside some time to identify the criteria for a successful group experience. I invite you to follow the following steps to help your next project or group get off to a great start.

Getting Started:

1. Provide an opportunity for group members to establish connections with each other by facilitating introductions.

For a long-term project, consider a brief opening exercise that helps members get to know each other better. One exercise that works well is to give each member 3 minutes to create a personal coat of arms, and then take turns sharing it with the group (a template is provided at the end of this workbook).

2. Identify the guidelines that will help the members work together more effectively.

Miscommunication often arises when group members have not had a conversation about operating guidelines. For example: How important is it that meetings start and end on time? How will decisions be made? What is the guiding mission for the group? Establishing working guidelines upfront will help clarify such issues by defining acceptable practices.

3. Have a conversation that helps the members identify what success looks like for the project.

Setting aside time at the beginning of a project to discuss the dream of successful completion will be tremendously helpful. This discussion helps the group create a shared vision of success and can help guide the group's decisions and work over the long term.

A website that has more information on team activities can be found here:
<http://www.businessballs.com/>

People Own What They Create

When I begin working with a new group, I adhere to the principle that People Own What They Create. You can do this by focusing on two points. First, listen carefully to hear what gifts and strengths individuals can contribute to the project. Second, seek opportunities for each person to contribute to the group.

Each of us has an interest in sharing our gifts and talents so that we can make a positive contribution. If you are a member of a group, consider what gifts and talents you want to share with others.

Exercise:

Reflect for a moment on your previous group membership experiences and identify the positives of that experience.

Identify the gifts that you contributed to this team experience

Based on this past experience, identify the important elements of a positive team experience for you.

As you begin to identify those aspects that created your positive team experience, you begin to see opportunities for positive group experiences and relationships.

One way that new members can contribute to the group is to make decisions. As you begin working together, consider what opportunities exist for bringing topics to the group for discussion, decision and action. As each item gets discussed and decisions are made, each person can begin to measure progress and the group gains forward momentum.

As issues are brought forward and addressed, group members also experience a sense of inclusiveness. When individuals feel they are part of a group experience where their voices will be heard and they can participate fully, they take a stronger interest in the group's success. As group members and group leaders, we can create greater success by helping individuals participate more fully in these processes.

Creating Helpful Structures for Groups

Earlier, I recommended that at the beginning of each project, group members have a discussion about the guiding principles for working together. In addition, the following two tools also can help groups achieve greater success.

First, include an opportunity for each group member to be heard at each meeting. This might take the form of a “check in,” where group members let everyone know what has been happening for them over the past week, or it might take the form of an opening exercise that gets everyone participating in a shared experience. Finding a way to encourage all members’ participation at the beginning of a meeting becomes a powerful way of ensuring that each participant feels included in the group’s work.

A second tool is to have each member share an update on their area of the project’s focus. Some groups have the tendency to focus on the more urgent aspects of the project, and including regular status updates from all aspects of the project achieves two important objectives.

First, emerging issues get addressed before they become urgent. Second, all group members learn that “status updates” are a regular part of the meeting. As a result, they tend to make progress on their respective area of responsibility so that they will have an update to report. Status updates reinforce the idea that all work that is getting accomplished is important and enhances mutual accountability of the team. Finally, explore opportunities at each meeting to recognize all of the accomplishments of the group and its individual members.



Shared Accountability

Working as a member of a team creates shared accountability that doesn't exist when people are working on their own. The shared accountability that is created when members of a group come together to work on a significant project can be a key ingredient for the project's ultimate success.

Successful teams often report that the accountability team members had to each other is what really makes the difference. One strategy for creating shared accountability is to begin with the end in mind. One approach involves asking team members to visualize what a successful outcome for the project would look like, and inviting them to share their ideas of a successful outcome.

