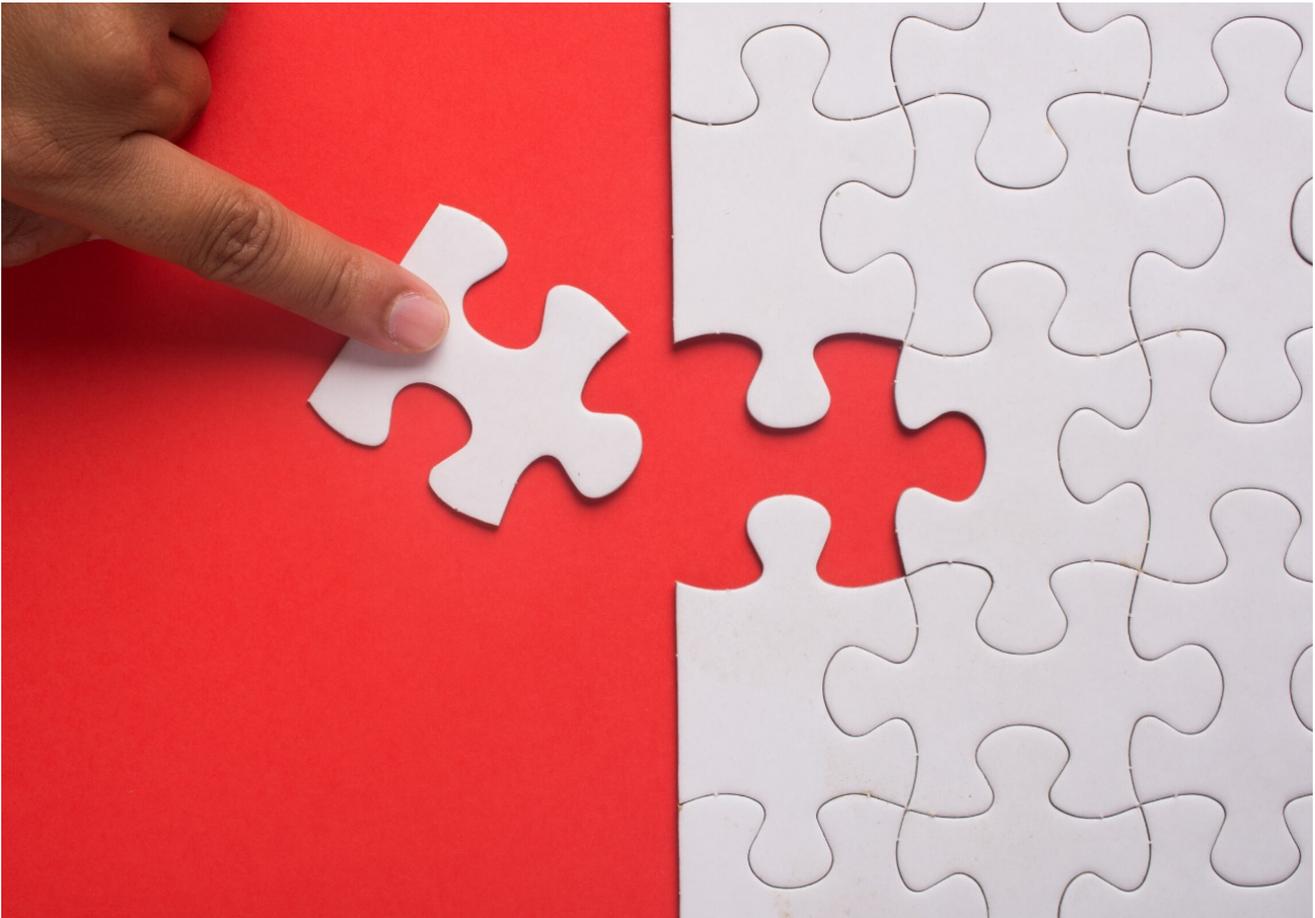


We're All in This Together – 4 Key Traits of High Performing Teams

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When I wrote my latest book, *[We're All in This Together: Creating a Team Culture of High Performance, Trust, and Belonging](#)*, I had no idea it would come out in the midst of a global pandemic which has had a significant impact on every aspect of work and life in our world. However, now more than ever, for our teams to navigate these challenging times successfully, we must come together, connect authentically, and lean on each other, which is what my new book and my work are all about.

