

Creating sustainable, high performing teams through team coaching

A case study at the Region of Peel

Business transformation requires effective leadership and team work. Imagine a senior leadership team faced with the challenge of changing their service delivery model and re-designing their division as part of the process. Where do you start when that leadership team has had significant historical challenges, is working in silos, and the culture needs improvement around employee engagement. One approach is to work with a team coach.

Successful transformation requires leaders to work collaboratively with high levels of trust, effective communication, decision making, and common goals. The article shares the journey that the Communications Leadership Team from the Region of Peel took as part of their business transformation.

Systematic Approach

Team coaching encourages the leadership team to work together as a system so that the competencies of each individual are fully maximized. The leverage for higher performance comes from coaching the team as a “system” over time, typically in monthly coaching sessions. Systemic team coaching works with the interaction of the team as a whole, rather than focusing on individual performance. The process works on strengthening the interrelationships amongst team members. Research indicates that connectivity between team members is strongly correlated with

business performance. Team coaches often employ coaching models such as the Organizational Relationship Systems coaching model which is rooted in systems theory; emotional, social, and relationship intelligence; team research; and appreciative inquiry. This creates a foundation for the team to be educated about their own internal system; to become more aware of their patterns of success and obstacles to achievement, and ultimately gives them a framework for sustainable change.

Team coaching has three key goals:

1. To shift the culture at the leadership level in order to drive change in the culture.
2. To develop a collaborative, high-performing working team that supports one another to achieve organizational objectives.
3. To train members to work together as a system so that the specific skills and competencies of each team member is maximized to its fullest. This involves working on both team productivity and positivity competencies, and enables better decision making, collaboration, and communication, thus increasing organizational performance.

Role of Team Coach

The role of the team coach is to help reveal the system to itself and to rein-

force co-responsibility and accountability for the team’s performance. Team coaches start by creating a safe environment in which people see themselves more clearly. Secondly, coaches ask for more intentional thought, action, and behaviour changes than the team would have asked of themselves. Coaches also assist in identifying the gaps between the present and future desired state. Finally, coaches assist the team by eliciting solutions and strategies from them to develop a strong action plan to close the gap, while providing support to the team to enhance their skills, resources, and creativity.

Process Used at Region of Peel

Team coaching starts with the “discovery process” to better understand the



MICHELLE CHAMBERS, M.Ed, CHRP, CTDP, ORSC-t works collaboratively with her clients to create sustainable change and to inspire and ultimately increase individual, team and organizational effectiveness in measurable ways. She can be reached at (905) 626-6494 or <michelle@chambersandassociates.ca>.



KARLA HALE, Director of Communications, Service Delivery and Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives for the Region of Peel. She is a graduate of the University of Waterloo. Karla’s expertise is in leading staff to successful outcomes for residents across her

very diverse portfolio.

The coaching session usually wrapped up with an opportunity to do appreciative feedback or a commitment to increase the positivity on the team by the team members (e.g., have a staff lunch together).

team; the team's business objectives, the culture, its strengths and challenges. The intent is to define the outcomes desired for team development. At the Region of Peel, the Team Diagnostic Instrument was used to assess 14 positivity and productivity factors (such as trust, accountability, respect, decision making, and alignment) with the team to benchmark current performance and to identify key areas for improvement. A one-day offsite session was designed to: introduce the team to the process of team coaching; share the assessment results; develop team norms; increase positivity and reduce negativity amongst team members; create a future vision; and develop the agreement between the team coach and the team. Ultimately, a prioritized action plan aligned with business objectives was developed. The Communications Leadership Team decided to focus on the areas of roles and responsibilities; decision making; accountability; trust; reducing negativity in the team; and managing conflict productivity.

