



Creating **high**
performance
teams

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Effective leaders are able to focus simultaneously on two fronts: firstly on how they, as leaders, can manage themselves – their own energy levels, enthusiasm and sanity; and secondly on empowering and motivating their teams by creating the conditions required to enable them to perform at exceptionally high levels.



For those of you who are business leaders, your world is complex. There are always time-critical problems to solve, budgets to achieve, stakeholders to manage and external market dynamics to anticipate.

And amidst all of this, there's a team of people – your team – looking to you to guide, lead and help them succeed. From my work with leaders at all levels, I've observed a consistent pattern.

The key to these two seemingly distinct tasks is essentially the same. Both require that the six Intelligences are functioning at a high level, modeled by you as a leader and within your team. To recap in a nutshell, we know from neuroscience that each of the Intelligences represents a distinct human need that exists regardless of the external environment. Interestingly, when times are good and there is plenty of money, these needs tend to get met easily (or at least the fact that the Intelligences aren't functioning well seems on the surface to be less of an issue). When times are tough and stress levels increase, however, these needs become much harder to satisfy, and the poor functioning Intelligences within the teams have a much more obvious impact on team output. The reassuring news is that when these needs are met, and the unconscious preoccupation with satisfying something that we can't always put our finger on is resolved, team members and teams are able to perform at exceptionally high levels.

By accessing the six noble qualities Tribal Loyalty, Spontaneity, Vitality, Empathy, Love of Learning and Wonder, they become secure, innovative, motivated, passionate, realistic and optimistic – the six foundational characteristics of High-Performance Teams.

If you want to be a successful leader you will need to learn how to meet these six needs and create these characteristics in your team, regardless of the external circumstances and dynamics. How you do this will vary according to your situation, but somehow – if you are going to create a High Performance Team – you will need to develop these very specific capabilities.

You also need to know which of the Intelligences are foundational to the others. In other words, these needs present in a definite order – address the right needs in the wrong order and you will still fail. In *NeuroPower: The Neuroscience of Building High Performance Teams*, I explore the six Intelligences, including their evolutionary social function, their characteristics, how they form, what we know about the brain activity that enables them to function and the implications of different levels of functioning, both for individuals and for the team.

The Six Capabilities you need to learn how to address as a leader if you are going to lead effectively and drive team performance

Capability #1: Learn how to create safety & security

Your first task is to create a sense of security. If you don't do this, you and your team will constantly be in 'emergency mode'. When you feel insecure your brain activity moves from your cerebral cortex (the big modern brain) to your limbic system (your primitive survival brain). In this mode, everyone else is considered to be competition or food. You cannot build teams when all team members are competing with everyone else to survive. You need to learn how to help your people feel safe and know that the environment around them is secure – regardless of whatever external factors may be at play.

Focus on encouraging a collaborative and unified team effort – very much in the theme of 'One for All and All for One'. This is the noble quality of Tribal Loyalty. For example, remind your team that making budget is not just an issue for the sales people; it's a 'whole of organisation problem' that needs to be tackled together requiring input from all levels. Give your people ownership of the key problems the organisation is facing and allow them to develop solutions together.

Because you're looking to create calm and balance, this phase needs to be done at a slow, 'one step at a time' pace for the group, so the team has time to consider the ideas fully.

As a leader you can use the following tools, that are outlined in the *NeuroPower Handbook*, to develop this capability in your team:

- 1. Clarify each team member's role and give feedback about how they are going;**
- 2. Develop your team's Value Proposition; and**
- 3. Develop leadership Codes of Conduct, both for yourself as an individual and for your team.**

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Capability #2: Learn how to empower your people to express themselves by turning emotions into words

It may sound counter-intuitive to encourage moaning from your team, but the rationale is deeply rooted in brain science. Self-expression is important in enabling individuals to take in new ideas, to think conceptually and to work collaboratively. All these abilities are facilitated by the right side of the brain, which easily becomes 'full' of emotion when we're emotionally charged. This prevents the full functioning of this Intelligence. So, as a leader, you need to help your team unblock or empty their system by turning emotions into words.

At the first step you have already enabled your team to feel safe and secure and to understand, respect and value each individual's role within the group. With this in place they will begin to take on a more collaborative approach to solving the problems at hand and access the innovation that is characteristic of High Performance Teams.

It is at this point you will need to learn how to encourage them to express how they are feeling about everything – their role, their KPIs, the role of the team in the organisation, even the stresses and disappointments they're facing. It is only by allowing your team to fully articulate how they're feeling that a truly resourceful space will arise and make way for effective solutions to emerge from their problem solving. This engenders creative spontaneity. But remember, as people express themselves, conflict increases. This means that as a leader you will need to upskill your team members on how to effectively manage this conflict.

