

# THE SUPERSTAR TEAM

HOW CAN YOU INSPIRE YOUR COLLEAGUES TO ACHIEVE OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE? CHANTAL BURNS EXPLAINS

The search for the holy grail of high-performing teams continues to be a popular pursuit among business leaders and HR managers. This makes sense when we consider that we can't achieve sustainable success unless people work well together.

So what is the secret of a superstar team?

If we were to list some of the qualities and predictors of high-performing teams, it would probably include:

- Great team spirit – evidenced by the feeling and energy when you're with them.
- Openness – people are able to speak honestly to each other, without taking things personally or getting defensive.
- Appreciation and respect for everyone's strengths.
- A desire to listen and understand each other.
- A lack of ego and a lack of dominating and controlling behaviour.

While they may look very different on the outside, what if there is one underlying factor that accounts for *all* these qualities and behaviours?

Over the past 10 years, the importance of *state of mind* has become more visible as a key enabler of performance. While it has been highly respected in the sports



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arena, it's only recently that businesses are catching on to it.

In December 2014, the *Harvard Business Review* ran an article entitled 'How State of Mind affects your Performance'. The authors shared some of their research findings, in which 94% of respondents said that calm, happy and energised states of mind are the ones that 'drive the greatest levels of effectiveness and performance'.

They missed one pivotal piece in the article, however. They didn't address what *determines* our various states of mind. The answer to this question is where we find the true leverage for individual and team performance.

To shed more light on this, my research partners and I conducted our own study in 2013/14, with hundreds of leaders and workers across multiple organisations. We asked: 'How important is state of mind when it comes to performance at work?' and 81% rated it as crucial.

We also asked: 'When you're having a bad day at work, what do you attribute that to?' The second most highly ranked answer was: 'If I've had a negative encounter with a colleague or manager.' Interestingly, 'my own state of mind' and 'how I'm thinking about things' ranked lowest on the list.

To put this into perspective, it's the equivalent of 1,000 people agreeing that nutrition

is crucial for a healthy body and then ranking nutrition lowest on the list for what determines good health.

We live in a world where most of us believe that how we think and feel is somehow at the mercy of other people or situations. This 'outside-in' belief – that our state of mind is governed by external factors – is part of an outdated understanding of how the mind works and it accounts for the majority of the problems that we encounter at work.

The truth is that we are active creators of our entire psychological experience.

How we think instantly creates our feeling state from moment to moment and this determines how we experience other people and the various situations that we are facing at work. Yet society tells us it's the other way round. We're taught that situations or other people make us feel the way we do. We're told that our motivation, happiness and wellbeing are dependent on our circumstances, accomplishments or material wealth.

This 'outside-in' belief fills our mind with unnecessary thinking, causing us to behave in ways that we otherwise wouldn't.

## It's not you, it's me

Let's take John, who is leading a project and is feeling increasingly frustrated because his colleagues are underperforming. Deadlines are being missed and John is getting flack from his senior management. He begins to get frustrated and resentful. He starts to lose hope that the team will get this project completed on time and on budget, and he begins to worry about the impact on his position. This plays out in how he relates to his colleagues as he becomes more and more withdrawn.

To John, it really looks like the performance of his colleagues and the challenges with the project are the cause of his frustration and discouragement. But the reality is that 100% of John's feelings of discouragement and worry are coming directly from his own thinking. As he continues to view the situation from this worried frame of mind, it appears more difficult and his colleagues seem less helpful.

If John realises that his colleagues and situation are not causing his feelings, this changes the whole game. Without all that concerned and judgemental thinking cluttering up his mind, the situation looks different and more hopeful. He gets new ideas for how he can progress the project and help his colleagues.

When we understand where our feelings are coming from (*thought*), it makes no sense to blame something or someone else for our stress or frustration. It would be like blaming the car in front of you for your empty fuel tank. In the moment you realise that you're 'blaming the car in front', all that 'outside-in' thinking instantly falls away, freeing your mind and

## What you need to know about high performance

- **My red will never be the same as your red:** We are all operating from our own subjective realities. The first step to fostering great relationships is to understand how thought works.
- **You can't feel something you don't first think:** Thought and feeling are two sides of the same coin. We're always living in the feeling of our own thinking taking form from moment to moment.
- **It's not them, it's you:** Your experience of others will always be consistent with how you are thinking about them. Your responses, behaviours and actions are generated by *your* thinking and not someone else's.
- **Diversity is the creative nature of thought:** Conflict is the natural experience of different perceptions colliding. We can learn as much from our differences as we can from our similarities.
- **Sticky thinking:** People and relationships don't get stuck. Only our thinking gets stuck.
- **No one has to change:** When you know where your feelings are coming from, no one has to change in order for you to feel OK. Your happiness or clarity isn't dependent on anyone else. It's already within you and always one thought away.

## We are active creators of our entire psychological experience

bringing new perspectives and possibilities.

### Advice on how to be discouragement-proof

How does your team handle and respond to setbacks and difficulties? Does it take them a long time to settle down and regain their bearings? Do they play the blame game and expend time trying to work out who is responsible?

Our natural capacity to handle setbacks and difficult circumstances is fuelled by our clarity of mind. And the fastest route back to clarity is seeing the truth of your experience.

Right now, in this very moment, where do you think your feelings are coming from? If you think they're coming from 'out there', it will automatically create more clutter and noise. If you

recognise that it's an inside job, it will automatically guide you back to a more objective and resourceful state of mind.

### Seeing beyond difference

What's your relationship with conflict? Do you avoid it at all costs? Are you the mediator who often tries to help people to 'get along better'?

Teams that function in a healthy and collaborative way will experience conflict as a natural aspect of being human rather than as something to avoid or resist. We all think differently and to expect it to be some other way is scientifically impossible.

My red will never be the same as your red. The more we understand and appreciate the truth of this, the less time and energy we waste on resisting or avoiding difference and defending

our view as if it's the only right one. And when we're not doing that, we inevitably find ourselves being more open, tolerant and curious about how other people view the world.

## No one can make you feel anything that you don't think

Other people are never the ultimate problem. Our primary relationship is with thought. It is only our innocent misunderstanding of how thought works that creates all the relationship issues that we encounter. Our feelings will often seem like a logical and natural response to what others are saying and doing.

In actual fact, life is always an 'inside-out' experience. It's how we think in any given moment that determines how we feel and, consequently, how we perceive and experience others. It's always a matter of perception.

That's why, when we operate from an 'inside-out' understanding, it brings perspective and clarity when they are most needed because we're aligned with how life actually works. It reconnects us to our natural resilience, wisdom and creativity.

Working well together is the inevitable outcome of a team that understands the true source of its own performance. As a leader, it's the greatest education that you can give to yourself and others. ♥

1 [www.hbr.org/2014/12/how-your-state-of-mind-affects-your-performance](http://www.hbr.org/2014/12/how-your-state-of-mind-affects-your-performance)

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