

LARGE-SCALE TEAM COACHING INITIATIVE CREATES SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

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Teams drive productivity in any organization, yet traditional team building efforts provide only short-term boosts that are difficult to sustain. Team Advantage™, an innovative approach to team building that incorporates team coaching with business planning, has been found to produce measurable, sustainable results in teams judged to be both high and low performing. Teams led by new managers also deliver measurable positive change.

Background

Research conducted on 24 teams in a ten-month period showed the team coaching process yielded:

- ◆ an increase in employee engagement;
- ◆ an improvement in leadership behaviors determined to be mission critical; and
- ◆ sustained increase in both engagement and improved leadership behaviors.

Team Advantage is a process for team transformation that originated from a need for a more

creative approach to planning and execution of business plans. Over the past 18 years, nearly 200 teams have experienced the positive impacts of a process that incorporates team building, communication, conflict resolution and business objectives into a game plan that is created by the team and facilitated by a professional coach.

Read more to learn about Team Advantage and the research demonstrating the effectiveness of the process.

Team Advantage is a comprehensive team development program that uses “coaching” as the key ingredient in its implementation. Coaching is used to foster leadership and growth in the team leader and also to promote team cohesiveness and plan execution. The program includes four phases and is conducted over a 16-24 week period, depending on the amount of time needed to coach and prepare the team leader.

Phase 1 sets the stage for Team Advantage. A coach works hand-in-hand with the team leader and

establishes a coaching relationship, develops an understanding of the business, assesses the team for readiness, and surveys all team members to understand their dynamics and challenges. Phase 2 is a more traditional “team building” exercise in that the team gathers at a live venue for two days to develop a plan based on an extraordinary business goal. The meeting includes other elements specific to the Team Advantage process, and the end product is a team unified in their direction, enthusiastic about their newfound awareness and communication, and on track with a concrete plan for the next four months.



Coaching — the Secret Advantage

Phase 3 is where Team Advantage is even more unique and, therefore, more effective than traditional team building. This is the coaching phase during which team development is solidified. The coach (or coaches, which includes internal and external coaches) continues to work with the team leader and the team for a four-month period. Teams become accountable for their plan, and the coach is able to serve as an outside voice and observer for actions that take place during the process. They coach the team around everything that shows up — communication issues, accountability, ownership of the plan, engagement or lack thereof, conflicts with team members and/or the team leader, and maintenance of momentum toward the extraordinary goal. The role of the coach is critical to the achievement of the team’s identified goal, and this accountability ensures that the benefits gained in the live workshop become long-term gains for team development.

The final phase of Team Advantage is a celebration stage that is actually incorporated throughout the program. Teams become accustomed to acknowledging each other and celebrating even the smallest of wins.

Researching Results

The success of Team Advantage has been obvious by looking at the business goals achieved by teams using the process and the many positive comments following the experience. In 2011, research was conducted that further proved the effect of Team Advantage on team behavior. A researcher investigated the impacts of Team Advantage on 24 teams that were part of a large commercial sales organization. The results of the research confirmed the potential of Team Advantage to positively impact a company.

The research project looked at the impact on employee engagement and on 12 leadership behaviors: half that were deemed mission critical by the company and six behaviors determined to be important indicators for Team Advantage. The 24 teams included 255 individual participants; all were sent a survey prior to participation in Team Advantage, an identical survey upon completion of the program, and a third survey about three months after completion of Team Advantage.

Increase in Engagement

The first significant finding was in the engagement scores, which showed a statistically significant increase between the pre-Team Advantage survey and the post. Employee engagement usually recognizes three components – people are engaged because (1) they love their job, what they do on a daily basis; (2) they believe in the company, its mission, leadership, products and direction; and (3) they respect and enjoy the people working with them. Of these three factors, the one that is most externally affected by an experience like Team Advantage is the third aspect of engagement. And in fact, that is what was discovered.

The specific engagement statement, “the people I work with adapt easily to new ways of doing things” increased by over 25 percentage points among Team Advantage participants. For this study it was one of five engagement questions that made up the engagement “score,” and although one other question, “Leaders communicate a vision of the future that motivates me,” also increased, another question actually decreased, “Considering everything, I am satisfied with the company at present.”

“Team Advantage is for any leader with a team and a goal. It’s a proven process, with challenges and rewards, that will drive your team past typical corporate objectives to new levels of engagement and commitment. You can transform your team — and your organization — with Team Advantage.”

**– Ken Blanchard,
Co-author of *The One Minute Manager®*
and *Leading at a Higher Level***

(The remaining two questions were unchanged during this period.) The conclusion from reviewing these responses is that engagement, as defined by the client company, increased among Team Advantage participants, largely due to the positive change in the way they viewed the other people working with them. And the positive increases in how they viewed their coworkers and leaders were substantial enough to improve the overall engagement score and offset a corresponding decline in satisfaction with the company.

Increase in Leadership Behaviors

The second significant finding was in the leadership behaviors. Six were behaviors deemed essential by the company (flexibility, customer centricity, change readiness, people development, collaborative relationships and commitment to improvement) and six were from Team Advantage (self-awareness, communication, ownership attitude, collaboration, comfort in chaos and interdependency). The behavior change was measured by asking questions that found out how participants behaved or thought in certain circumstances. The improvements demonstrated by the research showed that seven areas significantly improved: flexibility, customer centricity, change



readiness, people development, collaborative relationships, communications and interdependency. In other words, participants were more likely to act and think in ways that positively demonstrated these seven behaviors after they had gone through the Team Advantage experience than before. For the remaining five behaviors, none declined; they simply did not demonstrate a statistically significant improvement.

The third significant finding was that all improvements in engagement and behaviors were sustainable. Of the 24 Team Advantage programs, several concluded in July and August, and all had concluded by late October. In January, a third survey of participants was conducted to find out if the improvements noted at the end of Team Advantage had stayed with the participants or if they had fallen back into previous behavior patterns. The post-data showed that every index score including engagement and for all 12 behaviors, remained stable at three-months or longer past the conclusion of Team Advantage.

Summary

The effectiveness of the team coaching approach used in Team Advantage now is further supported by this recent research. Key factors contributing to this measurable success include:

- ◆ Team Advantage goes beyond typical training and team building by incorporating engagement in learning and development through an extended coaching process. The impact is sustainable, and real change occurs through the accountability and ongoing support provided by a coach.
- ◆ Team Advantage enables teams to create their own goals and take ownership of the outcomes. This approach was confirmed in a Harvard Business Review white paper (Increase Your



Team's Motivation Five Fold, Scott Keller, 4/26/12), which concluded that "when people make their own decisions, they are more dedicated to everything that follows."

- ◆ Components of the process are often continued by the team leaders and teams, providing an additional return on investment and creating long-term positive change.

Forthcoming research by Haysmar Inc. will demonstrate how Team Advantage can be used as an integral part of a culture change initiative in a major commercial organization. Preliminary results indicate significant positive impacts on engagement and key high performance behaviors with overall engagement scores increasing nearly 29 percentage points over the study period.

**To learn more about how
Team Advantage can be used in
your organization, contact
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