

HOW TO...

Deliver team coaching internally

The need for team-focused coaching and organisation-wide systemic thinking is greater than ever before. This means the ability to offer some form of team coaching is becoming increasingly important for one-to-one coaches, leaders, HR professionals, change managers and consultants.

Like me, hundreds of coaches are already trained and certified as team and systemic coaches, and we have our place. However, as the market continues to understand the benefit of focusing on teams and systems, rather than just individuals, within organisations, the need for one-to-one coaches, leaders, managers, HR professionals and change agents to apply team coaching skills will increase, and practically, not everyone will have received formal team coaching training. So, what are the basics?

TOP TEAM COACHING COMPONENTS AND APPROACHES

The eight team coaching components that follow are drawn from a real case study. My own experience as an internal team coach is combined with insight from team members, the team leader, HR representatives and other stakeholders within the organisation.

Note that content is not necessarily considered best practice, a reflection of professional team coaching competencies, or a particular team

coaching model or approach. Rather, these approaches reflect areas to consider based on real life experience.

1. FATAL FLAW

Waiting until the teams seems completely ready

MAKE IT WORK

Approach #1: Just start

Even if the team is busy and does not seem 'ready' to start intensive team development, start anyway. Working with the team will ready them. Begin with simple activities such as improving meeting structures, getting to know each other better, understanding strengths and developing team behaviour norms.

Michael, the leader of the team I worked with, said, "I am grateful we started the development journey when we did, as groundwork done early on played a big part in both me and the team surviving significant challenges later on, both professionally and personally."

2. FATAL FLAW

Not giving attention to contracting and agreements on a regular basis

MAKE IT WORK

Approach #2: Invest in team agreements

Invest as much time as needed agreeing roles and expectations between team members, between team members and the leader, and between the team and key stakeholders. Continually renegotiate all agreements.

Jane, a member of the team, reflected,

Drawing on her research for her book and her experiences as an internal team coach, **Helen Zink** sets out the basics for team coaching within an organisation

"It took years to pull together a meaningful team agreement. While we established initial behaviour norms in our very first development session, they continually evolved."

3. FATAL FLAW

Not being aligned

MAKE IT WORK

Approach #3: Ensure alignment

Encourage the team to develop clear purpose and a collective development goal. Ensure both are genuine and aligned with overall organisational strategy, and continually revisit this work. The easier it feels to accomplish, the more likely team purpose is a "tick-box" exercise rather than a reflection of genuine beliefs.

A cautionary note from Greg, another member of the team: "We struggled for years to reach agreement on whether we

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needed a written purpose statement for our team at all, let alone agreeing on the wording of it.”

4. FATAL FLAW
Not evaluating
MAKE IT WORK

Approach #4: Measure progress

Establish ways to gauge shifts in the team, for example, engagement surveys (if frequent enough), high performing team and other assessments, or stakeholder feedback. Discuss results with the team and key stakeholders in raw, unfiltered form. Recognise that tangible results only tell part of the story and that discussion surrounding results is more important than scores.

Michael commented, “I noticed changes in how the team were talking to each other, how they were getting along, and how they were interacting with stakeholders. Being able to feel the increased level of trust within the team was the most significant benefit, and I am not sure how we would ever have been able to measure a sense of that. I could feel it!”

5. FATAL FLAW
Flying solo

MAKE IT WORK

Approach #5: Involve stakeholders

Involve stakeholders throughout the process, including prioritisation of development activity. Ask stakeholders to respond to 360 surveys, encourage team members to interview them, or invite them to team sessions.

Susan, a senior HR leader and key stakeholder in this case study, said, “We (C-suite, staff reporting to team members, peers and other stakeholders) were not involved enough. We missed opportunities to find ways to support the team. If we had been involved more, we would have understood the team better, their successes and struggles, and some critics amongst us may have become advocates for the team.”

