

2 Weeks 2

Better Teamwork

Or, "A Tiny Fraction of What You Need to Have a High-Performance Team, But, Hey, It Might Be Good for Some Laughs, and I Can't Give Away Everything! You're Getting 10 Quite Practical Actions to Make Things Better for Yourself and Your Hardworking Teammates, in a Possibly Entertaining if Not Enlightening Format. Did I Mention It's Free? Can't Beat that with a Stick. Well, You Could, But the Pages Would Get Wrinkly."



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Hey, why not save a tree and some cash? If you print this, go double-sided if you can.

Everyone else, sorry about the blank pages, but that's why they're there!

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I don't know why this makes
me laugh, but it does.

If you're not at least smiling, we
may be in trouble here.

2 Quick



I know what you're thinking. There's no way you can fix your teamwork problems, much less create The World's Most Extraordinary Team Ever, in just two weeks.

Well, no, of course not. I didn't title this *2 Weeks 2 Perfect Teamwork!*

But you can do a lot more for your team in two weeks than you might think. I'm going to let you in on the biggest bombshell of a business secret you will read this year.¹ You see, scientists have been researching what makes one team perform better than another similar team for decades. My bibliography has more than 500 sources. Really.² There's always more to learn, but science has a pretty good idea of what works. Every time a new teamwork book comes out, heralded by trumpets and a parade of acrobats as the "next big deal," it turns out to mostly be a rehash of stuff we've mostly known for, in some cases, 50 or 60 years. Since I've been training teams instead of just writing books about it since 1994, I know how to translate that knowledge into specific actions that work. They're actually pretty easy. But here's the secret:

Nobody Does Them

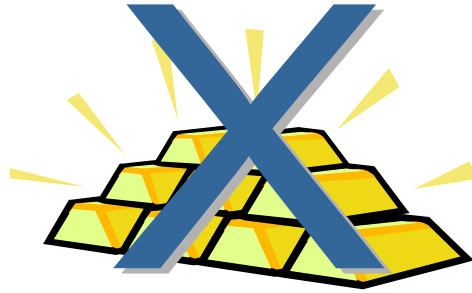
That's right. That's the big secret. Scientists know what structures and processes will help most teams perform better, and almost no teams use more than a few. Many don't use any. Now don't get me wrong: I love this. That's why I have a job. As long as one business team on the planet has missed the news that building a high-performance team isn't a big deal and doesn't cost much more than time, people will keep paying me the ever so reasonable fees I charge to do it for them. Yippee!

However, if you are one of those strange people who don't want me to earn a living off of you, I'm going to do something really bizarre. I'm going to tell you what to do over the next two weeks to give yourself and your team a better working life. And I'm going to do it for *free*.

¹ Maybe I exaggerate a tad, but stay with me.

² If you have nothing better to do, count them at: SuddenTeams.com/small-group-research. Then consider whether maybe you need a fuller life. Volunteer somewhere, that sort of thing. You'll be much happier than you will sitting around counting bibliographic sources, I promise you!

In case you're a "visual learner," that's:



Again, I know what you're thinking: "What an odd duck, giving away his business!" Problem is, I am a "purpose-driven" duck, and I have this silly little mission statement that I actually pay attention to: "To improve people's lives by spreading the benefits of true teaming as widely as possible."³ Because of that, I feel compelled to try to get you to take the simple, free steps in this e-book.

Of course, you're thinking, "Great: free advice, and worth every penny." I understand and appreciate your skepticism. If people were more skeptical about the claims some "team builders" make, I would have a lot less cynicism to overcome. When I work with teams who have been forced to play games or do ropes courses but saw no lasting changes, I first have to physically stop their eyes from rolling around like drunk hamsters. Those team-building activities aren't all bad. Though some truly accomplish nothing, most are merely ill-timed. Typical team building addresses only one or two issues the team faces, or symptoms, not root causes. If your everyday working environment is constantly bringing people down, a morale-boosting day at the go-kart track is a waste of time and money. If you don't change things at work, morale is going to sink again. Team-building games and personality tests put the cart before the horse—especially bad when the axle has snapped and the cart is lying in muck. Fix what's bringing the morale down in the first place. Even better, take steps that will improve all aspects of the team's performance.

Rant over. I feel better.

Everything I suggest in this book is both science-based and tried-and-true by yours truly. They're all little things, and they won't turn your team into Superteam,⁴ but if you take the time to put them in place and keep doing them consistently, they will help your team operate more efficiently and with less stress for everybody.

Of course, what I'm hoping is that you will decide I know what the heck I'm talking about and at least buy my nifty, practical (though not very funny)

³ Written before everybody put "To improve people's lives..." in their mission statements. Back in 1999, before the Millennium Bug ended civilization as we knew it, thankfully.

⁴ "Faster than a sales presentation (what isn't?)... Able to leap tall silos in a single bound..."

guide to high-performance teamwork, *The SuddenTeams Program: Bring Your Team Together Using the Science of Teams*.⁵ And if you do what most people do then—let it sit unread on your bookshelf for a year—maybe you'll get so desperate you'll call me and pay me the ever so reasonable fees I charge. For about the same cost as a couple days of team building, I can facilitate all of the agreements science says will give you the highest output and the lowest costs and stress possible. I call this:

❧❧

My Evil (Marketing) Plan

❧❧

⁵ An absurdly cheap \$17.75 (US) and available through SuddenTeams.com/effective-teamwork-book, IndieBound.org, or Amazon.com.

