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*Scripts from the
Working**Together** Learning Project*

Components of Instruction-Rich Teams

from MP3 programs #78-81, 86-88

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Working Together on Instruction-rich Teams I

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of [EvolvingSuccess](#). Today is where you and I begin the discussion on the power of instruction-rich teams. This is the approach I’ve taken to achieve those factor of ten advantages over other people in similar leadership or management contexts. “What do you mean by factor of ten,” I get asked.

First I’ll say that I don’t always get that factor of ten jump on people. It IS usually the case, though, that just my presence raises the level of team productivity by a factor of two or three, you know, double or triple what they were doing. With some careful thinking I often get a factor of five improvement out of the team. And when everything comes together, including the right dose of luck, I get factor of ten improvements in results.

There are two places I get this. I can get the same amount done with a tenth of the resources other people consume to get things done. Top brass likes that. The other place is reducing time to completion to a tenth of the projected time. Top brass likes that, too. Now, I don’t usually get things done in a tenth of the time with a tenth of the people, but one or the other very often works out.

In principle, I get these results because I do not operate out of an alpha climbing, emotionally abusive and domineering posture. If you review the subunit of programs on instruction-LESS teams you’ll see that we’ve identified a lot of team-hindering habits that come out of such a practice. What I do instead is to assure that what the team NEEDS to know it knows, and then I have them design the steps they can actually perform to achieve the targeted goals. It starts with good information, and ends with the team designing and executing their own script of instructions to get the job done.

Specifically, here are the steps, and this is the closest thing to a cook-book approach to anything I’ll ever deliver. You have to start by deciding to move from control through emotional domination to releasing control to the team you’ve assembled. Together with your team you start designing your approach to the successful attainment of the team’s goals. The first specific step you take AS A TEAM is to collect pertinent information. The second step is that together you and the team study the information you’ve collected. Third, you all critically compare what you’ve learned about the issues with the skill sets represented by all the team members. Fourth, based on the skills available to engage the issues the team builds plans to achieve their goals. Fifth, you let the team convert the plans into instructions for behaviors that fit their skill sets. Sixth, you release your team to execute those instructions.

Now, in the subunit on instructionless teams we listed a whole bunch of behaviors most managers exhibit that kill those six steps, which kills productivity in their teams. We’re going to work on each of those nasty points to show how to convert them into instruction-generating behaviors for the sake of your success, and the success of your team.

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Cracking Alpha Cockiness

Welcome! This is Thomas Meylan of **EvolvingSuccess**. To build an instruction-rich team we identified a six step process. Collect information. Study the information. Compare how your team’s skills fit into the information. Design goals and plans to achieve them based on this comparison. Convert the plans into specific behavioral steps the team can actually execute. Go execute the steps.

Not every person at the top can make use of this six step process. Sometimes the person at the top suffers from an inherent and publicly exhibited cockiness. To start with, the cocky person at the top already knows everything. There’s no need to collect any information. The cocky person will simply bark orders. Maybe they make sense, and maybe they don’t. That’s not the cocky person’s problem. It’s merely the team members’ problem to figure out how to cater to these orders.

You see, the cocky person has hired people who play directly into his or her cockiness. The team isn’t composed of thinking individuals with great solutions to offer. It’s composed of people whose emotional make-up requires a cocky, authoritarian person at the top. These team members believe that social dynamics and team working should be this way. Some of them might aspire to be like the person at the top, but most just want the security of someone else telling them what to do so that they don’t make any mistakes.

But, mistakes relative to what standard? Well, the only standard that matters is the standard of the cocky person at the top. However, it’s often the case that this cocky person actually doesn’t know much about his or her own business. As far as any real business market is concerned, that means that most mistakes are being made by the cocky person. Then, through the process of intimidation, the cocky person trains the rest of the organization to make the same mistakes as **standard operation procedure**.

Don’t let this happen to you. You don’t have to take on an undue humility. You simply have to be objective about two truths. First, **NOBODY** knows it all. Second, even in a mediocre team, like the kind formed by cocky people to stroke their egos, multiple heads are almost always better than one.

The big issue for cocky people is that they waste all the talent they’ve collected into their organizations. That’s where I almost always get an automatic doubling of productivity when I show up. The first thing I do is figure out who knows what. The second thing I do is have them train me in the nature of the business and what the current procedures are. The third thing I do is have them give me their best thoughts as to what we can do to do the job better. And **then** I start moving past merely doubling productivity and getting close to that factor of ten level of performance improvement.

