



Chapter 5: HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS IN HOSPITALITY

“Adam Smith said that the best result comes from everyone in the group doing what's best for himself. Right? That's what he said, right? (...) Incomplete. Incomplete, okay? Because the best result will come from everyone in the group doing what's best for himself... and the group (...) Governing dynamics, gentlemen. Governing dynamics. Adam Smith ... was

Leonard R. Syles explained to us how to measure effectiveness in teams in his 20-year-old book *The Working Leader*. By observing teams in action, he argued, one could notice certain characteristics that made operations more efficient. High performance teams, he pointed out, used to make decisions based on continuous trade-offs between the real needs of individual functions and the needs of the well-coordinated system. In this way, all team members, he said, were responsive to requests from other team members to consider modifying their own plans, in order to take into account the consequences for other functions. These teams were willing to seek out alternative ways of accomplishing their objectives in any given crisis situation. Members in these teams provided each other with as much advance notice as possible regarding how they were progressing with their own assignments, and were less likely to get into trouble. They also provided full and open information to others.

We have used the term high performance team to define those people working together but having a wider view of their own interest. The contrary is a tunnel vision. If any hotel unit is normally made of different functional departments such as the front-office, house keeping, sales & marketing, food & beverages, maintenance... The whole system efficiency will then have to be measured by the manner in which coordination and communication is conducted towards the company final goals, instead of those of the different departments.

To our purpose these goals are simple: (1) **to provide more value to guests** and (2) **to make the hotel operations more efficient at the same time**. High performance teams are though incentivized to improve both quality and efficiency. Efficiency/quality trade-offs are the rule in most business operations, especially in a highly competitive market.



Conscious Hospitality

If any company is to be considered as a role model in this regard, that should be Southwest Airlines. There are many reasons to explain Southwest Airlines' competitive advantage since its foundation - in an industry where the exception was to make profits. Many people would say that innovation was the key, but above all what made this airline company success was its culture and high performance teams. Jody Hoffer Gittel, in her book *The Southwest Airlines Way*, dubbed it as "relational coordination". Relational coordination resulted in fewer delays, fewer lost luggage, faster turnarounds, and higher employee productivity compared to other airlines such as United, American Airlines or Continental. Organizational factors such as shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect contributed substantially to effective coordination and, therefore, to quality and efficiency performance.

What is good for the individual is good for the team. We call it a team because its members share both successes and failures. We all win as a team, or we all fail as a team. We all win when each one of us succeeds but, at the same time, we all lose if anyone of us fails individually.

Peter Drucker used the term "gang" referring to groups of people calling themselves a team in many businesses organizations. There is a big difference between what we mean as a high performance team to what most people may think. Trust, is one key aspect. Trust between team colleagues and managers, is the basic pillar for any good team. A good team has also the opportunity to grow together, reinforcing its confidence and reliability among team members. If such trust is not a part of the equation, we do not have a team. Instead, we have a group of

individuals -or separate hotel departments - working together but defending its own interests.

Good teams must also share values, conforming the proper hotel culture. Values such as solidarity within the team, confidence, humility, unselfishness, respect for all members, flexibility and, of course, truthfulness.

A bureaucratic mind-set, much more concerned with the status and hierarchies - instead of personal capabilities and attitudes -is a barrier towards developing good teams. In companies with such organizational culture it is usually more important who said something rather than what was said. As oppose, high performance teams stress the importance of being part of a "community" and contribute to developing other coworkers and own ideas. What matters most is not who came up with a brilliant idea but instead how can we work, as a team, to implement that idea. Once we are working in developing such idea, we will enhance our individual capabilities and group *know-how*.

Good teams develop knowledge synergies. Because a good team is more cohesive, it is also more effective. In those working environments, coordination and communication among team members happen more naturally and spontaneously. I am not saying that there is no need for management when engaging in coordination or communication. Indeed, leadership is always key. However, these tasks are completed in a much easier way in such teams. This is happening because all team members share a common vision and company values, hence the work is carried out in an effortless and smoother manner.



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The opposite is also true and we can see groups of people in whom there is a lack of cohesion among team members, and selfishness becomes the rule. In such teams, even the simplest issue turns out to be a center of disputes and disagreements. So every working issue, which it is seen as something normal and easy to handle in a good team, in a bad team, is often considered as something “not possible, unworkable or unrealistic”.

There is no doubt that time is important in getting a high degree of cohesiveness. As human beings, we are moved by emotional rather than rational feelings. There will always be conflicts among working colleagues, because of the task interaction and interdependence within departments. Teams are not in an everlasting calm state. Yet, when strong company values are internalized by a majority of the team members, there is usually no need for management in resolving conflicts constantly. Chris Argyris, Professor Emeritus at Harvard Business School, in his work about organizational learning, stated that the difference between a good team and a bad team is the ability to solve conflicts and discrepancies within its members. I do fully agree with this statement, as experience has shown me.

Good teams need their time to grow; day-by-day, issue-by-issue... There is a famous sequence in the movie “Any given Sunday” in which Toni D’Amato, a football coach played by Al Pacino, gives a brilliant speech to all team members during the final game. In our day-by-day work, in the small daily tasks, we will encounter many situations to which the same speech could apply. As a football team they talk about inches but, in essence, they are talking about the same values: solidarity, confidence, respect,

sacrifice to the team, and success, or defeat, which finally affects the whole team. The coach says: “...inch by inch, play by play, ‘till we’re finished (...) The inches we need are everywhere around us. On this team we fight for that inch (...) you gonna look at the guy next to you. Look into his eyes! Now I think you’re gonna see a guy who will go that inch with you. You are gonna see a guy who will sacrifice himself for this team because he knows when it comes down to it, your are gonna do the same for him! That’s a team, gentlemen! And, either we heal, now, as a team, or we will die as individuals”.



Collective Management in hospitality believes that, in general, the right group of employees, together with their managers, should achieve better thinking as a team than individually. Collective Management ideas such as **guest feedback** management, **in-group dialogues**, **in-action working** or **mistakes recognition and sharing**, can only happen in very cohesive and high performance teams.