

# The Problems with Teams



*...a better way to manage*

the  
happy  
manager

Published by Apex Leadership Ltd.

# HOW TO BE A BETTER MANAGER

## The Problems with Teams

*What's in this guide:*

*Page*

3	<a href="#"><u>About the "How to be a Better Manager..." Series</u></a>
4	<a href="#"><u>The Problems with Teams</u></a>
10	<a href="#"><u>"Forcing" Teams – instead of forming them</u></a>
12	<a href="#"><u>"Exhausting" Teams – too many individuals, not enough teamwork</u></a>
14	<a href="#"><u>"Dorming" Teams – too much team, not enough work</u></a>
16	<a href="#"><u>"Aligning" – leadership style with team needs</u></a>
19	<a href="#"><u>"Organizing" – dealing with other influences</u></a>
21	<a href="#"><u>When Teams Get Better</u></a>
22	<a href="#"><u>Summary Checklist for the Problems with Teams</u></a>
24	<a href="#"><u>Team Problems Assessment Tool Guidance</u></a>
25	<a href="#"><u>Tool 1: Forcing Teams</u></a>
26	<a href="#"><u>Tool 2: Exhausting Teams</u></a>
27	<a href="#"><u>Tool 3: Dorming Teams</u></a>
28	<a href="#"><u>Tool 4: Aligning Teams</u></a>
29	<a href="#"><u>Tool 5: Organizing Teams</u></a>

# How to be a Better Manager...

**The Problems with Teams** is one of a series of practical, thought-provoking guides, designed to help you deal with a wide range of management ideas, activities and situations. Whether you are a new manager, or one who wants to hone or develop existing skills, we're sure you'll find something valuable in any of these guides.

This series of e-guides is published by Apex Leadership Ltd. The guides have been developed by a team of professional managers, consultants and educators. The full range of titles is available from [Apex Leadership Ltd](#), or from [the Happy Manager.com](#). Use these guides to benefit from our wealth of management expertise. Let us help you find: **a better way to manage...**"

Phil Higson & Anthony Sturgess  
Directors, Apex Leadership Ltd

## Using the guides

Each guide contains information, insight and inspiration on essential management topics. The best way to use the guides is to read through each section in turn, ensuring you pause for reflection wherever you see the "Consider..." points. Be sure to answer any questions posed, wherever they appear - they are there for a reason!

**Consider ...**

**Tools ...**

After you've worked through the guide, read the summary checklist. This both summarizes the contents of guide, and gives you actions to take to ensure you use it!

Finally, work through the tools. These have been designed to help you use and develop the advice given in the guide. Before you start on the tools, follow this link to the [Assessment Tools Guidance Page](#). This provides general instructions on how to use all of the tools in this e-guide.

Both the tools and the summary checklist are simple to use as handy references at the end of the guide, or as convenient memory aids to carry with you.

[Return to contents page](#)

## The Problems with Teams

If there is one thing as important as knowing how to build a better team, it's being able to manage the team effectively, when things go wrong. Knowing what can go wrong, why, and how best to deal with it is the key to overcoming team problems *before* they cause too much damage.

In our e-guide: [Build a Better Team](#), we highlight the steps you should take in order to build a healthy, productive team. The Problems with Teams looks beyond initial team building activities, focusing instead on how you can manage several situations which may cause a team to go wrong. Avoiding these common pitfalls can save you a considerable amount of wasted time and energy. *Pre-empting* these problem areas is far easier than trying to recover from difficult situations *after* they have happened.

Whether starting a new team or taking over an existing team, a team leader taking on a new role will have much to think about and do. To make matters worse, they can often feel the dual emotions of anticipation at the opportunities presented, and anxiety at the challenges to be overcome. One thing they don't need is to become engulfed by a whole series of problems, simply because they didn't see the warning signs early enough. This e-guide will help you to:

- ✓ identify common problems which affect teams as they develop;
- ✓ avoid these problems if you can;
- ✓ deal with them if you can't!

In this guide we will investigate five situations where problems can affect team development and effectiveness. They are:

1. **"Forcing"** teams - where there is too much emphasis on achieving results, at the expense of the team's welfare and effectiveness.
2. **"Exhausting"** teams - where too many individuals pursue their own agendas. There is too much individuality and not enough teamwork.
3. **"Dorming"** teams - where there is too much emphasis on the team but not enough on the work it supposed to be doing, and on achieving results.
4. **"Aligning"** teams – ensuring team leaders use a leadership style which is most appropriate and beneficial to each individual team.
5. **"Organizing"** teams – to cope with external factors. Teams don't exist in a vacuum and their effectiveness can be significantly affected by factors outside of the team.

