

The STAR Team Model for High-Performance Teams

Smooth Sailing using Five Important Points

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At Interaction Associates, we work with clients to achieve greater and more sustainable levels of business return on investment, by delivering a different ROI — Return on Involvement™. The primary way that we do this is by helping our clients to create cultures of involvement by developing a type of leader that we call the Facilitative Leader. They are best defined as leaders who demonstrate:

- 1) Strategic thinking.
- 2) Excellent collaborative skills.
- 3) Self awareness.

Facilitative Leaders' values, behaviors, and practices work to create high levels of employee engagement, involvement, and commitment, rather than merely compliance. This special response to Facilitative Leadership is “Return on Involvement.”

The STAR Team Model™ offers five main requirements for a successful team, based on Interaction Associates' research. A metaphoric example of a real-life sailing adventure is offered to illustrate the points on the STAR and to help illustrate the STAR Team model in action.

THE STAR TEAM MODEL™ FOR SUCCESSFUL TEAMS

A key capability of the Facilitative Leader is his/her ability to form and lead diverse teams — both specific project teams and ongoing management teams. Based on Interaction Associates' research and years of practice with clients, we have developed a simple yet powerful framework to describe the elements of a successful team.

Operating with balanced focus on three dimensions of success — Results, Process, and Relationship — these leaders define a successful team as one that produces its targeted results, effectively manages its work processes, and maintains healthy team member relationships.

Our high-performance team model, the “STAR Team Model,” has five main points, like the traditional points of a star. The model outlines the elements required for a team become a “star performer.”



HERE IS A BRIEF DEFINITION OF THE EACH OF THE “POINTS.”

1. Shared and Meaningful Purpose

The team’s task or reason for existing that is shared by all team members and, in some way, motivates and inspires each

2. Specific and Challenging Goals

The measurable results the team agrees to produce that will satisfy an important organizational need and demand extraordinary performance by team members

3. Clear Roles

A shared understanding by team members of how the responsibilities for specific team

functions and tasks will be distributed

4. Common and Collaborative Approach

Commonly understood plans and methods for accomplishing the team's goals in ways that facilitate participation, cooperation, and mutual support.

5. Complementary Skills

The right combination of knowledge, ability, and experience required to perform effectively.

The Facilitative Leader invests time to develop shared agreements on all points of the STAR to establish an operating climate of trust, respect, and shared responsibility that can mean the difference between success and failure, and between high performance and performance that's just so-so.

Based on Interaction Associates' research and years of practice with clients, we have developed a simple yet powerful framework to describe the elements of a successful team.

A METAPHOR - SAILING WITH A STAR TEAM

Let's look at an example: that of using the STAR Team model to assemble and lead a successful team to navigate a sailboat from San Francisco to Hilo, HI. It's my own personal experience of forming a crew and captaining my 35-foot sailboat on a 2,200 nautical-mile voyage.

According to well-known "lore of the sea," the Captain is the "absolute master" of the ship. That implies that the owner of the vessel necessarily makes all the decisions and issues orders to the crew. But, in sailing as in business, there is a collaborative way to lead: counting on the engagement, creativity, and full commitment of my shipmates, while leaving no doubt about who is the captain.

Here's how the STAR Team model applied to the voyage:

1) Shared and Meaningful Purpose

The team's task or reason for existing that is shared by all team members and, in some way, motivates, and inspires each.

The purpose of the voyage was clear – to sail from California to Hawaii. However, the STAR Team model suggests each member become aligned in something more than just a destination.

In an open conversation, we learned what was personally meaningful about making such a voyage. For me, this trip was a long-term goal since my teens. Frank, who had sailed the upwind reverse course to San Francisco, would now have the chance to complete the pleasant downwind sail to Hawaii. Anne was motivated by her own dream of leading an all woman crew in a Trans-Pacific sailing race for which this trip would be a test experience.

When we turned to refining our understanding of the purpose into a shared vision of success, we envisioned an efficient, seamanlike voyage, in which we made good time without pushing the limits, enjoyed the entire trip, arrived in Hilo safe and sound, and remained good friends.

2) **Specific and Challenging Goals**

The measurable results the team agrees to produce that will satisfy an important organizational need and demand extraordinary performance by team members.

This wasn't a race, so "winning" was not a goal. We agreed on other goals: a specific departure date; to retain open communication; to operate with a consistent watch system; to reach Hilo in 18 days or fewer; to learn and practice weather prediction and efficient navigation; to complete the voyage in safety and absence of injury to anyone. With crewmembers in very close proximity 24 hours a day, with the power of wind and waves tossing the boat, with the fatigue and stress of little sleep, we agreed an "uneventful" small boat ocean voyage would be quite an accomplishment.