2 Use This E-Book

Here's how the e-book works: Each day, do the step listed for that day. Pretty complicated, eh?

It truly is that simple. Technically you don't have to do the steps one per day, or in any particular order. I suggest you at least do "Day 1" on, you know, Day 1. Days 3 and 8 will have to be done in longer team meetings, so if you have regular team meetings on different days, switch steps around as needed. Most of the tips are not major changes, so I don't think you'll go into "change overload" if you do them straight through. In fact, deciding as a team you're going to dive in and get them done by a specific date makes you far more likely to complete them and get the full benefits of this thing.

When a step tells the team to "agree to" something,⁶ ask if anyone has any major objections. If so, negotiate those out, modifying what I recommended as you wish. Think of these steps as recipes, not standard operating procedures. But try not to get flour everywhere.

If you're a restaurant team, good luck with that.

This bird looks like he's high on sunflower seeds. I wonder if there's a 12-Step Program for that. And if so, are the steps pigeon-toed?



Yes, this is the way you will look while reading the e-book. I suggest hiding in a closet for an hour so people won't worry about you.

⁶ Not so great, I realize, if making agreements is one of your problems. If so, see Day 2.

Day 1: Standup Meetings

If you've worked in a group or team⁷ for more than, say, one day, you're aware of the problem of people doing their own thing... or misunderstanding what they were supposed to do... or spending the day gambling online. Rare is the team I work with whose members don't bring up "accountability" as a problem. Even if there's a fancy-schmancy project schedule with specific tasks, dates, assigned names, and punishments for failure like having to wear a chicken suit to work, people still want to do what they want to do. When that "what" isn't contributing to the team's priorities, other members get resentful, and the project slowly swirls down the drain. Let's start fixing that today, 'cause the rest of the two weeks will go a lot easier if you do.

If you happen to work in software development, you're going to think I stole this idea from Agile methodology, but I didn't. I stole it from a boss's boss years ago. He stole it from somebody else, as did the Agilistas. Whoever first came up with it deserves a kiss on both cheeks.⁸ It's a simple tool for making sure everyone on the team is doing what the team needs them to be doing.

Here's how it works:



You meet, while standing up.⁹ I'm serious! Okay, if you have a virtual team and you're meeting by phone, you can sit. But the point to standing, if possible, is it keeps people from settling in for a nice, long, time-sapping meeting. Whether in person or on the phone, all you talk about are three things:

- 1) What you did in the past workday.

⁷ Yes, there's a difference. See: SuddenTeams.com/what-is-a-team.

⁸ I think it was Attila the Hun. Who wants to sit in a meeting when you sit on a horse all day? Of course, I don't think Attila had much of a problem with people doing their own thing. If they did, he made it a problem for them to do anything.

⁹ If you're in a wheelchair, standing in spirit is more than sufficient!

- 2) What you plan to do in the coming workday.
- 3) What could stop you from doing that (any “obstacles”).

If you're the team leader, guess what becomes a top priority for you? That's right: #3 becomes your #1.

Do this at the earliest time everyone is normally available. If you have a bunch of overachievers who can't wait to get to the office at the crack of dawn, do it at 7 a.m. If you have normal people with lives and children, do it at 10 a.m. If you have a virtual team scattered about the planet, you may have to do two of them. If the second one occurs after you're at home, like many of my meetings when I had employees in India, pull a suit jacket over your pajamas for the Web cam.¹⁰

Having stated the rules for these meetings, now I'm going to tell you to break one of them for the next two weeks. Wait... not the jacket-wearing rule. (Cover up those teddy bear PJs, Davis!) I meant the one about only doing three things. Unless something I tell you about in this e-book has to be done in a full team meeting, take an extra 5 minutes to do it after you've done the steps above during the standup meeting. Your legs can take it. But starting with Week 3, no more exceptions, ever. If someone brings up another topic, set up another meeting with the people who need to be involved, say your farewells with hugs and tears, and go accomplish something.¹¹



They're all running in the same direction.

Inspiring, isn't it?

¹⁰ No Web cam? No jacket required.

¹¹ Hugs and tears are optional. Accomplishing something, not so much.

Day 2: Redefine Consensus

You might have groaned when you saw that word, “consensus.” It’s like flossing: you know it’s good for you, but it takes extra time and effort and leaves disgusting flecks of chewed food on your mirror. (Okay, maybe consensus isn’t exactly like flossing.)

Teams who take the time to reach consensus on important issues perform better in the long run. The process ensures that everyone’s knowledge is fully tapped, improving decision quality. By definition it creates internal buy-in, and having no internal friction can make external buy-in easier to build. Plus, every time you hold a vote, you create winners and losers. Worse, a pattern usually develops in which some people win more often and some lose more often. You already know what that does to teamwork.



The problem with consensus is the aforementioned extra time and effort of making it happen. So long as I am giving away my intellectual property, I might as well tell you my almost foolproof method of getting a team to consensus on a regular basis more quickly. First, note that consensus does not mean “unanimous agreement,” where everybody completely supports the decision. As I say in my book,¹² there are three possible levels at which an individual can show consensus:

- “I agree with the group.”
- “I do not fully agree, but I’ll go along with the group.”

