

Guide for Building Successful Teams

The following provides a detailed plan for leading your own team development workshop. Whether you are forming a new team or want to re-vitalize a well-established work group, you can confidently use this well-tested step-by-step guide with teams of 3 to 30.

Discovery Part 1: An Appreciative Inquiry into Incredible Teams- 30 minutes

Purpose:

Data gathering to start building a common understanding of what underpins the best teams- the root causes of success.

Process:

Pair up with someone you do not know as well and interview your partner using the questions below. (*Note: this can be done in very small groups of 3-4 if necessary.*) Read the questions as they are written aloud to your partner. Each person will have 15 minutes to interview their partner. Then switch roles. Before beginning your conversation, review these “Tips for Appreciative Interviews.”

- ★ Help your conversation partner to stay in “story-telling mode” and to avoid explaining or analyzing things.
- ★ Listen for great quotes, images and phrases and make a note of them.
- ★ Be really curious – be open to learning and interested in what you’re hearing.
- ★ Help your partner tell concrete stories about real people and events.
- ★ Give space for thinking.
- ★ Allow silence while the interviewee works on their answers – avoid jumping in.
- ★ Let your partner lead with their ideas.
- ★ Listen carefully – rather than thinking about your own answers to the questions, or telling your own stories.
- ★ Take some notes, especially of great quotes or phrases that energized you.

1. Please tell me the story of your best team experience; that time when all members came together, leveraged each other’s differences and strengths, and, because of that, produced extraordinary results.

If needed you can deepen your partner’s story by asking:

- What did you do that contributed to that success?
- How did others contribute?

2. If I asked people who know you really well about the three best qualities, attributes, or strengths you bring to this team, what would they say?

3. Imagine you fell into a deep sleep and woke two years from today to find that this team had become everything you always dreamed it could be. What do you notice that tells you your dream has come true?
4. If you had three wishes for this team, which if granted, would help that dream come true, what would they be?
5. What is one small step we could take today to start helping that dream come to life?

Discovery Part 2: Identifying Root Causes of Success That Give Life to Great Teams-40 minutes

Purpose:

To discover the root causes of success of great teams.

Process:

1. With your interview partner, join 2-3 other pairs.
2. In these groups have each person share their partner's story from interview **questions 1 and 2**. Save the analysis for later - stay in story-telling mode.
3. As you listen, take notes about what seems to underpin these peak experiences.
4. As a group, talk about what these stories and qualities tell you about exceptional teams. Find the patterns, themes, conditions and factors lying within those stories, and in particular what were the **circumstances that enabled those experiences**. Look for the **root causes of success** that made them possible. It may take some time before the themes and patterns become clear to you as a group, so do not feel pressured to come up with instant answers.
5. Now brainstorm all of the **root causes of success** you found in the stories. Try to use phrases more than single words.
6. Choose 6-8 you feel are the most important and write them on a flipchart.
7. On another flip chart, write down everyone's strengths from question 2.
8. And on another flip chart, capture the wishes from question 4. .
9. Post your flip charts on the wall and share with the others if more than one group.

Dream What Our Team Could Be- 60 minutes

Purpose:

To create compelling, exciting and enticing dreams of the future of our team. To share these dreams with each other in a way that brings them fully to life and that inspires us to begin living them.

Process:

In the same group(s) as before

1. Review the root causes of success, wishes, and your group's strengths.
2. As a group, project yourselves forward two years. Imagine that all your wishes have come true and that the root causes are now just how this team operates all the time. Because of that, this team delivers fantastic results and is the one everyone wants to join. The team has elevated and connected strengths and sees limitless possibility for the future. The ideas from the meeting two years ago have grown into everyday reality. The smallest possibilities have been expanded in exciting and novel ways of working together. What is most surprising is that people on the team now think of this as normal. As you work with this team full of possibility, what do you see, hear, and feel?
3. Describe your experience and images of what your team has become as a result of having stretched the best of what was already happening into an even better place. Those descriptions should be:
 - **ROOTED** in your concrete experiences of teams at their best – grown from the data that you have discovered together. (Please note: This is **NOT** about creating a vision that has been plucked out of thin air. Nor is it a collection of your own personal wishes).
 - **PROVOCATIVE** – it represents a stretch. It should be MORE than just a repetition of these stories; it should build on them, extend them, and push them to the limits of what is possible. What would 11 or 12 out of 10 look like?
 - **COMPELLING AND POSITIVE** – what will make your dream exciting, engaging and irresistible to others? Make sure you describe it in positive terms (an expression of what you want, rather than what you don't want).
 - Described in the **PRESENT TENSE** – as if it were happening now, rather than a wish for the future.
4. Use rich detail to describe your DREAM (avoid simple slogans and clichés). You might want to think of how specific activities, processes, and experiences are now different in real terms for people. You might also include your interactions with other teams, donors, other chapters, etc.

Note: This is an exercise in creativity, imagination and dreaming – the kind of team you want to work in, combined with rigor and thoughtful detail.

5. Your job now is to find a creative and expressive way to present your images of the future to other groups (if needed) – to bring the dream to life as if it is happening now. **You will have between 2 and 4 minutes to present your dream.**

Option 1:

The main focus is on ensuring the quality of **CONTENT** and on conveying the feeling and detail of your dreams to others. Try to make your presentations clear, compelling and memorable. Bring lots of creative materials in the room for you to use in making your presentations. Check out what is available. Think about imaginative ways in which you can represent your dream.

Examples:

- * A TV special
- * Magazine cover story
- * Mini play, or skit, or enactment of the dream
- * A “day in the life”
- * A poem
- * A work of art
- * News interview or “Front Line” special
- * A recruitment pitch
- * A film-style trailer
- * A song
- * A dance

Option 2:

- Imagine it is New Years Eve, two years in the future. The national board, your partners, donors, and even key public figures are here to recognize and celebrate this team.
- In 45 minutes you will be giving the team a New Years Eve toast. Your toast should include:
 - The difference that this team has made to you and the organization overall.
 - How the team was able to achieve such amazing results—the behaviors they exhibited as well other things that helped them achieve such amazing results.
 - Your hopes for them in the future
- You will also give the team some kind of drawing or other representation of these elements.
- Give your toast.

To “merge” the dreams from multiple groups, ask the following questions after the last group has shared:

- What did you notice in common across all the images we just saw?
- What did you find particularly energizing or exciting?

Then say something like: “We do not have to settle on a single image and we will not spend time trying to convert these images into a traditional vision statement. There is so much commonality and alignment that it is clear we all pretty much are looking for the same ideal future for our team. Now we can move into figuring out what it will take to help that dream come true.”

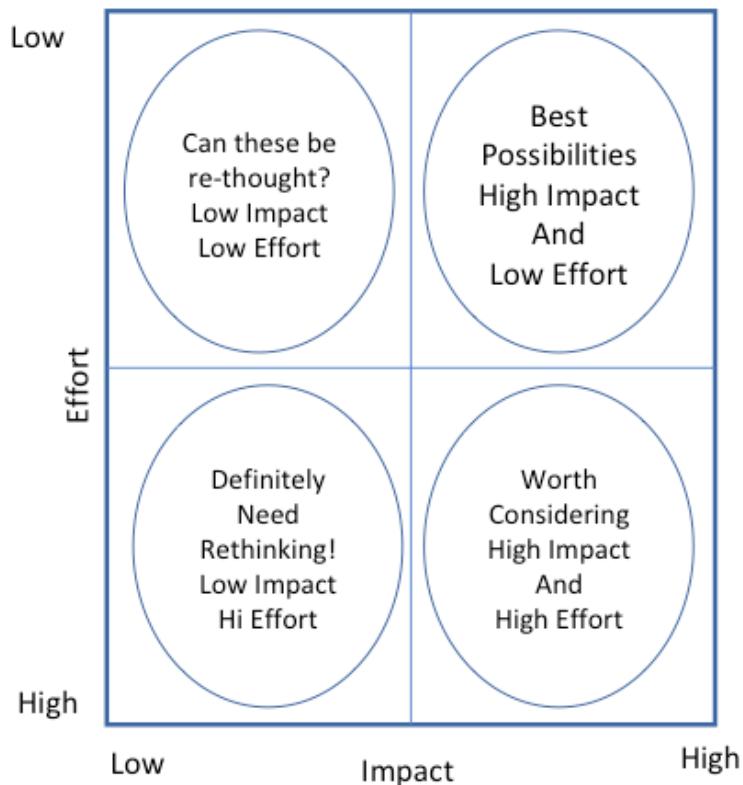
Design to Realize Our Dream - 60 minutes

Purpose:

Agreement on what can be done to help make our vision true.

Process:

- Ask: "What is it that we could create or change about us, our roles, our membership, our processes, our systems, our styles, our behaviors, etc. that would help make that vision real?
- Brainstorm ideas, eliminate duplicates, and narrow to 2-4. You might use an impact versus effort grid below to help narrow.



Deliver on Our Ideas - 60 minutes

Purpose:

Agreement on what we will do to make our vision true and begin action planning to do so.

Process:

Form into sub-teams around your highest priority ideas by letting people choose which they want to work on. Then do the following:

1. Name your idea/initiative
2. Describe clearly your initiative and what it is intended to accomplish: key objectives.
3. Write a brief Case for Action: (What difference will this make in how the team works together?)
4. Determine how will you measure success. How will you know this initiative is actually making any difference?
5. Suggested next steps: (what, who, when)
 - a. Short term (next 2-4 weeks)
 - b. Longer-term

Example:

1. Name: Internal Communications-Keeping us all informed
2. Description: Keep up to date on what each of us is working on and create a secure and up-to-date one-stop location for all our important documents.
3. Case for Action: Currently we use a variety of spread-sheets, emails, text messages, and word documents and never know what is the most recent. We also have no easy way to keep track of our agreed up on actions. A single, easily accessible repository for all of our materials that are needed by more than two people will make us more effective and efficient and help hold each of us accountable to our commitments.
4. Success: The repository will be regularly updated and will be the first place people look for important information.
5. Next Steps Short Term: a. In the next two weeks, Sarah will research at least 4 options including Drop-Box and GoogleDocs and make a recommendation to the team. Within one month the system will be up and running.
b. Within two weeks after that, Sarah will arrange appropriate training and the team will all be trained no later than two weeks after that.
6. Next Steps Long Term: All team members will post their reports on the system by the agreed upon deadlines.

Personal Commitments- 10 minutes

Purpose: Individual commitment to an action to contribute to this team becoming the best it can possibly be.

Process:

- Each person writes down their answer to the following:
 - What is one thing I **WILL** do starting tomorrow, requiring no resources beyond my control, that will help make our vision for this team become real.
- People share their answers.
- Collect all commitments to collate and send back out to everyone