

Building sustainable high performance teams



People strategist and leadership specialist, Carolyn Mitchell, shares ten ways you can be thinking about building and sustaining high performance teams in your business, along with questions to help stretch your thinking and inspire you to take action.

Ready²⁴



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1. Clarity

Seeking and providing clarity is fundamental to our success.

Discover and discuss your curiosities and lean into conversations that help you surface ‘stealth expectations’ (the expectations we have, but didn’t tell anyone about, and therefore usually go unmet, creating disappointment and resentment).

Getting on the same page and in alignment helps gear us up to power our potential.

Our formula for high performance is: expectations → agreement → accountability.

Ensure clarity is a minimum standard in your relationships and team.

Barriers – What gets in the way of you being clear with others or getting clarity from others? How can you overcome that?

Inspiration – Think about a time when you were clear and aligned with others around a goal...and think about a time when you weren’t... What was it like? How did it work? What did you learn from that?

Communication – How would people describe your communication style? What tends to be missing from your communication when you are under pressure?

“Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind.”

Brene Brown

2. Challenge

People who make us stop and think are important to our development and growth, and to a high performance team culture.

We need to actively seek out different perspectives, diverse feedback, and a variety of ideas.

It takes courage and humility to seek feedback and ideas this way. It takes curiosity, thinking and wisdom to understand it, analyse it and appropriately act on it.

We often learn the most from people who think differently than us.

So, look at who is around you. Make sure you’ve got people who stretch your thinking, challenge you and the status quo.

Sources – Who in my life ignites my curiosity and thinking?

Opportunity – Where can I be facilitating other people’s thinking by speaking up and/or asking questions?

Team – How can we invite more diverse ideas and discussion into our team meetings?

“Listen to the ideas that make you think hard – not just opinions that make you feel good.”

Adam Grant

3. Courage

Remember, it's ok to be scared sometimes.

When we experience fear it's an opportunity for us to practice courage. Without fear and vulnerability, there is no courage.

Courage doesn't look the same for everyone and it comes in all shapes, sizes, and variations... and it's not always a feeling of confidence.

High performance teams encourage, support, practice and reward courage as a skill.

Fear – In what areas of my life or work am I experiencing some fear? What's one thing I can do to practice courage?

Courage – When have I demonstrated courage in my life? What characteristics, traits, skills, mindset or beliefs have I gained from those experiences?

Calling it out – Where am I witnessing others demonstrate courage around me? Let them know what you're observing and experiencing.

“Courage is not the absence of fear but fear walking.”

Susan David

4. Success

We need to be crystal clear about how we define 'high performance' in ourselves, teams and business.

High performance teams have a clearly articulated formula with feedback and reward systems that support it.

It's not just what people do (results), but how they do it (behaviour), that counts.

What gets rewarded, gets repeated. Don't reward behaviour you don't want to see repeated.

Don't tolerate “brilliant jerks” – those who put themselves above the team, or get good results but leave a wake of destruction. The cost to teamwork and culture is too high.

Standards – What standards are you consciously and unconsciously accepting in your team?

Cost – What's the true cost to individuals, team, business and customers when you tolerate brilliant jerks?

Focus – What positive behaviours would you like to see more of in your team? How can you make that happen?

“The standard you walk past, is the standard you accept.”

Lieutenant General David Morrison

5. Renewal

Imagine reading a book without punctuation – no full stops, commas, paragraphs, or chapters.

It wouldn't make sense - it would be difficult and exhausting and almost impossible to get through. Your day, week, and year is exactly the same.

We need rest to recharge and to pause, unplug and consciously reconnect regularly.

Creating seasons in our work helps us 'protect fresh' and fuel innovation, growth and sustainable high performance.

Rest – What activities help me feel most rested? How can I create sustainable habits around them?

Seasons – How can I create seasons in my work? How would I prepare for them, and recharge after them?

Recharge – Which meetings/activities in my week take the most energy? How can I better prepare for and recharge from these meetings/activities?

“Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.”

Anne Lamott

6. Growth

A comfort zone is a beautiful, familiar place, but nothing grows there.

Know where the edges of your comfort zone are and consciously step into your stretch/learning zone.

The discomfort of the unfamiliar will have you highly attuned to creating new experiences and building skills and capability to take you to the next level.

Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Let discomfort be a signal for growth and for us to lean in, pay attention and stretch, not have it signal fear and retreat.

Awareness – What skills and experiences are inside and outside your comfort zone? What are your signals that you're outside your comfort zone?

Inspiration – Who do you know role models continuous stretch, learning and growth? What can you learn from them?

Motivation – What's one thing outside your comfort zone that if you worked on it, would make a difference in your life/work?

“Growth and comfort do not co-exist”

Ginni Rometty

7. Feedback

Feedback is critical to our growth.

It tells us what our strengths and opportunities are – we need to know what we should continue, start, stop and change in our behaviours and actions.

It helps us navigate the steps towards our goals, closing the gap.

Elite teams are feedback hungry teams and have the infrastructure, culture, systems, skills and capability to cultivate and leverage it.

They know how to ask for it, give it effectively, and demonstrate that they can take it too. Most of all, they genuinely value it.

Mindset – What words come to mind when you hear the word ‘feedback’?

Environment – What’s your team culture around feedback? What rituals, beliefs, and attitudes exist around seeking and providing feedback?

Receiving – How do you respond to feedback that’s hard to hear? Does your influence increase or restrict the flow of feedback?

“We all need people who will give us feedback. That’s how we improve.”

Bill Gates

8. Habits

You don’t have to overhaul the way that you work and live with big, bold action. It’s the small things done consistently that make the biggest difference.

They change your trajectory. Your daily habits will determine your future.

To unlock success and greater performance, take a look at your daily habits and what’s hidden in your structure and discipline.

The small step you actually take is better than the big one you almost do.

Don’t let size trick you. The key is consistency through habit formation.

Habits – What are the daily habits that are fueling my performance (in work and life)?

Letting go – What’s a habit that is holding me back or no longer serving me that I can let go of?

Creating new habits – When in my life have I created a new healthy habit and it’s had a positive impact? What can I learn from that experience and apply now?

“Success is the product of daily habits not once-in-a-lifetime transformation.”

James Clear

9. Failure

Waiting for perfect is never as smart as making progress.

Learn to take conscious risks.

What if you get it wrong, make a mistake, or there's a failure? Mistakes and failure are not the opposite of success, they are stepping stones to success.

Progress over perfection!

Don't let a fear of failure hold you back, keep you small, or make you quiet about things that matter to you.

Make intelligent failure part of your success formula.

Procrastination – When do you find yourself procrastinating? What triggers your over-thinking? What stops you from taking action and risks?

Failure – How do you feel about failure? What thinking does it trigger? When was the last time you failed at something and what did you learn?

Courage – Where do you want to demonstrate more courage in your work or life? What difference would it make if you did? Why is that important to you?

“The cost of being wrong is less than the cost of doing nothing.”

Seth Godin

10. Potential

It's not about the destination... it's about the journey getting there.

It doesn't matter where you begin, how far behind you feel, or how in front. It's not about natural talent. It's about how well you learn and grow – that's how you'll power your performance and potential.

High performance individuals, teams, businesses and cultures are always moving and growing.

They don't stay still and stagnate.

They actively keep growing and driving forward.

Strengths – What do you consider to be three key strengths you have that power your potential?

Resilience – When have you faced challenges in your career and life and how did you move through them?

Purpose – What motivates and inspires you to keep moving forward, taking on new experiences and opportunities? Where does your drive come from?

“The true measure of your potential is not the height of the peak you've reached, but how far you've climbed to get there.”

Adam Grant