

Team tune-up

What are the two or three changes you could make that would lift your team's performance?

For teams that work, and leaders who want more out of them.

WHAT YOU GET

Two things. A written report naming what's working and why, and the two or three concrete changes to the team's conditions that would lift its performance, what each is costing you now, and the behaviour you'd expect to see change once you make them. Then an hour of coaching to work out how you'll make them. Real things you can do, not a description of the problem, and nothing that needs anyone else to be involved.

To find them, I look at three layers, starting from the end.

What it's delivering. Whether the output meets what the business needs, whether the team is getting better at working together, and whether the people in it are growing. Outcomes are the question you have to answer; I can't see from the outside what the business needs from this team. So we start there, in the first thirty minutes.

What the team does. The key processes and behaviours you can see in the room, the ones that produce those results or don't: how much effort goes in and where, whether the team is working on the right things in the right way, whether it uses what the people in it know, how it makes a decision and what happens after one, what it does with disagreement. Most leaders see this layer, and most leaders try to fix things here.

What's underneath. Those behaviours aren't habits that appeared from nowhere. They come from the conditions the team is working under. Research on teams at Harvard (Hackman, *Leading Teams*, 2002; Wageman, Nunes, Burruss and Hackman, *Senior Leadership Teams*, 2008) found that how well a team performs depends less on how the leader leads than on whether a small number of conditions are in place. They're things a leader can set, which is the point. In plain words:

- whether it's a real team, with clear membership, or a group of people who report to you
- whether people can say what the team is for, and it matters to them
- whether it has the right people, and no more than it needs
- whether the work and the ground rules are set up so the team can do its job
- whether it gets what it needs from the business around it
- whether it gets help with how it works together, not just with the task

A change at this layer is what shifts the behaviour, and the behaviour is what shifts the results. Telling people to behave differently doesn't.

HOW IT WORKS

1. **Thirty minutes with you first.** What the business needs this team to deliver, where the gap is, and the behaviours you'd want to see change. That sets what I'm looking for in the room.
2. **I sit in on one meeting the team already runs,** as it is. No slides, no change to the agenda. I'm there to watch how the team works and read the conditions underneath it, not to assess anyone. Nothing is attributed, and the report goes to you and nobody else.
3. **A written report within two working days.** What's working and why. The two or three changes to the team's conditions that would lift the results you named, what each is costing you now, and the behaviour you'd expect to see change once you make them. One page, plain words, no names.
4. **An hour of coaching.** We go through the report and work out how you'll make the changes: what you'll say to the team, what you'll change in how it's set up, and what you'll watch for over the next month to know it's working. You leave with a plan you built, not one I handed you.

Your team's cost is one meeting it was having anyway. Yours is ninety minutes.

WHO'S SITTING IN

Me. Sean Irvine, not an associate. I ran plants and the teams in them for 26 years, and I now coach the people who run teams. I've sat in a lot of these meetings from both sides of the table.

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