There are few things that hold a team back more than emotionally unintelligent team members, or what I like to refer to as “social hand grenades.” These are the people who you would send to a party if you wanted the party to end.

While decades of research highlights emotional intelligence as a critical ingredient that distinguishes high performers from “everyone else,” (source), emotional intelligence is equally critical for team performance. For instance, one study found that “teams with greater average emotional intelligence have higher team functioning than [did] groups with lower emotional intelligence.” The same study also found that in a team “the ability to understand one another’s emotional expressions explained 40% of the variance in team performance.”

Work that has traditionally been accomplished by individual contributors now demands a collective centerpiece (i.e. a team) to pull those pieces together.
However, working as a team isn’t easy. Despite the vast array of experiences and diversity of thought that naturally comprise groups of people (groups aren’t the same as teams), it’s still challenging for leaders to coordinate, motivate and challenge their people in ways that support mutual collaboration.

At the core of every team are the relationships that make that team great, or, contribute to its demise. Here are six signs of an emotionally intelligent team:

1. **They re-clarify norms for new members.**

   When new members join the team, existing members are aware that he or she won’t have visibility on the spoken or unspoken rules that guide the team’s behaviors, so they take time to communicate and clarify what those norms are and question whether those norms are still working.

2. **They use curiosity to strengthen relationships.**

   Emotionally intelligent teams use curiosity to stay focused in their discussions, gather the information they need to make decisions, and understand each others’ perspectives. They know that weigh-in creates buy-in so they use inquiry as a vehicle for finding the right solution.

3. **Their environment is psychologically safe.**

   Psychological safety is the belief that you won’t be punished when you make a mistake; that it’s okay to speak your mind and to question the status quo. Psychological safety has a snowball effect for building emotional intelligence because the more you question and the more you learn, the more aware you become. This is exactly the type of team behavior that creates enormous breakthroughs for a company, not to mention build the type of trust that defines elite teams.

4. **They balance relationships with tasks.**

   Smart teams operate along a spectrum, with goal achievement on one end and healthy relationships on the other. They know that achieving the team’s task requires healthy relationships and also realize that results are…well…results, which they need to produce. Smart teams take the time to clarify these situations so members understand why an autocratic (top-down) decision style was favored over a consensual one, for example.

5. **They prioritize team learning.**

   The smartest product and service teams that I’ve experienced hold after action reviews to identify three things:
   
   1. What they intended to achieve
   2. What they actually achieved
   3. What caused the difference
In doing so, they build the team’s collective awareness about each other and the team’s mission at hand.

6. They listen to each other.

Emotionally intelligent teams are situationally aware of each other because they truly listen to what others have to say. They don’t wait to speak but instead actively listen without formulating in their minds what they want to say next.

The complex challenges of today will only continue to grow more challenging, and navigating through such complexities requires an emotionally intelligent team.

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