

ON COACHING THE TEAM

Questions To Test Your Group's Effectiveness

1. Do members of the group share in knowing why this group exists, where it is going, what it's trying to accomplish, what its core priorities are?
Or are they non-committed, grudging participants, perhaps because they feel that membership in the group is irrelevant to their individual performance and individual compensation?
2. Do practitioners believe that they can really depend upon and count on each other, and do they feel confident about each other's capabilities and efforts?
Or do they feel that relying on each other's goodwill and expertise is either naive or dangerous?
3. Do people share their collective wins and losses with each other?
Or do they only claim personal victories while rationalizing negative outcomes with excuses and finger-pointing?
4. Do members of the group genuinely listen to each other's ideas and opinions?
Or do they simply defend and promote their own positions?
5. Do people publicly honor and recognize each other's efforts and contributions?
Or are accomplishments taken for granted?
6. Do members of the group value each other's time?
Or do they behave in a way that suggests that other's time doesn't have much importance to them?
7. Do group members hold agreements and promises made among themselves as sacred?
Or, are agreements and promises only made expediently, such as "maybe, if it's convenient"?
8. Do people help each other succeed and grow, and then share in the excitement of each other's accomplishments?
Or are such concerns deemed irrelevant?
9. Do people hold each other to high standards of performance and provide each other with straight feedback, coaching, and compassion?
Or do they fail to insist on high standards or to coach poor performance, and confuse caring for people with indulging them.
10. Do group members behave as if their own success will be enhanced by the success of the group?
Or do these people act as if their own needs and those of the team are contradictory concepts?
11. Do people in the group share client contacts, information, tools and other resources with each other?
Or do they tend to hoard and protect turf?
12. Are members of the group recognized for contributing to the team purpose?
Or do group members feel that they are better off pursuing their own personal agendas, even though outwardly participating?
13. Does the group get the authority, the resources and the support to do what it was organized to do?
Or is a lot of time wasted playing political games to overcome internal bureaucracy?

Some Possible Benefits From Acting As a Group

1. Improving value to clients by delivering to them the collective wisdom and skills, and accumulated knowledge, of the group
2. Making business development efforts more effective through pooling and coordination of individual efforts
3. Better utilization and development of junior professionals through collective decisions on staffing of client work, allocation of resources, and mentoring.
4. Collective development of tools, templates, databases, and other practice aids to benefit everyone.
5. More rapid and effective dissemination of expertise and skills among the group
6. Better client service through greater ability to put the right people on the right job
7. Better market image through development of a collective reputation, not just the sum of individual reputations
8. The comfort of belonging to a small group rather than being lost as one of a very large number of people (applies both to the successful retention of senior as well as junior people)
9. Informal coaching on a one-to-one basis acting as a source of help for personal growth, rather than relying on firm-wide annual, bureaucratic performance appraisals
10. Improved profitability from focusing as a group on ways to enhance performance
11. Creation of a critical mass of time and resources to develop innovative service offerings, which no individual could afford to do alone.

Which of these benefits will be easiest to obtain? Hardest?

Which will be the quickest to obtain? The slowest?

Which disrupts your culture least? Most?

Which represents the biggest impact on your success? Smallest?

Which requires the most change in behavior? Least?

Which requires the most activist role for the leader? The least?

Conducting a Group Self-Evaluation

Agree or Disagree?

1. Members of our group are committed to accomplishing our objectives.
2. Members of our group get a lot of encouragement for new ideas.
3. Members of our group freely express their real views.
4. Every member of our group has a clear idea of the group's goals.
5. Everyone is involved in the decisions we have to make.
6. We tell each other how we are feeling.
7. All group members display respect for each other.
8. The feelings among group members tend to pull us together.
9. Everyone's opinion gets listened to.
10. There is very little bickering among group members.
11. We have the right skills, personalities and sufficiently motivated group members
12. This group is challenging and fun to work with
13. What needs to be done next is clear and correct
14. I am satisfied with the progress of the group to date in moving toward its objectives

Questions That Concern Group Members

1. • Why should we work together in groups?
2. • What's in it for me?
3. • How much of my precious time am I expected to devote?
4. • How will we operate as a group?
5. • What are we working to accomplish?
6. • How can we absolutely ensure that we actually accomplish anything?

Areas for Group Agreement

1. **Mutual accountability.** All group members must hold one another accountable for individual and for group performance.

2. **Shared contribution.** All group members must have an opportunity and obligation to contribute

3. **Shared values.** All group members must adhere strictly to the values, principles and standards established by the group

Common "Nonnegotiable Minimum Standards"

- a. Only truly superior work will be accepted.
- b. There will be no room for mere competence in client satisfaction. We will operate as our clients' trusted advisors, not their technical experts.
- c. Every person must have, and be working on, a personal development plan: no cruising is allowed.
- d. No one will work on things that could be delegated to a more junior person. If it can be delegated, it must be.
- e. Everyone must treat all others with respect at all times.
- f. Anyone in charge of a client assignment will be required to supervise all the work on that assignment to a high level, since we owe a duty of due care to our clients to manage the affairs that they have entrusted to us.

