

# Book review

## Leading Teams: 10 Challenges 10 Solutions

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This is a practical, no-nonsense manual on how to lead teams effectively. It should be in every manager's top drawer as a ready reference to the problems inherent in team management and the down-to-earth solutions to resolve those problems.

The authors, [Flint and Hearn \(2015\)](#), are both experienced business leaders and consultants. They have held executive positions in large corporations. Both now work as consultants on team development, leadership and employee engagement for an impressive range of companies. This book is based upon their experience of supporting more than 200 teams over the past 20 years and their own personal experience of leading teams for a combined sum of 25 years.

Each chapter follows the same structure covering:

- outcomes from implementing the solutions described in the chapter;
- self-assessment to enable the reader to gauge where her team may be in terms of development;
- example of the specific problem covered in the chapter;
- exploration of the causes of the problem, including the impact on the business, customers, employees and stakeholders;
- solutions – the “how to” actions that resolve the problem;
- behaviors of team and leader – the “how to” behaviors that support and sustain the “how to” solutions;
- thoughts and feelings of team and leader – the negative sentiments that are embedded in the problem and how to turn these into positives feelings;
- summary of the chapter;
- reflection questions; and
- self-assessment.

Each chapter also presents a vignette to illustrate the problem and solutions in a pragmatic manner. The appendices include a useful four-page summary of the solutions set out in the chapters. Also, there is a detailed plan for running a team workshop based upon the ideas set out in the chapters in the book and to help enhance team effectiveness.

Chapter 1 covers the topic of building trust. The outcomes are building rapport, encouraging openness and improving collaboration. Low trust leads to limited loyalty and restricted collaboration. The authors offer eight solutions to build trust within the team. It starts with encouraging team members to talk.

Chapter 2 shows how to overcome conflicts and tensions. Tensions exist in all teams but can have a destructive effect on teamwork if not managed properly and proactively. The outcomes are improved communication, open-mindedness, understanding of others' perspectives and healthy debates. The authors put forward eight solutions. Two solutions illustrate the authors' approach. First, assume positive intent behind someone's behavior, even if the words and actions suggest tension and conflict. Second,

walk in the other person's shoes to really understand them.

Chapter 3 explores the issue of sharing relevant information. The outcomes are shared wisdom and greater team learning. Poor information sharing starves the team of the oxygen it needs to learn and deliver results. It leads to team members co-existing not collaborating. Some people believe that knowledge is power. However, "when there is a healthy flow of communication, you are creating a learning culture, where contributions multiply to the benefit of individual, team and organizations". The authors describe six solutions.

Chapter 4 deals with team engagement. Disengaged employees "[...] are there is body, but not mentally or emotionally". Disengagement is contagious and can infect the whole team if not resolved quickly. Turnover increases. However, it is the employees with most potential that tend to leave and not those who are disillusioned. It is thus a vicious spiral if not addressed. The solutions are designed to reverse this and create a virtuous spiral of ever-improving engagement. The authors offer nine solutions. As with many aspects, it starts with the leader. She has to find her own motivation to give all she has got. Whatever happens in work, she has the ability to choose her response. This is what the authors call response-ability.

Chapter 5 covers creating transparency and openness. Covering up and hiding bad news lead to suspicion, gossip, inefficiency and bad reputations. The authors present seven solutions. This is succinctly illustrated by their solution number five – answering a question transparently: "the four principles of answering a question transparently are:

1. Answer the question.
2. If you don't know the answer, say so.
3. If you cannot answer the questions now, make a

commitment for when you will and honor it!

4. If you know the answer but cannot say currently – say so – and make a commitment to share the information when you can".

Chapter 6 explores long-term thinking. Team members can readily lapse into just doing the day job. Pressure to deliver in the short term is endemic in organizations. However, this can lead to the strategic goals being ignored. The team then ends up constantly fire fighting. The authors describe eight solutions. One such solution is to take a long-term view of your team members by helping them develop personally and professionally. Another is to balance short-term and long-term reporting. Most reporting systems concentrate almost exclusively on the short term. It is thus not surprising that employees pick up on this message and concentrate on the day job!

Chapter 7 handles team delivery and the team's reputation. Teams that do not deliver acquire a bad reputation. The authors offer seven solutions. They recommend creating a "team brand". A brand is a concept in the customer's mind. It is the "brand promise". Based upon reputation, internal customers may have a poor view of the current team "brand promise". The team can thus work on the promise they wish to make and how they can deliver on that new brand promise. This will help improve the team's reputation.

Chapter 8 covers improving the team's effectiveness in managing change. Few teams have the "luxury" of managing only the steady state. However, change can be disruptive, demoralizing and destructive if poorly handled. The authors present nine solutions, several of which centre on the familiar change curve. A classic problem is that the leader is often at a more advanced stage in the change curve than the team members. The leader may have been thinking about the proposed change for some time. He may have

been through a planning phase well before any announcement. He has thus had time to adjust. The team members have not had this chance. So, one solution is to slow down to allow others to catch up.

Chapter 9 covers mutual support for team members. The leader needs to instill the feeling that each member is looking out for the others. A lack of such mutual support leaves members feeling isolated. The authors describe nine solutions. For instance, globalization has led to an increase in the use of virtual teams that span different countries and cultures. In such circumstances, it is important that team members take time out to learn about those cultures. This should concentrate on the opportunities that differences bring to the team.

Chapter 10 shows how to get everyone going in the same direction. Without a common purpose, team members will become disengaged or may make up

their own purpose, further undermining teamwork. The authors describe nine solutions. Creating a vision and a team charter are two such solutions. A vision is an inspirational, believable and appealing picture of the future. It engages hearts and minds. A team charter includes the purpose, framework and agreements on how members will conduct themselves as a team.

*Leading Teams* is a practical handbook on the common problems in teams and the tailored solutions to improving teamwork.

## Reference

Flint, M. and Hearn, E.V. (2015), *Leading Teams: 10 Challenges 10 Solutions*, Pearson.

### **Stephen Flynn**

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