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### **“Dorming” Teams - too much *team*, not enough *work***

Having focused on developing the team the next step is to build a performing team. In this stage team strengths begin to emerge. These are the combination of individual strengths via teamwork, which brings results that couldn't be achieved separately. Team performance isn't just about individuals using their strengths. It's about using those strengths in combinations, focused on achieving team goals, which together produce excellent performance.

During this phase of team development the potential problem to guard against can be particularly subtle.

#### **Teamwork at work can often fail, not because people don't get on, but because they get on too well.**

This problem is an issue of too much emphasis on the team. In contrast to the previous section, where conflict and individual tensions dominate, when people get on too well together it's sometimes suggested that the team is “dorming” or asleep.

As teams emerge from a team development phase, many managers fear that teams won't work together, or that friction and factions may appear. However, another danger is that too much emphasis on teamwork may result in teams forgetting that working well together is a *function* of a team, not its *purpose*.

A team that gets on well, at the expense of getting things done, is a common but often overlooked pitfall. Whilst focus on teamwork is needed in order to develop a team, an over-emphasis on the team can cause significant problems.

One of the dilemmas with this aspect of team development is that it can be difficult to spot. Most managers want their teams to get on well together. It is easy to misinterpret the lack of any obvious signs of tension as an indication that the team is performing well. In reality, it may be that the team has become stuck in the developing phase, and it is not really performing well at all. There is too much teamwork at work, and not enough productivity!

It's quite possible that a team will not progress to the performance stage because team members have simply become too comfortable. When everyone works well together, it can be all too tempting to take things easy, enjoy the team-bonding activity, and in reality, to settle for achieving less.

Perhaps even more problematic is the situation where a team has performed well in the past, but then retreats to a comfort zone, no longer trying to sustain or raise its performance.

#### **Consider ...**

**“The greatest danger a team faces isn't that it won't become successful, but that it will, and then cease to improve.”**

Mark Sanborn

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**What can you do?**

The first thing to do is for the team leader to assess the team’s current situation. Next, in order to apply an appropriate leadership style, you need to know what style the situation requires. Below are four leadership styles, applied to the four basic team stages, followed by an explanation for each:

Team Stage	Leader’s Style	Leader’s Focus
New team	Steering	Results
Performing and achieving results with a team	Supporting	Teamwork
Performing Team	Stimulating	Strengths
Sustaining team performance	Synergising	Alignment



PREVIEW ONLY  
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[Return to contents page](#)

## Tool 2: Exhausting Teams

Questions	Assessment notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do one or two individuals dominate?</li> <li>• Is conflict resolved in a participative and fair manner?</li> <li>• Have team sessions been run to explore how the team will develop, and to foster a team ethos?</li> <li>• Is there clarity about what is expected of team members?</li> <li>• Have you got the team composition right?</li> <li>• Is conflict dealt with promptly?</li> </ul>	
Options	Comments about options
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage the team to clarify goals so that all team members feel they have contributed to the process.</li> <li>• Explain the team development stages to the team so that all members can see the potential pitfalls associated with poor teamwork.</li> <li>• Run a team session to make everybody aware of what is expected of them, and to pre-empt the risk of individuals pulling in different directions.</li> <li>• Agreeing a teamwork ethos together. This also establishes some boundaries for the way individuals behave in the team.</li> <li>• Discuss poor team performance with any specific individuals concerned and ask them if they have any issues with being a part of the team.</li> <li>• Assess reasons for difficulties.</li> <li>• Focus on contribution - what team members feel they can contribute and where they see their strengths.</li> <li>• Think about team composition and balance. Have you got the right mix of people with the right technical skills, team skills and attitudes?</li> </ul>	
Action Plan	

[Back to chapter](#)

[Return to contents page](#)

PREVIEW ONLY  
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[Return to contents page](#)

## HOW TO BE A BETTER MANAGER

### Updates

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**Join the community:** subscribe to the Happy Manager Newsletter for regular updates and advice on better ways to manage.

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Have a Good Workday  
How to Build a Happy Workplace  
Workstyle, Lifestyle

Build a Better Team  
Team Building Exercises  
Team Health Check  
The Problems with Teams  
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Leadership Essentials  
Defining Leadership  
Leading with Style and Focus  
Leading Insights

Transformational Change  
Sustaining Change  
Making Change Personal

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Conducting a Performance Review  
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Do More with Less  
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Extreme Thinking: Unlocking Creativity  
SMART Goals, SHARP Goals  
Making Better Decisions  
What's the Problem?

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First published in Great Britain 2012

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[Return to contents page](#)