Another approach involves breaking into smaller groups, then reconvening:

- Divide team members into groups of three to have conversations about the objectives they have for their specific area of the project.
- Bring the small groups back together as a whole, and review all of the objectives that were identified.
- Ask each member what they need to help them achieve success with their objectives.
- Schedule regular check point for the team to come together to assess progress towards objectives and address obstacles to achievement.
- Develop a regular practice of notifying team members of task completion to keep other team members informed and up to date.
- Consistently raise concerns before they have the opportunity to become a crisis for the team.

When engaging in these practices, keep any notes and/or flip charts from the meeting and review them periodically to see if the team is on track, and to assess if adjustments need to be made. Also, saving the flipcharts allows the team to celebrate their accomplishments when the project is complete.

Beginning with the end in mind can offer the team members the opportunity to visualize and then begin to execute a shared vision for success. Maintaining a focus on these objectives and their progress serves as a crucial strategy for keeping all project members – as well as the project – on track.

Ongoing Connection

High-performing teams have a strong sense of cohesiveness, and the success of a complex project requires ongoing connection. However, some projects get off to a great start, with strong clarity on objectives and project milestones, only to devolve into crises because milestones aren't being achieved. What goes wrong?

A project may fall victim to lack of executive sponsorship, lose prominence over other pressing priorities, or be undermined by a host of other issues. What generally happens is that the project team responds to the most urgent item on their task list, and without regular, ongoing communication among team members, the project fades to the periphery until it re-surfaces as a crisis.

To ensure that the project continues to have visibility for team members and their organization, opportunities for ongoing connection need to be created and sustained. This also allows the team to address small issues before they escalate.

Communication by phone, email and face-to-face meetings provide the structure needed to ensure a successful outcome. These meetings can update the status, address the obstacles and provide the support required for a positive outcome. If the project is significant enough to be created, it is significant enough to be set up – and supported – for success.

Communication Audit:

How frequently are we communicating with each other? (Face to face, by email, phone, skype, or other technology?)

How often are we meeting formally?

How are we documenting our decisions?

How are we sharing the action items arising from our meeting?

What process are we using when an action won't be completed by the deadline?

What process will we use to ask for support when we encounter an obstacle?

Will additional meetings be scheduled at the request of a team member?

Training to Facilitate Ongoing Team Success

People are often thrown together in a team project without any additional training or skills to help the team members function well together. As a result, people leave projects having had a less-than-positive experience, which they may attribute to a specific individual or more generally to the experience of the team.

When I work with teams, I assess the members' existing skill set and identify areas that could benefit from additional development over the duration of the team project. Offering ongoing training opportunities in the areas of interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, decision making, project management and change management enhances team members' professional development while increasing the likelihood of the project's success.

These discussions facilitate another important way for team members to have a shared language, connection, and understanding of their differences. Being able to successfully communicate and manage intergroup conflict, particularly during complex projects, is one more way to achieve project success. For example, the Thomas-Kilman Conflict Style Inventory is a particularly helpful instrument. Team members complete a simple written assessment; the results are then used as the basis for a discussion about members' conflict styles, in which they talk about their dominant styles and what happens when they experience interpersonal conflict.



Time: A Great Trust Builder in Relationships

Trust gets built in relationships over time. Helping members of a team effectively communicate with each other is an important ingredient to building stronger, more trusting relationships.

Commitment, communication, action and consistent follow through are all necessary to building stronger trust in team relationships. Simple acts repeated consistently over time build trust and produce great results.

Exercise:

As you reflect on your team experiences, consider what actions you can take to build more trusting relationships.

Following are some suggested additional actions that you might take.

Actions Speak Louder than Words

- Fulfill commitments to team members.
- Be on time for all team meetings and activities.
- Let team members know immediately if completion of an activity is delayed.
- Consult team members on issues affecting the team.
- Help team members out when they encounter difficulty.
- Ensure team members have the support they need to be successful.

Is there anything on the above list that you could strengthen in yourself to build stronger trust with your fellow team members? What else would you add to this list? Send me an email and let me know what comes to mind for you.

Team Problem Solving

There are a variety of issues that teams must address if they are going to solve problems effectively, including issues related to the specific project, to team functioning, roles and responsibilities clarification, and team guidelines, to name only a few.

