High Performance Series: Addressing Conflict is a Critical Process for Building Successful Teams

Teams are obviously made up of naturally diverse individuals and conflict is an equally natural result. This article explores how to harness conflict as a valuable tool for building a high-performing teams.

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> ## Blueprint for Success:
>
> "**All great relationships, the ones that last over time, require productive conflict in order to grow.**"
>
> Patrick Lencioni

The Value of Team Coaching: Leveraging Conflict for High-Performance

Teams, by their very nature, are composed of diverse individuals with varied backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. While this diversity is a strength, it can also be a source of conflict. In many cases, conflict is seen as a negative force that disrupts harmony and impedes progress. However, when managed effectively, conflict can be a powerful catalyst for growth, trust-building, and high performance. Team coaching plays a crucial role in transforming conflict from a detrimental force into a constructive one, helping teams achieve their full potential.

Patrick Lencioni, in his book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, emphasizes that one of the core dysfunctions of a team is the fear of conflict. He argues that avoiding conflict leads to artificial harmony and ultimately undermines trust and accountability. Lencioni states, "All great relationships, the ones that last over time, require productive conflict in order to grow." This perspective highlights the importance of embracing conflict as a means to foster open communication and build trust within a team.
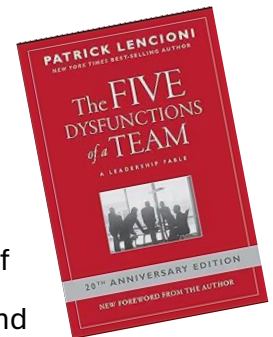
Example 1: A Financial Services Company

Consider the case of a financial services company that had recently merged with another firm. The leadership team, composed of executives from both companies, found themselves at odds. Their different approaches to decision-making and leadership styles led to frequent

clashes. The CEO recognized that this conflict, if not managed, could jeopardize the success of the merger. A team coach was brought in to help the team navigate their differences.

Through the use of a trained facilitator, this newly formed team of executives learned to see conflict not as a barrier but as an opportunity to explore diverse perspectives and learn from each other. The coach encouraged candid discussions where each executive could voice their concerns and ideas openly. As a result, the team began to trust each other more, understanding that conflict could lead to better decisions and stronger outcomes. The coach also helped them develop clear accountabilities, ensuring that responsibilities were aligned, and conflicts addressed and that everyone was committed to the company's goals. Over time, the team transformed their differences into strengths, driving post-merger synergies effectively.

Example 2: A Sports Team

In the world of sports, conflict is often unavoidable due to the high stakes and strong personalities involved. Without effective conflict resolution, there is little chance for success. Take, for example, a professional basketball team that was struggling despite having a roster full of talent. Players were clashing over playing time and strategies, and these conflicts were spilling over onto the court, affecting their performance. The team's coach decided to bring in a team coach to address the underlying issues.

The team coach worked with the players to build trust and encourage open communication. Instead of allowing conflicts to fester, the coach facilitated discussions where players could express their frustrations and work through their differences. They aired their concerns about each other as well as the decisions of the coaching staff. This outside coach also emphasized the importance of accountability, helping players hold each other to high standards both on and off the court. As the players began to see conflict as a way to push

each other to be better, their performance improved. They started winning games, and the team's cohesion became a key factor in their season's success.

The Role of Team Coaching

Team coaching provides the framework for turning conflict into a positive force. By creating a safe environment where team members can express differing opinions and challenge each other's ideas constructively, coaching encourages candid, honest dialogue. This open communication helps teams address issues head-on, rather than allowing them to fester and undermine performance. As trust builds, team members become more willing to engage in healthy debates, leading to better decision-making and more innovative solutions.
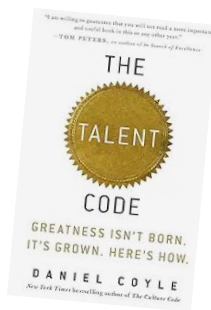
In Daniel Coyle's *The Talent Code*, he explores how growth often comes from moments of struggle and challenge. Applied to team dynamics, this concept suggests that conflict, when approached with the right mindset, can drive teams to push beyond their comfort zones and achieve greater results. A team coach helps facilitate this process by guiding the team through difficult conversations, ensuring that conflicts are handled constructively and that the team emerges stronger on the other side.

