

A close-up photograph of two hands held out, palms facing forward. The fingers and parts of the palms are painted with bright, vibrant colors in a rainbow pattern: red at the tips, followed by orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. The background is a solid, bright blue color. The text 'Building A TEAM' is overlaid on the image, with 'Building A' in yellow and 'TEAM' in white.

Building A TEAM

Leading Great Team Meetings

Nick Wright

Teams

One of the best questions I've heard at the start of a team meeting was, What has inspired you most since we last met? It created an amazing burst of focus and energy. I've also been in meetings that felt so mind-numbingly tedious, that it was as if all the air had been sucked out of the room.

I'm going to share some ideas that can help create inspiring and effective teams. These are teams that generate high levels of energy and engagement and achieve great results.

I'll focus on team meetings because these are the points at which greatest synergy and tension can occur. People are in the room together, whether physically or virtually, and it's how to make the best of that encounter so that something magic happens inside and outside of the room.

I'll draw your attention to four dimensions: Purpose, Content, Methods and Relationships; and I'll explain each dimension in turn, including sample questions to help guide team conversations. You'll see that I use an invitational style, intended to co-create, with others, the best team experience possible.

If I describe or suggest something that you believe, for whatever reason, wouldn't work in your team, ask yourself what it would take to make it work, or what would work instead.

☆ Purpose (Why)

Many teams assume they are working towards the same vision or goals, without having ever articulated what's important to them or what success would look like.

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Some useful questions that can help a team check for clarity and agreement include:

- 🗨️ Why are we here?
- 🗨️ What are we here to do?
- 🗨️ What are we trying to achieve?
- 🗨️ What do we need to align around?
- 🗨️ What are we like at our best?

We can apply the same principle to a team meeting and to specific items on an agenda. For instance:

- 🗨️ Why this, why now?
- 🗨️ What is the goal of this meeting?
- 🗨️ What is the purpose of this agenda item?
- 🗨️ If we were to succeed in this, what would a great outcome look and feel like?
- 🗨️ By the end of this meeting, what would convince us this was time well spent?

☆ Content (What)

I will often pause at the start of a meeting to take a breath (and pray), place the agenda face-down on the table, step back from the detail for a moment and ask, for instance:

- 🗨️ Of all the things we could do today, what stands out to us as most important?
- 🗨️ Which issues are genuinely critical?
- 🗨️ What must we avoid getting distracted by?

You may be surprised at how often an agenda created in the room like this ends up being far shorter, more focused and more engaging than the formal agenda that had been circulated beforehand. A useful next step can be to ask a next level of questions, before diving in. For instance, in a leadership meeting:

- 🗨️ What is the strategic significance of this issue ?
- 🗨️ What leadership issues does it raise for us?
- 🗨️ What are the questions that, if we were able to answer them, would enable us to make the best decisions?
- 🗨️ Are we pitching this conversation at the right level?

You could also ask, for instance:

- 🗨️ Who or what is driving this issue?
- 🗨️ Which aspects of this should we focus on?
- 🗨️ What do we already know about this?
- 🗨️ How clear are we about what is negotiable?
- 🗨️ What assumptions are we making?
- 🗨️ What would it take for us to agree on this?

☆ **Methods (How)**

The 'How' dimension is very often neglected in teams. Most teams follow habitual routines - whether they work for them, or not - and some feel trapped by formal meetings protocols.

Building a Team

In light of this, to break an established meetings-mould demands curiosity, creativity and courage. It calls for a willingness to disrupt established patterns of behaviour and to experiment with alternatives:

- 🗨️ How shall we do this?
- 🗨️ Where and when would it be best to do it?
- 🗨️ What would be the most creative, energising and effective way we could tackle this issue together?

If I or a team member is feeling bored, distracted or disengaged, I challenge myself, or them, to take active ownership of what I, or they, are experiencing, to speak up and propose solutions. This is about leaning actively into a conversation, contributing our best and not allowing ourselves to fade out. For instance:

- 🗨️ I'm starting to feel tired. Could we take a 5-minute break?
- 🗨️ I'm feeling confused. Could someone help me to understand this?
- 🗨️ I don't really know much about this topic. Could someone fill me in on the background?
- 🗨️ I'm really struggling with this. Could we try doing it X way instead?

☆ Relationships (Who)

It's common for teams to take part in teambuilding activities to address the relational dimension. These are often aimed at enabling people to get to know each other better in order to perform well together.

Here are some examples of people- and relationship-orientated questions that you could pose:

Building a Team

- 🗣️ What is the unique gift/talent/experience that each of us offers?
- 🗣️ What are the inter-dependencies between our roles?
- 🗣️ What do we need from each other to do our best?
- 🗣️ What relationships outside of this team do we need to manage well?
- 🗣️ What would help us know and understand each other better so that we can work well together?
- 🗣️ How can we get the best from the differences between us?
- 🗣️ What will we agree in advance to do, when tensions or conflicts arise?

And, if a team is more established I may ask:

- 🗣️ What do we tend to avoid?
- 🗣️ What would help us leap from good to great?

Refresh

If a team feels jaded or stuck, I will invite them to think back to a meeting that went well, whether in this team or in another team elsewhere, and then to share, for instance:

- 🗣️ I loved how we...
- 🗣️ I found it really helpful when...
- 🗣️ The thing that inspired me most was...

We will then practise enacting those qualities (often expressed as attitudes, behaviours or ways of working) until they become - again - the team's new, revitalised and lived experience.

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Nick has a Postgraduate Diploma in Coaching Psychology, a Masters' Degree in Human Resource Development, a Degree in Theology, a Diploma in Pastoral Studies and a Certificate in Supervision and Consultation.

Nick is a Fellow of the UK's Institute of Training and Occupational Learning. If you would like to learn more about Nick and his work, or would be interested to develop your own team or team leadership skills, see:

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[This article was first published in Training Magazine Europe, July 2015]