Most teamwork trainers will tell you those two, but here’s my no-longer-much-of-a-secret weapon:

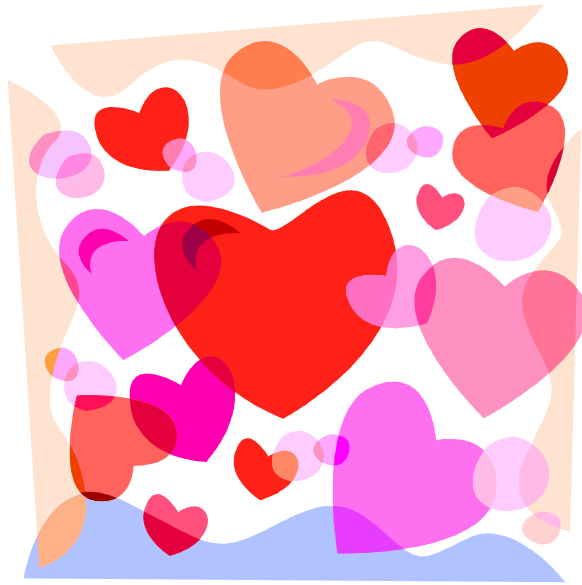
- “I do not agree, but I’ll help the team make the mistake.”

The thing is, that last one is the level I personally love to be in. If it turns out I have made one of my biannual mistakes, but I went along with the team, the team remembers my willingness to support the team and my credibility goes up. If, as routinely happens, I was right, the team remembers my astonishing humility and grace and... you guessed it... my credibility goes up! I can’t lose!

Agree as a team that from this day forward, you will work until you achieve consensus on all “decisions that affect the whole team and will have a

¹² At the risk of repeating myself, the highlights from my earlier footnote: absurdly cheap, SuddenTeams.com, IndieBound.org, or Amazon.com.

significant impact on team time, tasks, goals, or finances.”¹³ No more losers, people. It’s not nice. Let peace and love reign.



No one would
put this into
a business
document.
Oh, wait...

¹³ I think people who quote themselves are incredibly conceited, don't you? You don't? Well, what I think is more important than your thoughts! (I'm joking: Conceited? Get it?)

Day 3: Take Action(s)

When you make a decision in your personal life, you do something. You decide it's time to go back to college? You start looking at schools. You decide it's time to make dinner? You start pulling food from the fridge. You decide it's time to clean the bathtub? You go watch television.

Okay, so maybe the something you do isn't always what you *need* to do to accomplish your goal. Sometimes, too, you put off an action until it's too late, like when the ring around the bathtub offers to turn the water on for you. But my point is, there is no point to making a decision if an action does not result from it—unless you are deciding not to take an action, which is fine until the bathtub ring announces it's taking over the kitchen and drinking all of your beer.¹⁴



But most of the time in the business world, if your team makes a decision, there is some action required, even if it's only to tell a requestor you aren't going to do what they asked. Agree today that from now on, for everything from an e-mail agreement between two team members to a major policy decision by the team, the decision is not considered complete until you have written down:

- The specific, preferably measurable, action to be taken.
- Who will be responsible for it.
- The date by which they agree to complete it.

In the case of team decisions, this “action item” (AI) should then be stored someplace where everybody can see it. The stadium-sized electronic scoreboard on the wall of your factory will be perfect. What? You don't have one of those? What kind of a cheapskate company do you work for?

Fine. How about a spreadsheet stored in a document-sharing system or tacked to an old-fashioned bulletin board? Decide today where that will go and who will be responsible for it. An obvious answer is “the boss.” A better answer might be an “action coach,” a team member everyone (including the boss) agrees can harass them about their AIs when those come due.

If the AI is only between friends,¹⁵ having it stored away in e-mail is the perfect way to say, “I told you so.” Seriously, it can eliminate a lot of conflicts over what was decided and who was supposed to do what, which is, let's face it, a lot of conflicts. No more “Yes, you did!”, “No, you didn't!” Look up the action item and somebody apologize, already (see Day 9).

¹⁴ You may be asking, “Is there a reason he chose a picture of a guy cleaning up a mess to illustrate the need for action items?” Yes.

¹⁵ Well, “co-workers” if not friends. Comrades-in-suffering, maybe?

Repeat after me: “There’s no place like home, there’s...” Oops, sorry, wrong movie. “No decision without an action item, no decision without an action item, no decision...”

It’s a signpost. You have to make a decision. Get it?



I took this in Barrow, Alaska. Along with obvious destinations like the North Pole and Paris, one arm says “Lake Placid, Fla. 4774 Miles.” Don’t ask me why. I mean, it’s warm, but a gazillion bigger places are warmer than Barrow. Like, you know, Iceland.

Day 4: Rule Out the Crazyiness

Countries have rules. Sports teams have rules. Companies have rules. Kids on a playground have rules. Sake's alive,¹⁶ even churches have rules. So tell me something: why don't teams have rules?

Actually, every one of your teams does. And I'm not talking about that values list posted prominently behind the old coffee maker in the break room, the one nobody uses anymore since an international coffee chain opened its 11th store in your neighborhood (if not your building!). The truth is, a group of humans always creates what scientists call "social norms," rules about what you can and cannot do in the group. Usually these remain unwritten and can take months, even years to develop. When the group is the Crochet and Cognac Society for a Better Yesterday, that's no big whoop.¹⁷ When it is a project team given six months to create the Socket Wrench to End World Hunger, you don't have that kind of time.