6. FATAL FLAW

Failing to follow up and reinforce
MAKE IT WORK

Approach #6: Reinforce

Get traction by reinforcing work done in

team sessions with one-to-one coaching of team members and informal micro-coaching moments. Interact with the team between team sessions, pop into regular team meetings, establish peer coaching among team members, and find other ways to insert reminders into ‘business as usual’.

In this case study, I was an internal team coach and worked with the team every day. Jane said, “Our informal conversations, whether they were advisory or coaching in nature, were the most significant benefit of having an internal coach who was part of our team.”

7. FATAL FLAW
Failing to walk the talk
MAKE IT WORK

Approach #7: Role-model

Role-model psychological safety by encouraging participation and valuing diversity. How you behave when you are with the team will rub off on them and others they interact with.

Greg noted that team coaching completely changed the way the team

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interacted with each other, and I led the way when I was with the team. "Michael used to make all the decisions. Now we talk openly, make decisions without the leader, challenge each other, know each other better, have each other's backs, and have a lot of laughs!"

8. FATAL FLAW

Failing to walk the talk

MAKE IT WORK

Approach #8: Having the team leader champion the work

Team leaders play a disproportionate role in how teams operate. They normally hire and fire team members, negotiate and approve the use of resources, and decide how much team time to invest in particular activities. Furthermore, as illustrated in this case study, the leader's style significantly influences the way the team interact with each other, their relationships with stakeholders and, ultimately, their performance.

In this case, Michael resisted working on his own leadership style at first. Yet, over time, he made changes which enabled his own growth and the collective growth of the team. He said, "My commitment to work on my leadership style should have come earlier in the journey. My understanding around the critical role

that a team leader plays in high performance and team change is one of the most significant things I learnt from this experience."

Michael's experience highlighted the importance of encouraging the leader to:

- Create their own bespoke leadership style — a flexible style that meets the needs of the team and stakeholders in different situations.
- Have explicit conversations with team members clarifying the type of leadership they need to perform at their best.
- Reinforcing work done as a team in one-to-one conversations with staff. The leader has a key support role, described in no. 7 earlier.

FINAL WORDS OF ADVICE

The practical suggestions above have come from team members, team leader and key stakeholders who have experienced the benefit of team coaching first-hand. Michael encourages "all to invest in team development and coaching like we did, and remember it relies on a lot of faith and trust in the power of the coaching process."

However, being a team coach is not for the faint-hearted. It's complex, uncertain and scary at times, reflected by the high level of training, practice and supervision required over many

years to become certified by coaching professional bodies.

The challenge of team coaching may not be for you, yet you can add team coaching approaches to your existing toolkit with great success. Whether or not you aspire to formal team coach training or credentials, I encourage you to take a look at professional team coaching competencies and other further reading listed below; they contain sage advice for anyone working with teams. 📖

About the author

● **Helen Zink** is a growth coach, leadership coach and team coach, with significant hands-on business and leadership experience at a senior level.

Helen draws from a large toolkit, including coaching, team coaching, applied positive psychology, change management and other strategic tools and methodologies. She holds many qualifications and certifications, including: Senior Practitioner Team and Individual Coach with EMCC, Advanced Certification in Team Coaching and Professional Certified Coach with ICF, MSc (Coaching Psychology), MBA, BMS (hons), and others.

She is the author of *Team coaching for organisational development: team, leader, organisation, coach and supervision perspectives* (Routledge, 2023).

Further reading

- Clutterbuck, D. (2020). *Coaching the Team at Work*. Nicholas Brealey.
- Clutterbuck, D., Turner, T., & Murphy, C. (2022). *The Team Coaching Casebook*. Open University Press.
- European Mentoring and Coaching Council (2020). *EMCC global team coaching accreditation standards framework*. Retrieved from: <https://emccglobal.org/accreditation/tcqa>
- International Coaching Federation (2020b). *ICF team coaching competencies: moving beyond one-to-one coaching*. Retrieved from: <https://coachfederation.org/team-coaching-competencies>
- Zink, H. (2023). *Team Coaching in Organisational Development: Team, leader, organisation, coach and supervision perspectives*. Routledge.