



Cory Dobbs, Ed.D.
www.sportleadership.com
www.aleaderineverylocker.com
623.330.3831 (Phoenix time)

Cracking the Code: How to Build a High-Performance Team Culture

“A team is not just a collection of individuals. When everyone clicks into place, a team is truly a community, a tightly knit fellowship.”

Many coaches are expert tacticians, strategists, and teachers of techniques. Yet many, if not most, struggle when it comes to building a high performance culture. I mean high-performing team culture; a growth culture that stretches every member of the team. Think Seal Team Six. The elite fighting force, the team that captured Osama Bin Laden. Sure, your team may master an offense or a defense, but it’s a fact that most teams don’t reach an elite level of teamwork. To do so requires a deliberate and intense effort to build a dynamic high performance culture. It is a team’s culture that is at the heart of building a high-performance team.

It’s all about conditions; has the team (coaches and players) put into place the conditions necessary to promote and foster desired teamwork behavior? As a researcher I’ve studied hundreds of teams and can only conclude few teams, won-loss records aside, ever achieving an elite level. Study after study of elite teams, like Seal Team Six, continue to reveal it’s not solely the personnel, but rather the psychosocial factors—such as those that lead to team cohesion—that drive motivation, learning, and the high performance necessary to achieve an elite level.

Take a moment and re-read the quote above. I’ve purposefully left off the name of the well-known author. I did so out of respect for his work, but I do find this quote to be lacking in terms of action-ability. Most coaches and players unknowingly live by a “click or clash” framework of relationship building. That is, some people just click together while others clash with one another. And it’s rarely explicit, but very implicit—teammates prefer to go along to get along. Not in elite teams. Relationships and paying attention to the team environment are fundamental to creating a high performance culture.

At its most dynamic level a team is a system, a network of interdependent components that work together to try to accomplish the aim of the system architects. This differs from the most basic level of a team as simply a collection of players with talents that need meshing. When team relationships become more strategic, teamwork becomes the center piece of the team achieving its growth potential. The team building experience is, quite simply, an exercise in relationship building. Relationships impact every culture. Think of the process of team building as the unfolding of a social system; every interpersonal interaction is essential to developing greater task effectiveness.

I’ve uncovered, through wide-ranging research and practice, twenty principles and concepts and isolated eight “roles” that are necessary for building a high performance culture. Yes, I’ve cracked the code to building high-performance teams by invoking the invaluable role of adaptive performance—the purposeful and intentional relationship processes that raise team members to higher levels of motivation, collaboration, compassion, and performance.

The Teamwork Intelligence approach is a disciplined way of thinking about and building a high-performing culture; it involves practicing teamwork as both a system and a set of processes that promote a motivating environment. This invites us to explore the context in which teamwork occurs; the positive culture created by the coaches and players. Team building results from a shared unity of purpose determined by individual and team values, a clear vision of what the team is striving to achieve, interpersonal relations, complementary and synergistic roles and how individuals and the team handle individual and collective successes and failures. Teamwork intelligence delves into the complexity of team work as a process and as a way to understand the person (both players and coaches) embedded within a system.

To think about teamwork as a system, we need to consider the *inputs*, such as training for teamwork intelligence, the *process*, which we can describe as the system and the context in which the players and coaches interact, and the *outcomes*, which are the levels of motivation, performance, and well-being of players and coaches. To leverage the process of teamwork intelligence I have designed five building blocks that must be operationalized: (1) the four dimensions of team building and the associated eight roles of teamwork; (2) the three levels of a team player; (3) the three layers of a team player; (4) the five core concerns of every team member, and (5) the five forces of performance-enhancing relationships. By optimizing these five components—the teamwork intelligence system—we are able to enhance each individual's vital force and, in turn, the collective force of the team.

SO, WHAT IS TEAMWORK INTELLIGENCE?

Teamwork Intelligence is the purposeful and intentional relational process of team members together raising one another to higher levels of motivation, collaboration, compassion, and performance. It's deceptively simple: in order to build a high-performing team culture you have to create the conditions for team members to commit and unify—to coalesce into a single unit. Such oneness is not inevitable; it must be forged methodically and deliberately.

WHY IS TEAMWORK INTELLIGENCE THE SMART THING TO DO?

A significant aspect of teamwork intelligence is knowing the expectations one should have of one's teammates. One of the most significant expectations is that of high-level ownership with the purpose of each player investing in the development of a high-performing team. Through expectations and collective achievements, identification, loyalty, and trust are built. The goal and expected outcome is the development of the team's full potential.

Extreme Ownership is a central concept of Teamwork Intelligence. Teamwork Intelligence is not only about teaching student-athletes how to comply with a set of rules and procedures; it is about recognizing the profound difference between compliance-based behavior and values-based performance. Extreme Ownership is about creating a culture in which every team member is committed to performance excellence and team member wellness based on personal commitment to the best interests of the team. Ownership occurs when student-athletes own their personal learning and performance as well as team learning and performance. ***Here's the ultimate challenge of extreme ownership for you to hand over to the players: say to your team members "If you see a problem that nobody has taken ownership of, you're the one who sees it, so you own it."***

Teamwork Intelligence generates higher levels of autonomy, extra effort, commitment, performance, and satisfaction. High performance is what the student-athlete wants to do, not

because it brings personal glory, but because they feel a sense of extreme ownership of the team. The extreme owner is all in as a team player and willingly goes all out for the team.

I've seen enough to validate the claim that knowing what to do can lead to higher levels of doing. However, I've also observed far too frequently a high degree of learned helplessness. Student-athletes have, for the most part, grown up in a sport system in which they prefer to wait for the coach to take corrective action, to "instill" motive and values, and basically avoid taking responsibility for the building of the team. This is why elite teams are emphatic about deliberately building a team and insistent on teamwork intelligence.

Teamwork Intelligence provides a framework for seeing interrelationships of the elements of the team system rather than static "snapshots" that tend to distort the differences between a mediocre team and a high-performing team. Teamwork Intelligence provides a set of principles and includes a set of specific tools and techniques (such as role clarification provided by The Eight Roles of Teamwork) for building a high-performance team. Investing in the development of relationships will pay off.

Okay, so are you willing to invest time, energy, and resources into developing a high energy and high performance team culture? If so, get started as soon as possible. Explore the principles and practices The Academy for Sport Leadership has discovered and developed and teach in our Teamwork Intelligence Workshop.

Here's the Game Plan for Our Cutting-Edge Workshop

Session 0	Warm-up
Session I	The Four Dimensions of Team Performance: Putting Teamwork at the Center of Team Building
Session II	The Three Disciplines of a Team Player: Establishing Identity: Moving Through Autonomy to Interdependence
Session III	The Three Layers of a Team Player: Developing a Culture of Purpose and Integrity
Session IV	The Five Core Concerns of Every Team Member: Beyond Winning & Losing: The Well-Being of Your Teammates
Session V	The Five Forces of Performance-Enhancing Relationships: Building Relationships That Fuel a High Energy Culture

Some of the Cutting Edge Tools You'll Learn How to Use:

- Dobbs' 8 Roles of Teamwork (the DNA of a high-performance culture!)
- The Academy for Sport Leadership's Teamwork Debrief
- Championship Values Exercise
- Rate Your Teammate Instrument
- Culture of Trust Scorecard
- The Academy for Sport Leadership Case Study
- The Five Core Concerns of Every Team Member
- The Team Life Cycle
- The Five Steps of Team Leadership