¹⁸This is another big source of conflict and wasted time on teams: unwritten rules. For example, although it may not seem like it, we all believe in dealing with our mistakes. But your definition may be to try to fix it, then tell the team, while I believe you should tell the team, then try to fix it. Can you see a potential source of conflict?

So in your next team meeting, take 30 minutes to start this process, and

finish it in subsequent meetings taking 15 minutes here and there:

- 1) Ask this question: "What drives you crazy about working on a team?"

Note: Another team, of course. Working with your current team is like gliding along a ray of sunshine, obviously.

Actual Note: You are looking for a list of behaviors, actions you can observe or track.

- 2) Brainstorm a rough list of answers to that question, making sure no one comments on the answers.
- 3) Combine, delete, and revise as needed.

¹⁶ A saying from the American South which even I, born and raised in the South, don't understand, so don't expect me to explain it to you. But believe me, it's appropriate here.

¹⁷ Another saying from the South my friend Tom used to say. You'll have to ask him what it means, 'cause I'm not sure about that either.

¹⁸ I think this is supposed to be Thomas Jefferson working on the U.S. Constitution, but if so, he was having a bad wig day. Or had a three-mead lunch.

- 4) Convert the remaining answers, no more than 10, into a list of rules.

Example: Say one of the behaviors was, “People not taking their share of the blame.” The rule might be, “Accept responsibility for your part in a problem.”

- 5) Decide on a safe method of enforcement.

In other words, if you think another member of the team broke a rule, how should they address it?¹⁹ Most teams say, “Talk with the person directly.” Whatever that first step is, what should they do if the first step doesn’t work, or you’re not comfortable doing it for some reason? Raise the issue at the next team meeting? Set a meeting with the boss and the other person? Talk to someone on the team who agrees to serve as “Team Mediator?”

If I could get every team to take this day’s action, I honestly think the world’s productivity would go up by 10%. Of course, that would mean 10% more creepy clown dolls, so maybe that’s a bad idea.



See what I mean? Creepy.

¹⁹ An envelope? An English lord? A golf ball?

Day 5: Have an Agenda

Would you build a building without a blueprint? Create a major new software application without user requirements? Build a multimillion-dollar Internet company without a sketch on a napkin? Of course not. Yet every day, millions of business teams around the world hold meetings without agendas. I've sat in on some of them,²⁰ and can tell you these result-less meetings infect companies from the largest in the world down. People sit around for an hour, exchange some information and swap gossip, and go back to their office doing little or nothing different than they would have had they gone to a coffee shop instead. Except they're doing it slower, because they don't get the caffeine buzz.

If you hold regular team meetings, they cost you thousands of dollars each year. Take the average hourly pay of your team; multiply it times the number of members; add 50% if you pay benefits; throw on some extra for the cost of their machines or computers or offices that they aren't using during the meetings; and you get the picture. Whether that picture is a Picasso or Elvis on a black velvet background, you can see that meeting time takes a chunk of your budget. If you're not getting results from those expensive meetings... Well, let's put it this way: If you're not getting results from an expensive employee, what do you do?

You have a choice: Fire up the meeting, or fire the meeting. The former is easier than you think, and reduces the confusion over at HR.²¹ The first step is to treat the meeting like a little project, complete with its own little project plan. In short, have an agenda.²² Here is a simple agenda for recurring team meetings:

- 1) Approval of Notes—Discussion, revision if needed, and approval of the notes so everyone is on the same page about your agreements from last week.

Note: Don't waste time in a meeting reading. Send the notes out shortly after each meeting for reading before the next, and limit this section of the meeting to *action* on those notes. Be disciplined about this, and everyone will catch on after a couple of meetings that they have to read the notes beforehand if they want any say on them.

- 2) Old Issues—Action items (see Day 3) that have come due since your last meeting, and other stuff you have already talked about.

Half-Note: If you track action items as described in "Day 3," you'll know who is due to report on their AI results at each meeting. Or to embarrass

²⁰ 4,342,507 and counting. Or so it feels like.

²¹ "I'm sorry, you want to fire who? 'Team Meetings?' I don't see her name on our employee list. Is she a contractor?"

²² Not to be confused with Hava Nagila (the wedding song).

themselves trying to explain why they didn't get it done. Peer pressure can be a beautiful thing.

3) New Issues—Stuff that came up since the last meeting.

Eighth-Note: Only include items that might require action from the whole team. If a smaller group can handle it, assign it to them. If you just want to provide information, send it by e-mail in time for everyone to read it before the meeting.²³ Then only allow questions or discussions during the meeting. No readings in meetings.

4) Review of New Action Items—Make sure everyone knows what they agreed to do, because every decision results in an action item, right?

Since you enjoyed our last chant so much, let's have another one: "No meeting without an agenda, no meeting without an agenda, no meeting..."



When I typed in "plan," the clip art gallery came up with this. But tell me: If this guy keeps pulling as he apparently plans to, isn't he going to knock over his ladder? Now that's great planning!

Come to think of it, the way most teams plan, I guess this *is* appropriate.

²³ I'm talking a couple of days here, not at 7:45 for an 8 o'clock meeting.

