GREAT TEAMWORK MAKES ANYTHING POSSIBLE

There's a lot more to teamwork than just forming one single team. Real success comes from the team-of-teams.

Author: Graham Winter

Let's Start With A Reality Check

Great teams achieve the near impossible. We see it in Olympic sport, in emergency services, the arts and military, and in business when great teamwork turns a mediocre plan into an outstanding result.

However, we live in a world where every enterprise routinely calls a group of more than two people a team. There are leadership teams, sales teams, business unit teams and projects teams and so on.

Organisations say they have teams, but then bemoan disunity amongst leaders and silo-behaviour slowing the business and disrupting service and the bottom line.

The harsh reality is that despite these businesses regularly using the word 'team' to describe business groups or functions they fail to develop the single greatest capability to succeed in the complex and ever changing world: having the whole business work together as one team (i.e. a team-of-teams).

This recipe for mediocrity causes untold damage to businesses in every sector.

Is Mediocre Teamwork Damaging Your Business?

1.	**Delays** Are you frustrated at the speed with which you can implement new initiatives?
2.	**Cost overruns** Do projects creep over budget despite every possible attempt to manage efficiently?
3.	**Missed opportunities** Have you regretted missed chances because two or more parts of the business couldn't get their act together to make it happen?
4.	**Relationship breakdown** Is there friction (or stand-offs) between people that affect responsiveness?

What does 'One Team' mean for the business?

Four characteristics will tell you immediately if you have people working together in a one team culture:

- **Unity** - our leadership team is united and collaborates outside of formal meetings
- **Problem Solving** - functional experts and teams openly work with others to tackle the business challenges
- **Partnering** - managers and employees work like partners to help each other
- **Agility** - the business is nimble and adapts quickly to opportunities and threats

These four areas can be summarised as **leadership, teamwork, performance** and **change.** They are the pillars of a strong business culture.

Five 'Shares' build a team culture

From business leaders to sports coaches, successful leaders are deliberate about building a one team ethos into day-to-day behaviour because without this, the spectre of disunity and silo behaviour soon emerges under pressure.

In a one team culture people respond quickly to opportunities, think about their impact on customers, and capitalise on marketing and sales initiatives.

The Think One Team model has identified five crucial practices that characterise the behaviours and culture of organisations that have great teamwork within and between teams. You can use these to strengthen your business culture and performance.

1.   Share the Big Picture

To establish and build a team that performs under pressure everyone and every team must know and share their part in the bigger picture. That picture might be of the business vision and values, or simply just understanding workload and priorities in the next few weeks. Without it, employees' likely response to pressure will be to get busy and blinkered which means gaps, duplication and inefficiencies.

SELF REFLECTION	If your team members were asked to separately write on a post-it note what they understand to be the big picture for your business, what would they write?
	Would they share the big picture or are you at risk of the alternative where people pursue conflicting agendas?

Sharing the big picture starts with leaders and the way they interact with other leaders in the business.

There are many clever ways that effective leaders share the big picture:

- **Trademarks** - Define a small set of 'trademark' values and behaviours that you want to characterise the business. Get the whole team involved in formulating this activity because it will generate energy and commitment.
- **Engage Early** - Get into the habit of engaging people early in any new initiative. Keep them informed, explain the 'why' behind decisions and consider the impacts on people of change.
- **Use Sprints** - Use 90 Day updates, or other 'sprint cycles' to share the big picture of the business plan and goals.

Be mindful that in a busy world, people lose motivation and direction if they don't understand and see their part in the bigger picture.

2.   Share the Reality

One characteristic of high performing teams that sets them apart is open and honest conversations. They don't sugar coat their stories, they seek, offer and receive feedback and they respectfully challenge each other.

When the opposite prevails, people avoid and deny reality - which puts the enterprise at risk because people won't raise concerns.

One very successful Australian enterprise has created a culture of open and candid conversations by commitment of leaders to three standards:

Put values first in recruitment decisions

A recruitment choice can put the whole business at risk. Be fully accountable to get the right values fit for your business. Never recruit a technical person no matter how good they are if their values don't fit. If in doubt, use psychological profiling to support your decision.

Do not compromise on behaviours

Immediately call behaviours that don't fit the culture. Be accountable as a leader because what you accept, you approve and that will become the culture.

Ask for and gracefully accept feedback

Regularly seek feedback from team and colleagues. Receive graciously, reflect slowly and then act on what needs to change.

3.   Share the Air

Do your people share the air? Do they listen to each other and respect diversity of views? Do they collaborate on the most pressing business problems? If so, then you are building a nimble and adaptive business.

The alternative is stifled communication which slows down the business and often leads to finger pointing and blame when things go wrong.

There are simple yet powerful actions to strengthen this practice.

- Instead of meetings where people just present information, set them up to stimulate and share ideas. Pose questions such as *'What's the single most important thing for us to improve in the next month?'*.
- Bring together people with different skills and backgrounds to work on key problems and initiatives.
- Hold 'whole-of-business' get togethers regularly so that people get to know each other as people, not just in their business roles.

You will know that it's working when your staff start talking about getting together to Share the Air!

4.   Share the Load

When team culture really starts to 'tick', the fourth 'share' happens spontaneously as people understand what the load really is, and they collaborate to get the job done while playing their own part.

The alternative is 'Look After Your Own Turf' and you may see it as in-business competition, and narrow self-interest.

Here are five ideas to create a Share the Load culture:

- Bring people together to jointly plan and prioritise
- Ask for help and seek help
- Get the right people in the right jobs
- Roll-up your sleeves and help out
- Encourage people to find ways to simplify the business processes.

The biggest single contributor to sharing the load is planning and prioritising together. Have a top ten priorities list for the business and make sure that everyone can see their contribution to those items.

5.   Share the Wins and Losses

In strong teams everyone wins and loses together, whereas in the alternative Play 'I Win, You Lose', people take credit for wins, while blaming losses on others.

Leaders have a vital role to play here in instilling frequent good quality debriefing because this creates the expectation and the opportunity to celebrate successes, learn from these and from the setbacks, and turn lessons learned into lessons applied.

Here are four questions to ask your team to prompt some Share the Wins and Losses behaviour:

- Are we winning?
- Have you recognised someone's effort today?
- What wins can we celebrate?
- What have we learned in the past month?

GREAT TEAMWORK	MEDIOCRITY AND DYSFUNCTION
Share the Big Picture	Pursue your Own Agenda
Share the Reality	Avoid and Deny
Share the Air	Stifle Communication
Share the Load	Protect your Own Turf
Share the Wins and Losses	Play I Win Your Lose

Where to begin?

From small businesses to large corporations, team culture is always a reflection of the unity and day-to-day behaviours of leaders.

Investing in developing united leadership is as vital as having effective financial systems and controls.

You can set up your team for success (and take the load off yourself) by developing a leadership team that brings the five crucial practices to life:

- Instil vision, values and purpose **(share the big picture)**
- Foster openness to have the robust conversation **(share the reality)**
- Engage everyone's ideas and energy **(share the air)**
- Be accountable for your job and for collaborating **(share the load)**
- Debrief, learn and adapt together **(share the wins and losses)**

The time invested, will set up your business for success, and that arguably is your most important role as the business leader.

In Summary

The business landscape is awash with mediocre teams and it is damaging enterprises at a time when they desperately need people to work together.

It requires deliberate and sustained action to instill a culture that gets everyone in working together as one high performing team.

The five practices from the Think One Team model provide a simple and easy-to-understand framework to begin or to assess progress on that journey.

How high you set your sights is your decision, but the reality remains that great teamwork makes anything possible.

What do you want to achieve?