

Building Teams in Real Time

By [Marty Lasker](#)

Have you ever attended a Team Building Seminar? Afterward, were you as effective in developing or improving the performance of a team as you feel you could be? Many of us struggle with the value of the seminar experience.

I am committed to simulations as the most effective way for people to learn. Simulations require people to become actively involved and own their learning. Participants are engaged through the challenge of a problem, project, or competitive situation. Their response to this challenge is then analyzed by the participants themselves with the support and guidance of an experienced facilitator.

Simulations compel participants to play an active role in their learning, while the typical seminar is passive and requires the learner to sit in a chair for the duration, often resulting in a lengthy, boring experience.

With regard to Building and Developing Teams, the first question is. "How can I distinguish between any old team and what we really want - High Performing Teams?" The research confirms that successful or High Performing Teams have the following characteristics:

1. They commit to a common purpose – they know and agree on what they are supposed to accomplish.
2. The team establishes clear rules or guidelines for how they will operate – there is a process they will follow or steps to mark their progress.
3. They make effective decisions – they have agreed on how they will make decisions, and they follow the process.
4. The team members communicate openly – while being respectful of one another, they don't hold back in expressing opinions or in giving feedback.
5. Each team member commits to the team – this is not an audition for the next role. There is a commitment to the team's performance rather than individual recognition.
6. They value each other's differences – they recognize that there are differences and take advantage of them rather than try to suppress them. They adapt to different personalities and styles.
7. There is follow-through – each member of the team does what they say they will do as they recognize that the team's success depends on them.

The second question is, "How do we build or develop a High Performing Team?" My answer is to put the team through a practice run – real life in real time; give them an experience where they need to perform as a team, demonstrating proficiency in the characteristics shown above. There are many project based simulations in which a group has to build something or solve a problem. Most of these experiences fail to

emphasize the high-performing team characteristics such as those listed above. Instead, they put the participants through an activity and then revert back to the standup lecture or discussion about what went well or didn't go well and how the team might improve.

I have found an experience that simulates the interaction of a team in real time. "Pumping the Colors" is a one-day simulation that does it all. It starts with team members sharing their preferred styles, has the team review the characteristics of High Performing Teams, and has the team concentrate on setting priorities for acquiring these characteristics. It gets the team to focus on the need to plan and evaluate the team's performance as a leading indicator of ultimate success. There are four time periods spread throughout the day for the team to complete a challenging project. Alternating between the project and team meetings simulates real life. The difference is the consistent team meeting sessions where the team's performance is constantly evaluated and improvement plans are generated and implemented in real time.

Marty Lasker is an experienced corporate trainer specializing in the use of simulations to drive learning within organizations. His client list is extensive and includes many Fortune 500 companies as well as schools and not for profit organizations. Included among the subject areas he addresses are finance, change, leadership, diversity, and team building. He can be reached directly at hlcici@aol.com or through his company's web site at <http://www.hlcinc.com>

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