Day 6: Silence = Consensus

First off, if this is Saturday, go home. I meant *Business* Day 6, you silly person, you!²⁴

Want a great way to destroy your team? Say nothing in the team meetings, then complain to other team members about the decisions the team made. Get them involved in similar behavior, and I promise forward progress will grind to a halt, people will turn against each other, civil war will erupt, and eventually the entire enterprise will collapse into a heap.²⁵

In my gazillion²⁶ years of training teams, the most powerful rule I have used to get things moving is, “Silence or Absence Equals Consensus.” I didn’t make it up, and can’t find out who did. If I could, they would get a big bear hug from me, I’m telling ya’.

As I say in that cheap book of mine, “team meetings are the only proper time and place for negative discussions of team issues. If you do not speak up in the meeting, you give up the right to complain. As for the absence part, that means that the team will never accomplish anything if you are constantly waiting for so-and-so to be there, because there will always be a ‘so-and-so’ missing. It is okay to delay noncritical decisions to get information from an expert. But at some point, you have to move on.”

I know some people like time to process things before speaking. That’s fine: all they have to agree to do is ask for a delay on a decision until the next meeting, if feasible. If the decision has to be made right away, the team can skip to some other issue and come back to this one, or take a short break.

For issues on which you need an outsider’s buy-in, this can get tricky. You are, of course, going to invite that person to your meeting covering the topic. You *are*, right? When you do, ask them to forward the invitation to someone who can represent them in their absence.

If nobody shows, postpone the issue and put shame to work for you. Instead of rescheduling it as part of your next regular meeting:

- 1) Negotiate a time with the expert to meet on that one topic.
- 2) If they miss that one, cancel the meeting, then reschedule again for your next regular meeting.
- 3) Send a disturbingly polite note (“I do hope you weren’t hit by a bus...”) inviting them for one last chance.
- 4) If legally allowed, make a decision at that time whether the expert is there or not.

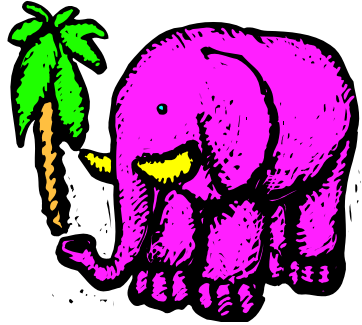
²⁴ Yes, that’s a Monty Python reference. If you don’t know who they were, you probably haven’t laughed at a thing in this e-book and stopped reading, so why bother explaining?

²⁵ Perhaps I exaggerate.

²⁶ “Gazillion” in the scientific meaning of “more than most people.”

More often than not, they won't complain (much) about your decision. Sneaky, right? Thank you, I'm very proud of it.

Today, agree on this rule or some variation thereof. The enforcement is as simple as it is critical. Everyone must agree that if another team member criticizes the team privately, the listener will gently cut the person off by saying, "Purple elephant tongues."²⁷ This will be a kinder, more compassionate and team-building way of saying, "Hey, bub, you blew your chance to speak up!"



Can you believe I actually found a clip of a purple elephant? Unfortunately, I can't confirm whether its tongue is, in fact, purple. Apparently said tongue is planted firmly in its purple cheek, sort of like mine as I write this e-book.

²⁷ No, I don't know what this means, even though I made it up years ago. My "oddchildren" love it, so I had to work it in here somehow. No, they're not odd. I am their "Oddfather," which I'm sure you understand about me by now.

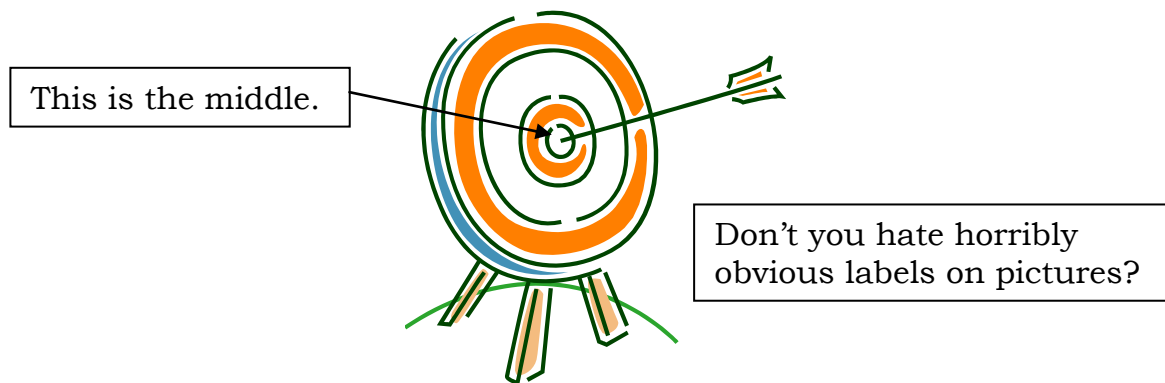
Day 7: 10 Qs

A moment in an otherwise completely forgettable TV movie has stuck with me since seeing it decades ago. In this follow-up to the old “I Dream of Jeannie”²⁸ series, Jeannie is leaving Tony’s home office. She says, “I love you,” and awaits his response with a mix of expectation and dread. “Love ya’,” he says back curtly, without looking up from his work. Oh, the devastation on Jeannie’s face. Made you want to stuff Tony into that bottle of hers.

Ever since job satisfaction surveys began pointing to the importance of “feeling appreciated by my manager,” the phrase “thank you” has become as routine as “hello,” “good-bye,” and “how ‘bout dem [insert favorite sports team here].” Like anything you can easily get, this makes those thank-yous as effective as a fly swatter against a swarm of African killer bees.

