

Steps to set up and run a team learning session: Pose insightful questions, listen with humility, and ask for help

By Nancy Settle-Murphy and Karen Eber

- Schedule a special time dedicated to discussing overall team health and exploring ways to work together more effectively.
 - Let them know how you'd like them to prepare, and explain how you will prepare (*see steps below*)
 - Plan on at least 90 minutes if your team is virtual, and at least two hours if you can meet face-to-face.
- Prior to your team session, find ways to gather insight as to what the team feels is working and what needs to change.
 - This can take the form of a survey, using an outside facilitator to conduct small-group meetings or 1:1s, or setting up an online conference area where people can speak freely
- Write down questions for you or your facilitator to ask the team during your meeting (if some have not been answered in your preparation leading up to the session). (*See examples in next section*)
- Review any feedback you have, whether from an employee engagement survey or some other mechanism. Remain curious as to possible reasons for disengagement, rather than assuming you already know.
- Determine who will facilitate. You will need to listen in the session. If you feel you may become defensive or your team may feel more comfortable responding someone else then find a facilitator who is not part of your team.

Conducting the session

- To find ways to encourage people to share, you need to put people at ease and gain their trust. To do this, kick off the meeting by making yourself vulnerable and being open with the team about your intentions. You might start by offering comments as to:
 - Your concern that the team has become disengaged
 - Your desire to turn things around with their help
 - What are most proud of about the team and what you feel is going well
 - What you see as the team's current challenges
 - What you see as your own leadership challenges and shortcomings
 - Your desire to brainstorm ideas with the team
 - Your commitment to making needed changes
- The facilitator should make sure meeting participants are able to respond to questions such as :
 - What are we doing well?

- What is our vision for a team operating at the optimum health?
 - What does it look like on a daily basis?
 - How are we communicating?
 - How are we operating?
 - When are we meeting, and what is the focus of those meetings?
 - Where are the milestones where we want to celebrate our accomplishments?
- What leadership behaviors, attitudes and traits are most important to achieve this vision?
- What challenges do we need to successfully address to work together more effectively?
- What do you need from the leader, which you are not getting now?
 - You may want to exit the meeting to give the team a chance for an open discussion, and then return for a collective summary

Your special contributions during this meeting:

- Create a safe environment for everyone to share without fear of reprimand
- Be intensely curious
- Validate assumptions
- Listen and remain open to the discussion
- Clarify and ask for examples when needed
- If the team asks something of you that you know may be tough for you to deliver on, acknowledge this up front and propose alternatives for consideration