3) **Roles and Responsibilities – Decision Making**

A shared understanding by team members of how the responsibilities for specific team functions and tasks will be distributed.

I made sure we talked about roles and decision making, and that we had clear agreements well before we left. Anne, who has a food related business, undertook to do the food planning and purchasing. Frank and I agreed to share the remaining boat preparation work, and I took care that we had the necessary navigation and safety equipment. As to roles at sea and decision making, we agreed to discuss any important decision, unless it was an emergency. We would generally seek consensus, but both Frank and Anne agreed that as captain and owner I would have the final say if we could not all agree. For any radical course changes, I would share the information and seek input, but I would decide.

There were dozens of advance decision and role-making agreements. Making these

in advance lets us all know how we would participate and prevented possible dashed expectations. It really contributed to our achieving the goal of remaining friends at the end of the voyage.

4) **Common and Collaborative Approach**

Commonly understood plans and methods for accomplishing the team's goals in ways that facilitate participation, cooperation, and mutual support.

Having a Common and Collaborative Approach not only produces better quality work product, it helps to establish a climate of collaboration and open communication. In our case, much of our common approach to sailing the boat was based on shared experience and practices as sailors – how to coil the lines; how to tie a reef knot; speaking the common language of sailing in giving directions or warning of an impending action, and so on. Another aspect of our Common and Collaborative Approach was the way we made explicit agreements about watch-keeping and about calling crew meetings.

An example of how this worked was when, about ten days into the cruise, Frank asked for a crew meeting to discuss the watch schedule. As we were sailing west and the local time was changing, Frank was standing watch in the dark more than Anne or me. We quickly agreed to rotate the schedule. Our agreement to make an open feedback “crew meeting” culture aboard the boat prevented what could have developed into resentment.

5) **Complementary Skills**

The right combination of knowledge, ability, and experience required to perform effectively.

Even if all the other parts of the “Star” are right, if the team does not have the requisite complementary skills to accomplish its work, a team/crew can suffer a lot of frustration and even failure.

Frank was an experienced single-handed sailor, having made many ocean cruises alone. Anne, too, had lots of sailing experience, and as noted, had special expertise in food and provisioning. I have been sailing for more than 30 years and I had spent several years working on my classic boat to upgrade, renovate, and learn every inch and system of her, thoroughly. I had mechanical skills to deal with a couple of minor engine issues when they came along. But the “technical” skills of sailing were not enough to meet our goals; interpersonal skills also mattered. As a business owner, Anne knows how to think through issues and negotiate compromises. A lawyer by training, Frank is a good listener and advocate for his ideas. As a consultant and facilitator, I brought some skill in convening discussion and building agreement. Each of us had a different but enjoyable sense of humor, and, like all sailors, perhaps an ability to spin yarns for entertainment.



A CLIMATE OF TRUST, RESPECT, AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

I mentioned earlier that a successful team is one that a) achieves its targeted goals, b) manages its work processes efficiently and c) maintains healthy team member relationships. Ensuring that we built a climate of trust, respect, and shared responsibility supported all three dimensions of success we wanted.

Trusting one another – not only to run the boat on our watches, but to speak up honestly and act respectfully to each other – helped to minimize the very natural stress and fatigue that a long ocean voyage creates. This in turn helped us focus more fully on the task at hand, and on enjoying together the incredible beauty and majesty of the open ocean, and the life changing experience of a small boat voyage. We respected each other’s skills and commitment to the boat, the voyage and to each other. And we shared responsibility, in small things like the rotation of cooking, keeping the small cabin as neat as possible, and in the big things like handling our couple of days of very heavy weather.

Even if all the other parts of the “Star” are right, if the team does not have the requisite complementary skills to accomplish its work, a team/crew can suffer a lot of frustration and even failure.

Once in a great while in business life one gets the opportunity to be part of a great and successful team. When it happens, it is a never-to-be-forgotten experience. It has a magic to it that one can still feel years later. That is how I feel about the sea voyage I made a few years ago. Approaching a team experience with Facilitative Leadership and the STAR Model cannot always assure success; but it sure does improve the odds.

ABOUT INTERACTION ASSOCIATES

Interaction Associates (IA) is a 40-year innovator who delivers strong business results through advanced leadership development. IA’s consulting, training, and coaching services empower leaders to build trust, engage employees, and foster collaboration to drive strong business results to more than 1/3 of the Fortune 500. IA’s proprietary research shows that the “Return on Involvement” of employees yields measurable business results. In 2011, IA was named to Training Industry’s Leadership Companies Watchlist of top innovators in the leadership field. IA has global delivery capability with corporate offices in Boston and San Francisco. More information is available at: <http://www.interactionassociates.com>.