Ten in-person team coaching sessions were held over the course of 12 months. These 1.5 hour sessions were used to address action plan items; deal with current business issues; and help reveal the team's behaviours, while teaching them process techniques that they could use to support one another. The format usually included a welcome and check-in to see what was happening within the team and to diagnose the current climate. Furthermore, it was a good opportunity to get a "systems" perspective on current business challenges and relationship challenges that had arisen between coaching sessions. There were check-ins against the team norms to see if there were any modifications to them at other meetings in between coaching sessions. As well, the coach checked in

with the team on their "homework" assignment and held them accountable for achieving their commitments. Homework might be referencing the team norms during other meetings; practising a new technique or process learned, etc.

A theme was usually identified for the coaching session (in consultation with the senior leaders of the team in a design meeting prior to the team coaching) to focus on during the coaching session. Themes included roles and responsibilities; trust; positivity; communication; or decision making. The coach would engage the team in conversation around the theme and share observations with the team on how they were behaving. Furthermore, minor skill development might be offered or the team might be engaged in a customized exercise so that they were engaged in an action learning exercise focused on the theme within their workplace. Team coaches make use of many tools including competency wheels, constellations; dialogue and inquiry; process check-ins; teaching the use of feedback and "I" statements; decision-making grids; etc.

The coaching session usually wrapped up with an opportunity to do appreciative feedback or a commitment to increase the positivity on the team by the team members (e.g., have a staff lunch together). Finally, there were evaluations to give team members an opportunity to provide feedback to the coach on the effectiveness of the session; the impact on them; and what they would like to address in the next session. Homework was also assigned to the team to increase their accountability and to commit to performing an action that would address their workplace issues, and hence increase productivity and performance.

In addition, there were developmental learning opportunities to focus on skill development in the areas of change

leadership; decision making; conflict resolution; and strength-based coaching. Tools and templates were shared so that the team could immediately apply their learning back in the workplace. All sessions were designed based on the team's needs, while incorporating current work situations so that they could apply action learning principles as part of the coaching process.

One year after the journey began, the team was reassessed using the Team Diagnostic Assessment to create a second benchmark and to measure the progress of team development. The team transitioned from a "low positivity, low productivity" team into a high performing team. Goals and strategies saw a 68 percent improvement with alignment showing a 63 percent increase and team leadership a 40 percent increase. With respect to positivity factors, some significant increases were demonstrated in respect (80 percent), optimism (83 percent) and constructive interaction (64 percent). As a result of the journey over the past year, not only did this senior leadership team transform themselves, but they supported their division through a significant business transformation.

Benefits of Coaching

The benefits of team coaching include:

- ▶ sustainable improvements to relationships and communication on a system-wide basis;
- ▶ the development of a powerful sense of team spirit that enhances organizational climate, productivity, and retention;
- ▶ improved inter-departmental cooperation through the reduction of "silos";
- ▶ the development of constructive conflict skills, leading to more rapid resolution and productive outcomes;

- ▶ increased positivity within the work environment, which supports sustainable productivity;
- ▶ the capacity to increase the creative potential of the organization or team; and
- ▶ accelerated productivity, accountability, and team performance.

The Peel team was facing a key business transformation. When else might team coaching be an appropriate solution? The following conditions often lend themselves to the benefits of

team coaching: during the formation of new teams (intact, virtual, or project); during a change in leadership; where teams are operating in silos; where clarification of roles and responsibilities is required; where clear decision-making processes, guidelines, and tools are required; when communication is impeding team progress (poor conflict resolution, negotiation, or feedback skills); when there is a change in team members; or where teams exhibit loss of positivity and productivity.

Thus, team coaching provided at the “systems” level can be measurably used to mark development in a team’s performance over time. It is a fantastic process to help a team work together as one system; to learn more about themselves and increase their individual and team self-awareness; and to develop skills and learn tools and processes to better assist the team, so that they can reach higher productivity, while increasing positivity within the team at the same time. *MW*

as published in

Municipal World

CANADA'S MUNICIPAL MAGAZINE – SINCE 1891

1-888-368-6125

www.municipalworld.com