On the other extreme, there’s the Dear Ol’ Mom Thank You. When I spend some time cutting back bushes in my mother’s yard, she, knowing I detest yard work, goes overboard with the praise: “You did a *wonderful* job,” she gushes. “Just *perfect!*” Thanks, ma, ‘cause I’m still five and need the extra encouragement.

There is a useful middle ground, and most team leaders and members don’t hit it regularly. Starting today, agree as a team that you are going to “aim for the middle.”²⁹



First, on routine thank-yous, change it up. Say:

- “I appreciate it.”
- “I’m grateful to you.”

²⁸ An utterly ridiculous American sitcom of the 1960s about an astronaut who finds a genie in a bottle and takes her home. I loved it.

²⁹ Why do motivational speakers insist you “aim high?” Know what happens when you do that in archery? You miss! Unless you were hitting too low. If you hit too high, on the other hand, you need to “aim low.” Can’t wait to hear *that* from another speaker.

- “You’re very kind.”
- “My life would not be the same without you.”

Okay, that last one is a Dear Ol’ Mom Thank You. But you get what I mean.

When someone does something bigger and going more out of their way, like washing your car,³⁰ make a bigger deal of it:

- 1) Put... down... the text device.
- 2) Look ’em in the eye.
- 3) Say “thank you” with energy and verve.
- 4) Add:
 - a) What they did.
 - b) The extra effort they put in.
 - c) Why it made your life easier.

Example: “Thank you very much for getting this done on short notice. I know it ate into your day, but it will really help us to please this customer.”

To help each other out as a team, agree that if anyone is guilty of aiming either too high or too low, the other person has the right to say, “10-Q” (think about it) with a wry smile and a wink. Then the other person will try again.

Notice that I didn’t single out the team manager for any of this. Yes, the manager needs to get good at thank-yous, and should drop their ego to accept gracefully when an employee (we’ll call him “George³¹”) points out that the manager missed the target. But I also want teammate George to thank Marisol, and Marisol to 10-Q George if he sounded blah, and Marisol to thank the manager, and the manager to 10-Q Marisol if she aims too high. Think of it as 360-degree performance reviews³² without the survey forms.

³⁰ What? None of your colleagues washes your car for you? Wow, your team *is* messed up!

³¹ In a Bugs Bunny cartoon, Bugs is captured by the Abominable Snowman, who says, “I will name him ‘George,’ and I will hug him and pet him and squeeze him...”

³² In which, for example, a manager’s annual performance appraisal includes input from her employees, same-level managers, boss, boss’s boss, customers, and all their grandmothers.

Day 8: Plan 2 Communicate

Miscommunications boil down to the old “5 Ws and an H” done wrongly:

- Wrong Who—The content went to the wrong person(s).
- Wrong What—The content wasn’t what the receiver needed.
- Wrong When—The content didn’t get there in time (perhaps the #2 cause of communication complaints).
- Wrong Why—The sender missed the point (a message can be 95% of what the recipient needed but still fail because of the missing 5%).
- Wrong Where—The sender used the wrong medium to reach the receiver, such as e-mailing instead of calling when an immediate response was needed.
- Wrong How—The way the message was worded upset the Receiver (probably the #1 cause of communication complaints).

The really aggravating thing is you can get just one of these wrong, and it won’t matter one figginbottom³³ that you got the rest perfect. The recipient is still going to be PO’ed.³⁴

You can cut down on a lot of this with a little planning. At your team meeting this week, get a Communications Plan started, using these steps from... oh, heck, you know what it’s from³⁵:

- 1) Assign a subteam to:
 - a) Meet with each primary stakeholder: at minimum, the team manager, direct customers, and partner groups within the company.
 - b) Make a spreadsheet or form with these columns³⁶:
 - i) Item—A document name, a type of content, etc.
 - ii) Author—Who on the team will prepare it (can be a person, team role, or job title).
 - iii) Audience—Who will receive it (ditto).
 - iv) Purpose—What they want the item for.
 - v) Frequency/Timing—How often or when they want it.
 - vi) Method/Format—What medium they want it in.

³³ No offense intended to your bottom, Mr. or Ms. Figgin. I’m sure it’s lovely.

³⁴ Perturbed and offended. What did you think I meant?

³⁵ My cheap book, *The SuddenTeams Program*, mentioned a few dozen times already.

³⁶ Or you could just buy the book, which has a form all ready to go, feeling lonely and unneeded, purposeless. You could make it so happy. Give it something to do.

By the Way: Notice the emphasis on what *they* want, not what *you* want. You want to reduce miscommunications; to do that, focus on the receiver during this process.

- c) Complete all the columns except “Author” for all stakeholders and bring it to the full team.
- 2) As a team, assign authors to fulfill the plan, and create action items covering all of the communications listed.
- 3) Set action items to follow up with the stakeholders in one month, three months, and yearly after that to ensure their needs are met.

I know what you’re thinking: “Hmm, it sounds like a personal communications plan might be a good idea, too.” Brilliant! Then all of your conversations can look like this³⁷:



³⁷ TeamTrainers Consulting makes no guarantee or warranty that following the advice contained in this document or any other TeamTrainers publication, regardless of release date or version, will cause readers to talk, write, or look like fuzzy-wuzzy puppy dogs in moonlight.