As a leader you can use the following tools, that are outlined in the NeuroPower Handbook, to develop this capability in your team:

- 1. Actively foster creativity;**
- 2. Make conflict a business as usual activity (by using the Pinch Crunch model to establish a way to manage emotional expression); and**
- 3. Use brainstorming to drive innovation.**



Capability #3: Learn how to motivate by identifying, delivering and celebrating quick wins

With clear roles, lively discussion and enthusiasm starting to build, the team is now ready for some focus. Here, your role as a leader is to take your team through a process of identifying the three or four key objectives it can achieve that are on strategy. You need to create urgency and focus resources on kicking a few high profile goals. The key is to ensure that each individual's ego, drive, motivation and sense of competition are focused on achieving for the team, rather than for themselves as an individual at the expense of the team. Once the team starts to feel that by working together it can achieve whatever it focuses on, you will have mastered the capability of motivation and invoked the noble quality of Vitality in the team.

As a leader you can use the following tools, that are outlined in the NeuroPower Handbook, to develop this capability in your team:

- 1. Develop a competitive strategy for your team;**
- 2. Dynamise the group; and**
- 3. Effectively manage any plateaued performers.**



Capability #4: Learn how to facilitate empathy through active listening

We all have a need to feel heard and understood. It may sound fluffy, but feeling emotionally connected to those with whom we work not only has a significant impact on our enjoyment of daily life, it can also be a pivotal factor in performance – both our own and the team's. In the face of major challenges, both internal and external, bonds between individuals can be critical in determining the resilience and responsiveness of a group.

When team members enjoy strong interpersonal connections, they're able to support each other through tough times and together find the heart to persevere. This is the noble quality of Empathy. In the absence of these bonds, teams often become fractured and performance drops.

The key for you as a leader is to learn and model the noble art of active listening to drive win/win outcomes. When you encourage team members to listen to each



other and try to see situations from another's point of view, you promote the development of Empathy within the team. Even when it's all smooth sailing, this can mean the difference between a team that merely performs and one that excels. Leaders that have mastered the capability of empathy create teams that are cohesive, connected and have a culture of empowerment and support (rather than politics and white-anting). These characteristics enable team members to work seamlessly together to achieve exceptional win-win outcomes.

As a leader you can use the following tools, that are outlined in the NeuroPower Handbook, to develop this capability in your team:

- 1. Build active listening in your team;**
- 2. Communicate effectively with groups; and**
- 3. Ensure all agreements are win-win.**

Once the team starts to feel that by working together it can achieve whatever it focuses on, you will have mastered the capability of motivation and invoked the noble quality of Vitality in the team.



Capability #5: Learn how to get information flowing – lead and lag indicators

Your role as a leader is now to ensure everyone is working from accurate data about how they are performing, both individually and as a team. This involves invoking the noble quality of Love of Learning, so that data and information is valued and used to drive team performance. To master this capability you, as a leader, need to understand the difference between lead and lag indicators and their impact on strategy development. Lead indicators are inputs, lag indicators are outputs and both are needed to ensure team strategies are effective. As a leader, you need to understand how to identify and then share lead and lag information so that the team is a living, learning group – not a collection of automatons following an inaccurate strategy.

As a leader you can use the following tools, that are outlined in the NeuroPower Handbook, to develop this capability in your team:

- 1. Create a 'learning lab' team culture;**
- 2. Identify and track your lead and lag indicators and use this to drive strategy; and**
- 3. Leverage from your team's intellectual capital.**



Capability #6: Learn how to create hope for the future

In the brain, there is no chemical difference between anticipation and anxiety. The only difference between these profoundly different emotions is our perception of what is going to happen in the future. Anxiety is a feeling of future dread. Anticipation is an expectation of something positive happening in the future. Your job as a leader is to transform anxiety into anticipation by creating a sense that somehow something positive is coming up.

This is a capability that all the great leaders have mastered. It encourages the team to access their own C2 Intelligence to vision how a different future for the team could be created, through revolutionary ideas, paradigm-shifts and strategic thinking.

At this stage, your role as a leader is critical, because your ability to create a sense of anticipation (rather than anxiety) about the future will determine whether your team is forward-thinking, optimistic and eager to face the challenges that the future brings or is quietly dreading the next meeting.

As a leader you can use the following tools, that are outlined in the NeuroPower Handbook, to develop this capability in your team:

- 1. Create the future you want through visualisation;**
- 2. Undertake scenario planning to create a new future for the team; and**
- 3. Visualise and focus on ideal outcomes.**

When these six capabilities are mastered by leaders and the six Intelligences are fully functioning in teams, the results are breathtaking. Team members work seamlessly together to achieve outstanding results and the success and impact of team, as a whole, far exceeds anything that could have been achieved by just one or two of the team members working in isolation.

Creating High Performance Teams is not a simple task. It takes commitment, time, energy and internal fortitude from you as a leader and commitment from the team members. However, it's well worth the effort. Your team will achieve exceptional outcomes, your people will feel engaged, motivated, fulfilled, self-actualised and optimistic about the future.

And, of course, so will you.