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Cracking Alpha Disrespect

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The second characteristic we identified in the person at the top which will keep this six step process from ever getting started is that they disrespect the people they have working for them. It’s an obvious consequence of cockiness, where you know it all and everyone else is a dumb-ass, but that’s all you could hire. OK, there’s a clue right there...why doesn’t a cocky person hire smart people? Can’t find any...or can’t attract any?

But I digress. The lack of respect means that a real team will never actually form. Not only does the lack of respect held by the person at the top prevent this, but the rest of the employees learn to disrespect each other. Disrespect becomes a cultural element in the organization. This creates the pervasive opinion that EVERYONE in the organization is an idiot except ME! The person at the top is an idiot. The co-workers are idiots. The suppliers are idiots. And most of all, the customers are idiots! THERE!

Well let me tell you. It’s not hard for me to double the productivity in a situation like that! Again, it’s one of those cases where I just show up and things **automatically** start going better. Now you can be sure that NO ONE loves me when I show up. They think I’m an idiot, too. So I can get away with playing the dumb old fart while at the same time soliciting everyone else’s great wisdom. After all, like everyone else in the room I think I’m the only guy who came with brains. The difference is that I’m there to succeed at building performance, not build my ego, nor even build my reputation. I only have **professional** things to prove, not personal things.

If you are at the top and you don’t respect the people working for you, remember, you hired them that way. And whether you intended to or not, or even whether you know it or not, you’ve built a culture based on disrespect that doesn’t sit well with anyone who has to do business with your organization.

Disrespect as usually expressed by people at the top is an emotion about people that usually has no basis in reality. Conversely, if you are open to it, people can be allowed to earn your respect based on objective performance standards. Giving people real opportunities to earn your respect **strongly and quickly** changes the nature of your culture. If you further reinforce this by expressing your respect as it is earned you start moving into extremely constructive modes of team building. This will take a lot of practice, but if you start in simple ways to allow people to earn your respect, your change of behavior in this area will create great and positive change in your team.

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Cracking the Unpleasable Alpha

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The third characteristic we identified in the person at the top which will keep this six step process from ever getting started is that they continuously refuse to be pleased by anything done by anyone working for them. This is often greatly aggravated by a related unwillingness by the person at the top to state clearly and exactly what he or she wants. In many cases they don’t know what they want, and by admitting that they run the risk of looking stupid or indecisive. In some cases they know what they want, and they KNOW that what they want would make them look stupid. In other cases it’s the only way the person at the top can motivate a crude form of research and development. They don’t know how to be systematic about it, so they just spit out some vague notions about something that better start working soon or heads will roll. And so the team scurries off in fear or anxiety about solving a problem that hasn’t yet been identified.

Talk about a fabulously efficient way to waste time and money! Keep people working in the dark in the hope that by some random, miraculous ACCIDENT they come up with some significantly business-worthy result. And THEN, be sure to express dissatisfaction with it. Maybe they’ll come up with something better.

People at the top who operate that way, and believe me, there are a lot of them, leave so much money on the table it’s damn near a crime against human sanity. And in fact, it IS a crime against business sanity. Why would anyone WANT to make it harder for their people to succeed in moving their business forward?

If you train your people in the impossibility of pleasing you, you’re probably also training them in the impossibility of pleasing anyone, including a customer base. Your people have been demoralized to the point that they simply believe that they can’t succeed...and so they give up. They still come to work, but they do not work much on the business’s goals after a while.

If you want to succeed at business, you have to succeed at selling things to a customer base that never stops expanding. You have to train people to expect solid targets and goals from you. You have to train them to investigate the means to achieve those targets and goals. Then you have to be clear on your rewards and acknowledgements when they succeed. Your goals and targets are used to help your team define a problem. With a problem in mind they can work toward a solution. With a solution in hand, they can generate the instructions they need to meet your targets and goals.

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Cracking Alpha Narrow-mindedness

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The fourth characteristic we identified in the person at the top which will keep this six step process from ever getting started is that they strongly hold narrow-minded viewpoints and are closed to broad ranges of ideas and possibilities. In other words, they already know it all and can’t conceive of their employees as having any ideas worth contributing to the success of the venture. Now, when you combine this with the characteristic of the previous program, that the person at the top won’t tell you anything, then you’ve effectively killed the ability to do at least steps 1 through 3 in our list of steps to create an instruction rich-team.

One of the reasons that all of the negative characteristics of a typical alpha are so difficult to deal with is that these negative characteristics still deliver what the alpha thinks of as an acceptable level of success. There actually isn’t anything wrong as far as the alpha is concerned. So why should such a person broaden their viewpoint and seek out the knowledge of their employees?