A team's problem-solving approach often evolves as problems occur. Many teams find it challenging to deal with a problem they are facing, while at the same time attempting to develop a methodology for solving problems.

One strategy for tackling problem-solving is to start with simple problems to solve. Taking some time in the non-time sensitive project phases of the team project will enable the team to clarify the problem solving approaches that will serve the project best in the longer term. Developing a process for solving problems from the outset will offer the team an approach as problems become more complex, time sensitive, and challenging.

Following a problem-solving session, schedule some "team maintenance" time to address any remaining questions and clarify recommendations for problem-solving approaches that can help resolve future issues.

One approach is holding "After Action Reviews." This practice, originally developed by the military and now widely used by organizations of all sizes, is an excellent learning tool, and asks team members to address the following questions:

What were the key events/steps that got us here? _____

What highs/lows did we experience? _____

What did we do well? Not so well? _____

Did we get the result we wanted? Why or why not? _____

What would we do differently next time? _____

What did we learn from this experience? _____

What are our next steps? _____

Your team's preferred problem-solving approach might vary, depending on the specific issue you are tackling. Greater overall success is likely with the help of a few After Action Review (AAR) discussions to facilitate team learning.

High Performance Teams

High performance teams don't happen by accident; the project, event or initiative is what brings a group of people together. However, paying attention to the roles and responsibilities of the team, effectively addressing issues as they arise and engaging in regular "team maintenance" activities such as check-ins are what allow teams to achieve high performance.

High-performing teams keep their focus on two aspects of their team: project outcomes and goals, and the functioning of the team. By engaging in regular team maintenance, you and your team can enjoy the rewards of high performance.

How do you know if you are in a high-performing team? The following questions will enable you to conduct a self reflection on your current team experience.

Is your team operating at peak performance? _____

What does your team know how to do really well? _____

What single wish do you have that would make your team much stronger?

What one step can you take to move the team forward? _____



Honoring Team Endings

Teams often come together for a finite period of time to work on a specific assignment or challenge. One of the most valuable times a team can experience is an appropriate opportunity for reflection and closure.

Moving beyond the “We Did It!” celebration, set aside some team time to mark the ending of the team, which can achieve two objectives.

First, it offers personal closure. The more intense the team experience, the more valuable the opportunity to personally acknowledge the team ending. Team members will likely find themselves along a continuum of “I’m ready to be done,” to “I don’t want it to end.” Being able to allow all perspectives to exist in a team closing conversation is important.

Second, the team closure conversation offers an opportunity to harness the learning from the experience, so that you can take the lessons learned with you into future team experiences. Our most significant personal learning happens in relationships with others. Taking time to reflect individually and as a team on our experience and our learning is a powerful way to engage in self development.

This is an opportunity for each member to identify what worked so it can be replicated in future experiences, and to avoid any obstacles that hampered your team’s performance.

A simple closing exercise can involve asking team members to answer the following three questions, first individually, and then by forming into groups of 3 to discuss their answers before capturing the full team’s learning. If your team is small, move directly from the individual reflection into the full team discussion.

How did I show up for this team? _____

Would I do anything differently next time? _____

What are the three highlights of this team experience for me? _____

*What is the one lesson I am taking away from this experience that I want to carry with me into future team projects?*_____

Participation in this closing team de-brief offers everyone the opportunity to discuss a shared experience and mark the team's conclusion. Even for those team members who are ready to move on, setting aside some precious time for this discussion will reap longer-term benefits.

Learn More About Creating Great Teams

Visit Dream Catcher Consulting at www.dreamcatcher-consulting.com

Keeping in Touch:

Do you have a great team story to share?

Would your organization or company newsletter benefit from an article on teams?

Is your association or corporation seeking a consultant, facilitator, or workshop leader?

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APPENDIX - Personal Coat of Arms

(Take 3 minutes and complete the following coat of arms. Use Pictures and/or words to capture your personal values and priorities in the coat of arms below. Share your coat of arms with your team members).

