

# EXPANDING TEAM COACHING CAPABILITIES FOR IMPACT

Four essential lenses for seeing the Who, What, When, and How of teams in organizations

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“Can you coach my team too?” Many of my executive coaching clients ask me this question. And my graduate-level students often ask, “Can you teach me how to coach teams?” Because I’ve worked with corporate leaders and teams for over 40 years, pioneered empirical research in the team coaching space, published articles about team coaching, and trained hundreds of professionals on the art, science, and practice of team coaching, I know that while most coaches are well trained to work in a one-on-one format, fewer have the capability and confidence to effectively coach teams.

Having worked with teams in organizations for 40 years and having conducted empirical research on team coaching I know one thing to be true: coaching teams is more complex than coaching individuals. For example, it requires the coach to be aware of a wider range of group dynamics and systemic interdependencies. The coach needs to notice the extent to which the team is in alignment about its team-specific goals, roles, and decision-making processes. At the same time, the coach must attend to both the individual and collective voices in the room, and navigate the sticky web of trust and confidentiality amongst multiple stakeholders.

Because coaching teams is more complex than coaching individuals, coaches need to acquire an additional set of team-specific knowledge and skills. Although there are very few team-specific models within the coaching literature, there exists a plethora of knowledge to draw upon from team-specific disciplines (Peters & Carr, 2013). Navigating the knowledge-base about teams and applying that knowledge to coaching can be daunting.

In 2011, I synthesized various published team coaching models into a single framework called the Four-Lens Team Coaching Framework. Since then I have educated hundreds of leaders, coaches and other professionals about the framework and how to apply it to their own team situations. As a result, they are better enabled to make informed decisions and choices about how to contract and interact with a team, and to design and launch team coaching initiatives for enterprise-wide change. The impact can be significant when done well:

- Improved team productivity, team performance, and workplace engagement
- Faster integration of organizational change initiatives
- Accelerated development and scale of team talent

### THE FOUR-LENS TEAM COACHING FRAMEWORK

Although there are many more lenses we can use as coaches (such as diversity, gender, etc.), these four core lenses offer significant insights when coaching teams in organizations. An easy way to use the framework as a mental model when working with a team is Who, What, When, and How:



#### Systems Lens (WHO):

Who does the team need to interact with in its environment in order to achieve its goals, e.g. other departments, customers, etc.?

**Focus:** Team interdependencies.



#### Task Lens (WHAT):

What does the team need to achieve and what are its methods of operating? What are its goals and priorities? What are the team members roles? What is the team's method for making decisions?

**Focus:** Team coordination and results.



#### Stages of Development Lens (WHEN):

When did the team start working together? Are they in the beginning, middle, or end of accomplishing their team goals?

**Focus:** Team maturity.



#### Group Dynamics Lens (HOW):

How is the group interacting? How are underlying emotional and psychological processes exhibited through their behaviors?

**Focus:** Team relationships.

It is important to note that the framework is not a linear model. There is no hierarchy of the lens. No one lens is more important than another. Each lens informs other lenses. The value of applying this framework is to help open our eyes to new perspectives and solutions that we otherwise might not have seen.

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### APPLICATION & RESULTS

One of my coaching supervision clients, Nancy, came to me feeling frustrated during her work with a team that was charged with launching a new product for the organization. She explained that she previously conducted an analysis with the team about its current situation. They concluded that “interpersonal conflicts existed between team members causing a low level of trust and a high level of dysfunction.” So, Nancy offered to engage the team in an ‘elephant in the room’ conversation to resolve interpersonal issues between team members.

Although some passionate debates ensued during the conversation, the team still felt stuck—nothing was resolved. They remained behind schedule on the product launch, and frustrated.

During my supervision session with Nancy, I introduced her to the Four-Lens Framework. This is when she experienced an ah-ha moment about herself: “I have a bias of looking through only one lens – the Group Dynamics Lens! I’m like the hammer who only sees a nail. When I see conflict, I automatically address it by engaging in an ‘elephant in the room’ conversation.”

Next, I invited Nancy to re-examine the team through all four lenses. Her eyes widened and brightened, seeing the team’s situation in new ways. In turn her choices expanded about additional ways to work with the team. She proceeded to educate the team on the Four-Lens Framework. Then the coach and the team decided to jointly analyze the team’s situation through the four lenses. During their analysis, they confirmed that indeed the team was in the “storming” stage of development (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977) which put the team at risk of not meeting their mid-point performance goals. Then they saw even more.

Their biggest ah-ha moment was experienced when they collectively saw the source of conflict stemming from a lack of clarity and agreement about roles of the team members (Task Lens) as well as the role of the sales executive who was an influential, yet not formal, member of the team (Systems Lens). The team became motivated to address their conflict by clarifying roles and responsibilities of all team members as well as the sales function.

As a result of gained alignment about roles, they met their mid-point performance goals with a renewed sense of team cohesion and motivation. And Nancy felt an increased competence in her capability to coach teams.

### SUMMARY & TAKEAWAYS

Coaching teams is more complex than coaching individuals. Team coaching requires an additional set of team-specific knowledge, skills, and tools in order to make better informed decisions when designing and launching team coaching initiatives. When the coach expands her knowledge-base such as when learning and applying the Four-Lens Team Coaching Framework, her capabilities are expanded. The impact on the coach, the team, and the enterprise can be significant.

As a coach, consider learning more about team-specific frameworks such as the Four-Lens Team Coaching Framework. Attend training courses and engage in

individual and peer supervision to build your capability to look through multiple lenses so that you are better enabled to design and launch highly effective team coaching initiatives. You may just discover questions and answers that you otherwise would not have seen which can expand the impact on you, the team, and the enterprise.

After having educated hundreds of coaches and leaders over the past decade using evidence-based approaches such as the Four Lens Team Coaching Framework, I remain in awe of the power of learning and applying new knowledge. To paraphrase Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. "A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions." •

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