Conflict also plays a crucial role in building a healthy culture of accountability. When team members are encouraged to hold each other accountable, conflicts may naturally arise. When properly applied, this type of conflict can actually be helpful for maintaining high standards and ensuring that everyone is committed to achieving both their own and the team's goals. As Lencioni notes, "Teams that engage in productive conflict know that it's a natural and necessary part of the team-building process." Through coaching, teams learn to navigate these conflicts without damaging relationships, leading to a culture of accountability and mutual respect. In addition to fostering trust and accountability, conflict can accelerate problem-solving. In teams where conflict is embraced, issues are identified and addressed more quickly. Team members are not afraid
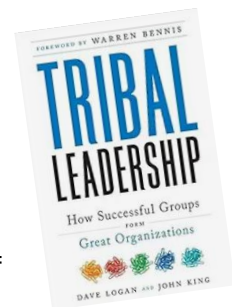
to voice concerns or challenge the status quo, leading to faster and more effective solutions. As the authors of *Tribal Leadership* suggest, teams that operate at higher cultural stages are better equipped to handle conflicts and turn them into opportunities for improvement. Team coaching helps elevate the team's culture, ensuring that conflicts are used as a tool for growth rather than a source of division.

Adopting a Common Approach to Problem Solving

Having a consistent approach to problem-solving is crucial for any organization aiming to operate efficiently and effectively. Our methodology, "Team Solve," provides a structured process that guides teams through the essential steps of problem-solving. By consistently using this approach, teams begin by clearly identifying and defining the problem, ensuring everyone understands the issue at hand. They then explore various options for resolving or mitigating the problem, encouraging creative thinking and collaboration. Once the best approach is identified, the team documents the next steps clearly, assigning responsibility for each critical action. This consistency not only provides a proven forum for discussion but also helps teams properly define problems and reach solutions more quickly. When teams have a shared problem-solving framework like "Team Solve," they can navigate challenges with greater confidence and clarity, leading to faster and more effective outcomes.
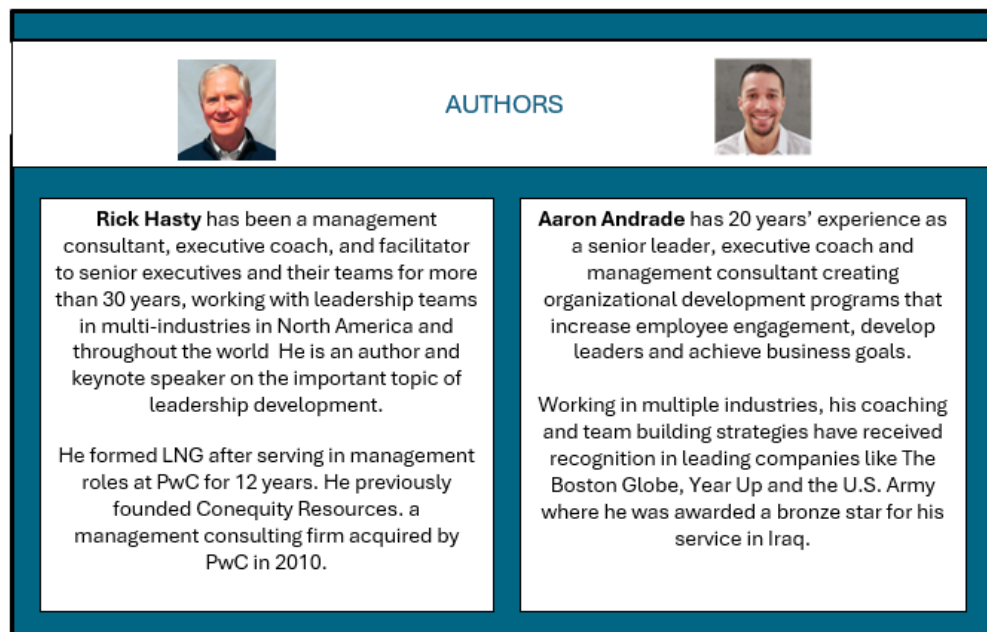
Conclusion

While conflict can be uncomfortable, it is an essential ingredient in building high-performing teams. The key to success lies in managing conflict effectively and using it as a tool to drive progress. Team coaching provides the structure and support necessary to transform conflict into a positive force, helping teams build trust, foster accountability, and communicate more effectively.

Incorporating a consistent problem-solving approach, such as our "Team Solve" methodology, further strengthens teams by giving them a proven framework for addressing challenges. By clearly defining problems, exploring solutions, and assigning responsibilities, teams can navigate conflicts and obstacles with greater confidence and efficiency. This

structured approach, combined with the benefits of team coaching, ensures that conflicts are not just managed, but leveraged for growth and innovation.

Ultimately, the value of team coaching and a consistent problem-solving process lies in their ability to help teams harness the power of conflict and collaboration. As teams learn to navigate challenges productively, they become more cohesive, resilient, and equipped to achieve their goals and drive success.

AUTHORS

Rick Hasty has been a management consultant, executive coach, and facilitator to senior executives and their teams for more than 30 years, working with leadership teams in multi-industries in North America and throughout the world He is an author and keynote speaker on the important topic of leadership development.

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Working in multiple industries, his coaching and team building strategies have received recognition in leading companies like The Boston Globe, Year Up and the U.S. Army where he was awarded a bronze star for his service in Iraq.

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