For the past 20 years, I've been studying, researching, speaking, and writing about the qualities of great teams. I've been honored to partner with organizations like Google, Wells Fargo, Microsoft, Schwab, eBay, Genentech, Gap, the NBA, the Oakland A's, and so many others—helping them enhance the culture and performance of their teams.

In addition to these large, well-known brands, I've also worked with small businesses, government agencies, educational institutions, nonprofits, local school districts, and more. And, while each team and organization have their own unique challenges, goals, and dynamics, there are some universal qualities that allow teams to effectively collaborate, trust each other, and perform at the highest level.

Here are the four key traits of high performing teams that I've learned through all of my research and experience:

1. Create Psychological Safety. Psychological safety is a shared belief that the team is safe for risk-taking. People on teams with psychological safety have a sense of confidence that their team will not embarrass, reject, or punish them for speaking up or taking risks. The team climate is characterized by an atmosphere of interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves without fear of negative consequences to their self-image, status, or career. Essentially, psychological safety is trust at a group level.

Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson has researched and written extensively about psychological safety over the past 20 years. "It's not enough for organizations to simply hire talent," she says. "If leaders want to unleash individual and collective talent, they must foster a psychologically safe climate where employees feel free to contribute ideas, share information, and report mistakes."

A 2017 Gallup study found that only three in ten employees strongly agree with the statement that their opinions count at work. Gallup calculated that by "moving the ratio to six in ten employees, organizations could realize a 27 percent reduction in turnover, a 40 percent reduction in safety incidents, and a 12 percent increase in productivity."

2. Focus on Inclusion and Belonging. An essential element of creating a safe environment that allows people to trust each other, collaborate with one another, and perform at their highest level as a team is inclusion and belonging. There are countless studies linking inclusion to higher profits, increased engagement scores, and enhanced business results.

For example, according to a study of 140 U.S. companies by Accenture alongside the American Association of People with Disabilities and Disability:IN, those that offered the most inclusive working environment for employees with disabilities achieved an average 28 percent higher revenue, 30 percent greater economic profit margins, and twice the net income of their industry peers between 2015 and 2018.

Inclusion means "having respect for and appreciation of differences in ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, education, and religion." It also means "actively involving everyone's ideas, knowledge, perspectives, approaches, and styles to maximize business success." And, as important as it is for us to focus on both diversity and inclusion,

the ultimate goal is to create an environment on the team and in the company where everyone feels as though they belong, regardless of who they are, the role they have, and their background.

3. Embrace Sweaty-Palmed Conversations. Great teams embrace conflict and feedback as natural and important aspects of growth, collaboration, and success. This means we have to be willing to have those awkward, uncomfortable, sweaty-palmed conversations with each other. The problem is that because conflict and feedback can be hard, most teams aren't very good at it. However, when team members create an environment that is conducive to having healthy and productive conflict, they have an ability to connect more deeply, navigate challenges effectively, give each other feedback in a way that makes everyone better, and innovate in ways that allow them to thrive. Research conducted by CPP Inc., publisher of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, has shown that in the U.S., workplace conflict costs companies more than \$350 billion a year. And that figure reflects just the time people spend dealing with conflict; it doesn't include the emotional, psychological, and physical toll it takes on people personally.

Nate Regier, author of *Conflict without Casualties*, whom I had a chance to interview on my podcast, says, "The purpose of conflict is to create, not destroy."

4. Care About and Challenge Each Other. What I've seen, experienced, and learned about high-performing teams over the years is that they understand and have a balance of two important things at the same time: *Caring About Each Other* and *Challenging Each Other*. Both are essential and both have to be focused on with the same level of intensity for the team and all of its members to perform at the highest level.

For a team to thrive there must be a deep level of trust that everyone has each other's backs, has good intentions, and is moving in the same direction together.

In a piece published in the *Harvard Business Review* in 2017, neuroeconomist Paul Zak writes, "Compared with people at low-trust companies, people at high-trust companies report 74 percent less stress, 50 percent higher productivity, and 76 percent more engagement." In other words, creating a strong culture of trust, as well as an environment where people know they're cared about and supported by their teammates, leads to significantly greater engagement and performance.

When our team understands, practices, and embodies these four key traits, we can create a culture of high performance, trust, and belonging. And, doing this allows us to thrive, even and especially when we're facing uncertainty and challenge like we are today.

Check out the book [here](#). Feel free to leave any questions or comments here or directly on my [blog](#).

* This is an adapted excerpt from *We're All in This Together*, by Mike Robbins, published by Hay