Day 9: Actual Apologies

This is a companion to Day 7's 10-Qs. If you're a politician or big business executive caught accepting bribes or ruining the Gulf of Mexico, you know the usual post-mistake script already: "If I did anything that could possibly have offended a handful of people who are really easily offended, I'd like to say I'll pick my words more carefully next time." Translation: "I did nothing wrong, and you're too picky-oonie."

First off, if an apology starts with the word "if," it isn't an apology. "If" suggests the possibility no wrong was done, which means everything following it is pretty much a lie because the speaker doesn't really think they did anything wrong. And the recipients of such "apologies" know it. The rest of the one above says the problem was someone else's fault, again wiping out any real sense of remorse.

Starting today, agree as a team that you will henceforth follow my Fivefold Apology Process guaranteed to bring comforting reassurances from the aggrieved party they do *not*, in fact, think you are a child of Satan³⁸:

- 1) Admit the mistake, or at least your part in it, without mentioning what anyone else did.³⁹

Hard Truth: You're human. You make mistakes. It's okay.

- 2) Say you're sorry the way your mother⁴⁰ told you to: "...like you mean it!"

- 3) Tell them how you feel about it.

Touchy-Feely Truth: Yes, this means emotion words like "bad" or "propitiatory."

- 4) Tell them what you are going to do to fix any negative results, if you can.

- 5) Tell them what you are going to do to prevent the mistake from happening again.

Here for your exempling pleasure: "I'm truly sorry I missed the deadline. I feel terrible about it, and I am going to work late to get this done. I also plan to make better use of the task reminders in my e-mail program so it doesn't happen again."

To enforce this rule, everyone gets permission to say this (nicely) when they think it appropriate: "Thanks, Nikolai,⁴¹ but I think you're missing a step."



³⁸ Guarantee void if you *are* a child of Satan.

³⁹ "Mommy, I'm sorry I pushed Stevie down two flights of stairs, with an extra bounce on the landing, but he called me a 'boobie.'" That explanation doesn't fly. Nor did Stevie.

⁴⁰ Father, aunt/uncle, foster parent, grannie/grampa, whoever tried to look out for you and complains now when you haven't called in the last five minutes.

Then walk out or change subjects. It's up to the apologizer to figure out the step and try again later.

As with thank-yous, aim for the middle in terms of frequency. Apologizing for every little misstep will cause it to lose power the same way routine thank-yous do, and one apology per goof-up is sufficient. Many people are nearly as uncomfortable receiving an apology as making them, so rein in your embarrassment or you are likely to damage the very relationships you're trying to mend.

I'm sorry, did I hurt your feelings? Sorry about that. I am really, really chagrined. Really sorry. Couldn't be more bummed about my utter failure. You must hate me, I just know you do, and I don't blame you. Don't forgive me, I don't deserve it. Just turn your back on me and leave, that's what you should do.



Yeah, that'll work, too.

⁴¹ Yes, call them Nikolai. That's the joke. Unless their name is "Nikolai." Then use "George."

Day 10: Party Hardy

In my team development program,⁴² a standard team-building activity that I do include is a “Social Night.” But it’s at the end of the main training portion. Part of it is a celebration of all the great work the team has done to reorganize itself. It’s not a free-form event, however, because the idea is to get people to see each other as—are you ready for this?—*people!*

Today, start arranging a place and a date when everyone can gather. Each team member can bring an adult guest. If the only way to get everyone there is to allow children, include them, but make arrangements for them to be supervised and elsewhere in the vicinity part of the time. Ask your employer to pay for this, but if they won’t (shame on them), do it as a no-host event at a relatively cheap place.

At the event⁴³:

- 1) Ten minutes after the scheduled start time, get the group’s attention and have the members introduce themselves and their guests.
- 2) Have the event facilitator say the following: “There is one rule at the moment: No work talk until I say otherwise. Team members introduced to a nonteam member may take exactly one minute—one minute, no more—to tell that person about your job. Then you have to move on to other topics.”
- 3) While waiting for dinner, or after dinner, say: “To have some fun and get to know each other better, we are going to play a game called ‘Two Truths and a Lie.’ Take three minutes to think of three statements about yourself, only two of which are true. They can be about hobbies, former jobs, other things you did in the past, anything *except* your current work life. If you have trouble coming up with a false statement, use a fact about a friend or family member. Try to make it believable, though.

“At the end of that time, we are going to go around the room. Each of you will tell us your three statements, and the rest of us are going to try to guess which one statement is a lie. The person you came here with does not get to guess during your turn. Any questions?”⁴⁴

Don’t Fret: Make up rules on the spot to answer any questions.

- 4) Complete the game as described.
- 5) After the game, tell them they can talk about work if they want to, but to keep the focus on fun.

⁴² See: SuddenTeams.com/team-builder.

⁴³ Yeah, you know where this is from: that book. Just 2 more references 2 go.

⁴⁴ (An actual footnote) This game is adapted from: Butler, A. (1996), *TeamThink: 72 Ways To Make Good, Smart, Quick Decisions In Any Meeting*. McGraw-Hill: San Francisco.

Three other rules:

- One alcoholic beverage per person.

Legal Clarification: That's a maximum, not a requirement.

- No lampshades.
- No multi-level marketing products. It ain't *that* kind of party, either.

