



Harry Franzheim—an HR/OD Practitioner for over 30 years—has published this newsletter to bring you careful insight into reducing costs and unlocking employee potential.

**AT ISSUE**

*Stress is usually viewed as a negative influence on employees, but some stress is not always bad. In fact, stress can be used to keep your team at peak performance, helping them discover creative solutions for your company.*

## Using Stress to Spur Problem Solving



### HR Fact:

Organizations are in a constant state of motion, beginning with the "now state," which is headed toward a "future state." In the "now state," when people and organizations behave ineffectively, people feel pain. Without pain, there would be no call for a change. When a business is always in a reactive mode, there is not time to do what is necessary to change the situation. In visualizing the "future state," leaders develop strategic goals and objectives. Future thinking is essential to determine the direction and the flow of the organization.

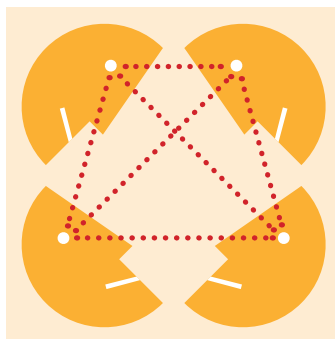
We have covered Tuckman's stages of team development (forming, storming, norming, high performing). And we have discussed the team leader's need to "style shift" to bring about the next stage of development until the team reaches the stage of High Performance. This article covers the leader's role in sustaining High Performance over the long haul.

But first let's dig into the genetics of a High Performing Team (HPT). The following are characteristics of an HPT:

- They operate perfectly fine with or without the leader.
- They have a high degree of interdependency with one another.
- They produce better than they would as individuals.
- They have a high trust level and therefore are able to debate and innovate fast.
- They get a lot accomplished because

#### Six Good Team Characteristics

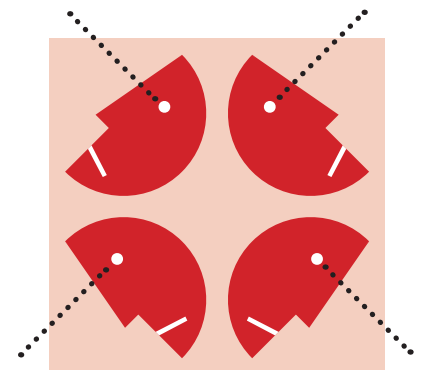
- #1 – Successful without a leader
- #2 – Better as team, not as individuals
- #3 – Dependent upon one another



- #4 – High trust equals quick action
- #5 – Focused on results
- #6 – Like working with each other

#### Five Bad Team Characteristics

- #1 – Absence of trust
- #2 – Fear of conflict
- #3 – Lack of commitment



- #4 – Avoidance of Accountability
- #5 – Inattention to results

they are focused on results.

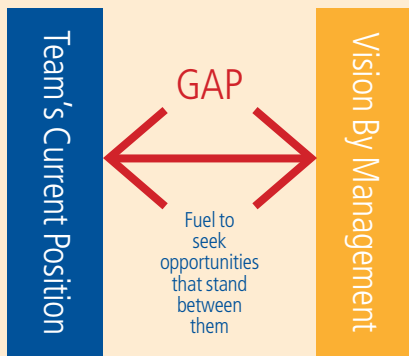
- They like working together, regardless of the tasks.

If you have ever been so lucky to have been a member of an HPT you will have very fond memories and wish to be part of one again. But many people have never had the opportunity to be part of one. High Performance Teams are fun and highly productive. But they are very hard to sustain.

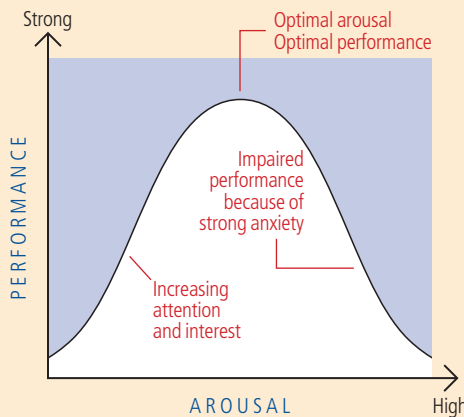
High Performance Teams are hard to sustain because by nature they are highly productive and members can either get bored or work themselves out of a job. Therefore, the key to sustaining the HPT is to always keep them challenged and a little stressed.

### Creative Tension

There is a difference between “being stressed out” and “being burnt out.” We never want to “burn out” a team or an individual. But being “stressed” is highly desirable as long as it comes with focus and a vision.



When there is a gap between a team’s current situation (where we are now) and the vision provided by leadership (where we want to go), a well-functioning team will use the gap as fuel to seek the opportunities that stand in between. Teams are at their best when they are identifying problems, seeking opportunities and closing the gap.



The tension that is created by a beautiful, inspirational vision can be an HPT call to action. If the vision describes the current situation, then the HPT will idle and die.

As the HPT solves problems, seizes opportunities, and slays the dragons, it will be getting closer and closer to the vision. When that happens, it is imperative that Leadership concoct a new vision, one that inspires and challenges the HPT to do more. Failure to adjust the vision will cause the HPT to idle and die.

### Not All Stress Is Created Equal

Stress is not something you get from someone or something. It is simply your chosen reaction to a stimulus. You may perceive the stimuli as an interesting challenge and feel a stress response (eustress) or you may perceive the stimuli as a threat (distress). Note the word “chosen” in the above sentence, which means you are in control even when you feel that you are not. How you choose to perceive the stimulus makes a difference in how you respond.

The Yerkes-Dodson Law (graph above) suggests that with an increase in arousal (eustress), performance will increase, but overdo it and performance will decrease. Task complexity will certainly dictate how quickly the performance drops, but more recent research suggests that simple tasks can be sustained at a high level of perfor-

mance even under the highest amount of arousal (eustress).

### Trust Is the Protein of the High Performance Team

At the cellular level of any High Performance Team is a solid feeling of trust among team members. “I got your back” relationships provide so much cushion that can absorb the heaviest of all errors made by a team member. When there is “unconditional love and respect” for one another, members do not operate out of fear or anxiety, they do not worry about disagreements leading to disengagement, and they do not need to filter ideas or comments. Instead, they are able to innovate, make a mistake, and learn, all without fear of “letting down the team.”

Patrick Lencioni, author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (Jossey-Bass 2002) has put “**absence of trust**” as the **first** and most important dysfunction of a team because without trust there is “**fear of conflict**” (**dysfunction #2**). With a fear of conflict there is a “**lack of commitment**” (**dysfunction #3**). With a lack of commitment there is an “**avoidance of accountability**” (**dysfunction #4**). When there is an avoidance of accountability there is “**inattention to results**” (**dysfunction #5**). Without trust you won’t get high performance.

### What’s a Leader to Do?

Keep the pressure on by the re-creation of a compelling and challenging vision, one that evokes a positive stress response from the team. The leader must do everything possible to keep the level of trust very high. This means that that the leader must encourage risk taking, celebrate failures, and demand learning and improvement. Stress, like gravity, is cheap and dependable. It may be time to amp it up a notch or two! **ne**



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