

Teams Getting Beyond Doing More with Less

--*Marcia Hughes and James Terrell*



Teams are encountering the request or demand to do more with less all too often. How do they respectfully re-direct expectations to gain more success while building their own team emotional and social intelligence? We're the first to acknowledge that it isn't easy. However there are strategies to support success. We discussed many in our recent [webinar](#) and will review many here.

First, as Dick Thompson, the publisher of the [TESI®](#), noted teams under stress start focusing more individually and less on the team as a whole, which negatively affects the team's ability to process information. Interpersonal issues between team members are often heightened, conflict is more likely to arise and can be harder to resolve and the sense of well-being is reduced. Working with the seven team skills measured by the TESI ([Team Emotional and Social Intelligence Survey®](#)) provides teams and their leaders with a powerful model to support their success. Each skill is identified together with a tip or tips for building team strength in addressing the stress of being asked to do more with less.

Team Identity is a skill that supports a sense of connection instead of the isolation stress can bring and that in turn helps teams better respond to management pressure effectively. Teams can build their skills by taking charge of some of their time together and have fun. When they get to know each other better, they can work on the same wave length, resolve challenges quicker and be more relaxed. So go to lunch together, go for a walk, or have a regular celebration for birthdays of the month. If your team ever is challenged by management for taking the time, respond that neuroscience shows that taking some breaks supports much more productivity.

Team Motivation gets the team geared up to meet the challenge they face. However, challenges must be reasonably designed so the team has a chance to be successful. If too much is asked the team becomes demotivated because they're set up to fail. Part of the answer comes from the team finding their bigger "yes". When they find what is more important they gain strategic perspective, it's easier to communicate to one another and to management.



Team Emotional Awareness helps team members recognize what's happening so they can respond to one another and to the situation. When they learn to name the stress and pressures out loud, team members can then discuss their feelings, hopes and worries. They become aware of how to support one another and do so more effectively with the opportunity to release at least some of the tension.

Team Communication is essential in so many ways, for example in applying their reality testing skills. When team members communicate they can discuss how many expectations are on their plate, lay out a strategic plan and propose direction to management to guide their mutual work. This can mean realizing there just aren't enough resources to tackle all the tasks on their plate. They can show why and suggest the best course of action. Teams often lump everything they need to do under the concept of communications. This clouds the clarity that comes from recognizing communication touches all their skills, but can be separated from the other six TESI skills.

Team Stress Tolerance skills are central to addressing the challenge of being asked to do more with less. One core set of strategies comes with managing their physiology. For example, they can practice exhaling as long as they can, which shifts their conscious attention away from their overheated cognitive circuits. This easy strategy “refreshes their mental screens”. They can practice stair therapy – go climb one or more sets of stairs if possible before making a key decision or confronting someone. They can take a walk together, which is a great way to get to know one another and supports quicker team work when back at the office.

Team Conflict Resolution calls for teams to develop more collaborative solutions that strengthen their productivity and persuasive ability with management. Teams might perform a SWOT analysis on key activities, brainstorm how to make one or two meaningful changes, implement and then check back in in a few weeks. Incremental change is more sustainable and empowering than extreme makeovers!

Team Positive Mood gives the team energy, enhances happiness and better decision making. It's at the center of developing real team agility. This brings us full circle by connecting with the idea under team identity of taking time to play. It can feel highly counterintuitive when the team is under pressure. Nevertheless, taking time out provides perspective and supports well-being at all levels.

How are your teams managing their challenges of being asked to do more with less? Let us know!