Clarifying Group Purpose

1. Why does our group exist?
(what specific benefits can your group expect to obtain from acting as a coordinated team?);

2. How will working together as a group help us compete?
(what might the benefits be to each member and to the firm from investing some amount of each individual's discretionary non-billable time in pursuit of building a strong practice team?) and,

3. What's in it for each of us?
(what might each individual member want to get out of working as a group for their respective career satisfaction?)

Negotiating a Group Agreement

1. Are we prepared to create a supportive environment and what would it look like?
2. Are we prepared to work at getting the benefit of joint intellectual exchange?
3. Are we prepared to cooperate in developing common tools and methodologies that we might all be able to share?
4. Are we prepared to invest in developing superior support staff, internal systems and technologies to provide for the effective conduct of our practice?
5. Are we prepared to effectively engage in joint marketing activities?
6. Are we prepared to devote non-billable time to helping each other when facing sensitive client issues?

Possible Topics for Group Ground Rules

1. Mutual respect and cooperation
2. Interpersonal communications and expression of ideas
3. Making of decisions and resolving of conflicts
4. Support for personal risk-taking
5. Frequency and format of group meetings
6. Meeting attendance and punctuality
7. Participation in group business development efforts and sharing of clients
8. Completion of individual projects
9. Client service and handling of complaints
10. Learning and sharing knowledge
11. Supervision, training, delegating, and staffing of engagements
12. Constructive feedback and performance evaluations

Throw Down A Challenge

1. What breakthrough goal would we like to achieve?
2. What complex problem would we like to solve?
3. What would we like to create that never existed before?
4. Which competitor would we like to vanquish?
5. Do we have a deep energy and passion to accomplish something extraordinary?"

Action Planning Meeting Topics

1. What is our group's strategy for being more profitable over the next year?
2. In what ways can we improve our overall efficiency in handling our kinds of matters and get our client assignments accomplished at a lower cost to us?
3. What kind and amount of training may be necessary to have each of us performing at a higher level of competence?
4. What actions can we take to improve the fees clients will pay for our services?
5. Which of our most recent client engagements would we consider to have been our most profitable and what do we need to do to get more of those?
6. What could we be doing to ensure a higher degree of morale, motivation and enthusiasm, so that we might better retain our talented people?
7. What do we need to do to better understand our existing clients, understand what is keeping them awake at nights, and actually be perceived to be more valuable to them?
8. What kinds of services might existing or prospective clients want, that no one else has yet to offer them?
9. What would we need to do to get our existing clients to actively refer others to use our group's services?

Guidelines For Action-Planning Meetings

1. Set a singular focus
2. "Brainstorm" ideas
3. Ensure ideas are actionable
4. Get "voluntary" commitments
5. Keep commitments small
6. Establish your "Contracts For Action"
7. Follow-up between meetings
8. Celebrate successes

Rules For “Brainstorming”

1. • Say everything that comes to mind
2. • No discussion
3. • Make no value judgements – positive or negative
4. • Record all comments quickly so that they are seen and get down lots of ideas
5. • Encourage participation and build on each other’s ideas.

Steps to Resolve Conflict

1. Describe the conflict and the nonproductive behavior you are observing.
2. Ask each person to comment on the cause of the disagreement.
3. Have each person, in turn, summarize what he or she heard the other person say (or understand the other person's position to be).
4. Ask each person, in turn, to identify points of agreement and disagreement.
5. Invite your colleagues to suggest ways to proceed.

Specific Ideas for Providing Recognition

1. Visit a person in his or her office just to thank them for some specific contribution or post a thank-you note on your colleague's office door.
2. Send an e-mail message to everyone in the group advising of a person's personal contribution to your own accomplishment.
3. Organize a number of your group to take a specific staff member out for lunch on their birthday or arrange to send a card home signed by everyone on the team.
4. Present a stuffed "Energizer bunny" to that group member who keeps going and going, or a stuffed roadrunner to those who manage to complete a particular rush client project in record time.
5. Arrange with firm management to rename one of your firm's meeting rooms each year after that person who has made the most notable contribution to the practice team during the previous twelve months.
6. Present each new person joining the group with a specially printed T-shirt displaying their name above the name of the group and the firm.
7. Initiate your own internal one-page monthly newsletter. Arrange a "Bravo" column to salute personal and professional activities or a "Good Tries" column to recognize and offer encouragement to those whose innovations did not achieve their full potential.
8. Allow new people and staff to rent, from the local art gallery, a work of art of their choice for their office or work area.
9. Allow, encourage and support people in developing their own recognition programs.
10. Create a Hall Of Fame wall with photos of outstanding achievements, both professional and personal.
11. Create an annual report, yearbook, or photo album containing memorabilia and photographs of every group member along with their best achievements of the year.
12. Give an employee a day off with pay if he or she recommends a person who is hired and makes it past the ninety-day probation period.
13. Buy a local billboard to celebrate a person's professional, political or civic honor.
14. Host a surprise picnic for the entire practice team in the parking lot or parking garage.
15. Designate days when anyone who makes a negative comment forks over a dollar and use the proceeds to fund a social event or external charity.
16. Give out "Odd Couple" (Felix and Oscar) awards to people with the neatest and messiest work areas.
17. Send flowers to the spouse of any person or staff member who has to be away from home for an extended period on client business, to show appreciation for the sacrifice.