Let’s suppose YOU are such an alpha. What conditions might create an interest in operating your company differently? The two most frequent are, #1, the market FORCES you to change approaches and #2, you are dissatisfied with your current market share or profitability. Well, those are both legitimate reasons for changing business approach and operations. The critical issue in both of these conditions is the need to change.

What’s the first thing that needs to change? The volume of new ideas flowing into your company needs to increase. Those new ideas will be the basis of the changes you apply to your current approaches and operations. So, how do you as a stubborn and narrow minded alpha open up to new ideas?

First, start getting used to the idea that no one, including you, knows everything. Second, get used to the idea that if people have been involved in your business for any length of time they have learned something about your business. Third, since they’re your employees you have a certain right to what they have learned, and you want to get the benefit of their experience. Fourth, you want to plow their experience into the changes you need to respond to market changes and/or to improve your profitability. Lastly, keep in mind that you will have to continue to practice these steps even when your gut tells you things aren’t working. In reality, things **will** be working. They just will be changed.

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Cracking Alpha Laziness

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The fifth characteristic we identified in the person at the top which will keep this six step process from ever getting started is that they don’t work as hard on their business as they should, and the rest of the team becomes discouraged as a result. The person at the top doesn’t seem to care, so why should the rest of the team?

What does this have to do with creating an instruction-rich team? On the face of it, there are two things. First, motivation to succeed at any aspect of the job has been sucked out of the organization. Second, the first big job in the six step process is to collect information that could lead to the organization’s success. If the person at the top isn’t engaged enough in the organization to seek out success-building information, there is nothing to convert into instructions for the team to execute.

If the person at the top is really disengaged from the success of the organization, the best option for the rest of the team is to find a job in a better organization, plain and simple. But suppose this disengaged person all of a sudden develops a passion for the success of his or her organization. What do they do next?

If the person at the top really is turning over a new leaf, then the most straightforward thing to do is to execute our little six step process for building an instruction-rich team. The first step is to collect information that will lead to success. The best way for the person at the top to execute this step is to make it a communal activity. Engage the entire organization in information collection. It’s fast, it’s usually efficient, and people will be attracted to information that already makes sense to them. This is important in case what they found becomes an important part of the new strategy going forward. The person who found the information becomes an immediate subject matter expert for your organization.

In a similar manner, the rest of the steps in the process to build instruction-rich teams can be executed as communal activities. In fact, most of them don’t really work unless they are team activities. And furthermore, the greater the level the effort on the part of the person at the top turning over the new leaf, the greater the performance payoff is likely to be for the rest of the organization.

Why is this? Because while it is often asserted that you SHOULD lead by example, the fact is that you ALWAYS lead by example, whether the example is good, or it’s bad.

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Cracking Instructionless Group Habits

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The last point we want to make about the formation of instruction-rich teams falls to the team itself. While we’re not going to talk about revolts or other forms of social or civil disobedience, there is a certain responsibility a team can take for its own performance. Assuming that a team doesn’t outright abandon the structure to which it belongs, the team can change the way it sees the person at the top. The most common thing teams do is build and nurture a certain emotional dependence on the person at the top. It could be a constructive dependence, as in an organization where the person at the top functions as a real leader. But often the emotional dependence is dysfunctional, as when a team believes it has to suffer with an abusive person at the top because, well, what else can you do?

You see, most teams have their OWN reasons for remaining instructionless. The most common two are, One, the team is afraid of change and, Two, they don’t know there is another way to work. Ultimately, however, a team remains instructionless because they do not demand that instructions be part of the working environment. Using old fashioned transactional analysis jargon, this is where the team members act out as children with respect to the PARENT at the top.

So someone might ask me, “Tom, what advantage is there in pushing for better instructions from management?” Well, there are two answers to that question. First, better instructions lead to better performance. These will improve both job satisfaction and job security. Second, who said a team has to wait for better instructions from leadership and management? Adults, again in the transactional analysis framework, define their own approaches, and develop and execute the action plans it takes to succeed. As a general rule, a team full of adults performs better than a team full of kids.

Now, if the person at the top isn’t performing like an adult, that’s going to hurt team performance, right? Can the team develop a culture on its own that promotes better behavior from the person at the top? Can the team lead by example if the person at the top can’t? I think it can, but experience shows that the person at the top usually feels highly threatened by such moves. Speaking from my own past on this, I learned that the more like adults a team acts, the greater the need for increased communication to the person at the top. This REDUCES, but doesn’t eliminate, the levels of misunderstanding generated between the team and the person at the top. The person at the top might not have actually wanted a powerful team, but the team could consider inviting him or her in.

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