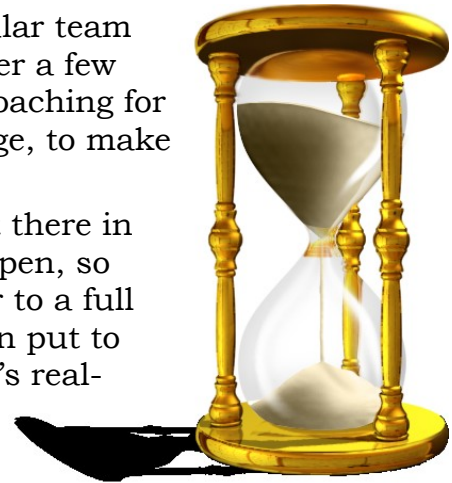
I don't know about you,
but nothing says "party"
to me like a dancing
poodle in a tutu.



All the Days of Our Lives

If you found this e-book at least slightly amusing and mildly useful, imagine how much fun (and cost-efficiency) you could get by partaking in any of these other fine offerings from TeamTrainers Consulting⁴⁵:

- **Teamwork Training and Coaching**—Want a high-performance team without the hassle of figuring out how? Hire us to do it! We perform a quick assessment, a little customizing, maybe a short retreat, then take small chunks of your regular team meetings to give you everything you need over a few months. And we throw in a year of remote coaching for team leaders and members at no extra charge, to make sure it all sticks. Such a deal!
- **On-Site Classes**—Learning and hilarity right there in your workplace, or at a five-star resort in Aspen, so long as you're paying. Ranging from an hour to a full day, our classes provide useful skills you can put to work right away. Customized for your group's real-world issues, they include plenty of exercises to practice the skills and keep you from keeling over into your bagels.
- **Meeting Facilitation**—Getting a large group of people to focus on the matter at hand for hours or days takes a special kind of insanity, and trust me, we have that! Well, really, it takes lots of planning, some good meeting rules, techniques for group decision-making, and a firm but kindly hand at the helm. We have all that, too.
- **Speeches**—You like fun and practical presentations? The kind that give you ideas you can put to work as soon as you get back to the office? Talks that are really mini-classes, with no slides whatsoever? Guess what kind we give.
- **Do-It-Yourself Book**—Bosses won't pay for any of the above, even though that stuff more than pays for itself? Fine. If you've got some stick-2-itiveness, you can get a long way toward high performance by following the step-by-step instructions in my absurdly cheap book, available under the "Book" tab at: SuddenTeams.com.



⁴⁵ This section's title refers to a U.S. soap opera that a couple of my college chums starred in years ago. I never watched it. But do you remember when Sami Brady went from, like, age 8 to a teenager over a weekend? And I'm so glad to see Carly back. Or I would be, if I ever watched it.

How can you get all this great help, you ask? Easy schmeezy:

- E-mail us: info@sudden teams.com.
- Or, just call me directly. I'm really nice. Funny sometimes, too. The number is: 1-877-966-9723 (toll free) or 919-414-8939.

Want gobs more free information, despite the fact that I just gave you 32 pages of it? Well, I shouldn't do this... the boss will get mad at me⁴⁶... but I like you, so check it out:

- Teamwork Information—Definitions, best practices, an expert system, and more, under the “Free Help” tab at SuddenTeams.com.
- Teams Blog—Discussions on applying The Science of Teams™ to your teams, under the “Teams Blog” tab.
- TeamResearch News—More than 100 summaries of teamwork studies, at SuddenTeams.com/team-research.
- Twitter.com—Team-related tweets through our [@TeamTrainers](https://twitter.com/TeamTrainers) account.



Our logo. See, it's two “Ts” that look like people high-fiving each other. Two “Ts.” TeamTrainers. Get it?

I knew you would!

⁴⁶ That's a joke. Excluding all my clients, I'm “the boss.”

About the Goofy Author

Despite going for some laughs in this e-book, as I also try to do in my trainings, I'm really serious about that mission on page 8. In a job at Los Alamos National Laboratory, the birthplace of the atomic bomb, I realized the only way I was going to succeed with my project was to get four groups working more efficiently and talking to each other. I facilitated the creation of four self-directed work teams, they accomplished amazing results, and I was hooked.

Having been a trainer in various subject areas since I was 14 (when I first taught swimming), I wanted to find out what really creates high-performance teams. Also a former reporter, I used my science journalism skills to spend six months researching scientific articles or books and writing my unique teamwork training method, *The SuddenTeams™ Program*. Now available in a do-it-yourself version, as mentioned too many times in the footnotes, the original is around 500 pages long and now boasts a bibliography of more than 550 sources. It is a comprehensive training manual for turning any work group into a high-performance team, with a trainer's script and additional instructions, forms, and handouts.

In 2000 I founded TeamTrainers Consulting to sell the training, and I've been running it off and on ever since, eventually building it into my full-time gig. After starting the company in Albuquerque, N.M., USA, I operated in Seattle for quite a while.

I moved back to my hometown, Raleigh, N.C., in 2008, where my company has an A+ rating from the Better Business Bureau and I'm a respectable member of the community. Really... I mean it! Stop laughing already, that wasn't a joke!

Thanks a bunch for reading *2 Weeks 2 Better Teamwork*. I hope you got a laugh or two, and more importantly, that its suggestions will make your working life easier.



Jim Morgan

Nothing to see here; move along, please.

What's that?

You need "closure?"

Sure, okay. We aim to please:

