

## **Top Team Alignment**

The Bolton Group LLC is an executive assessment and development firm retained by CEOs and business unit heads who seek positive change in their leaders and top teams. We show individual executives how to operate at a higher level and create greater value, how to best align top leadership teams to perform and how to build the capabilities of the next generation of leaders.

If you seek to build a sustainable enterprise, achieve improved results from your business strategies and build a resonant working climate, your top leadership team must operate in a highly effective, interdependent way. A high performing top team is an asset that can't be duplicated by your competition. And top leadership teams are very different from the countless other teams that are part of most organizations.

Yet, the harsh reality is that many top leadership teams are often not teams at all, but a loose collection of bright, energetic, strong-willed executives who report to the same person and work individually — sometimes at cross purposes. The studies about the performance of top teams are alarming. Consider the following facts:

- Only 20 percent of CEOs rate their top teams “high-performing.”
- Trust is an issue in over 65 percent of top teams.
- 80 percent of top team members think they have the skills to fulfill their roles, yet only 30 percent of their peers think they do.
- And when we've asked “*How effective is our top leadership team today on a scale of 1 – 10 and how effective should it be?*” on average, CEOs responded 6.2 and 9.6 respectively. Their direct reports responded 5.9 and 9.4 respectively.

These statistics are disturbing, because the need for executive-level collaboration and team performance is higher than ever before. Globalization, rapid innovation, and relentless competition are demands that require a cohesive and highly effective leadership response. And increased collaboration can only occur when the top team is aligned and simultaneously focuses on the three critical dimensions of top team performance: creating clarity, building capabilities and increasing commitment.

**Creating Clarity.** Clarity is increased by focusing on:

- The purpose, direction and norms of behavior of the top team;
- The results the top team commits itself to achieving;

- The roles/responsibilities and expectations of each team member;
- The process for meetings, information sharing and decision-making;

**Building Capabilities.** Capability building includes:

- Building the capability to productively raise and manage conflict;
- Building the skill and mindset of each team member to give and receive feedback and feedforward;
- Building the capabilities of individual team members and the collective capabilities of the team;

**Increasing Commitment.** Increasing commitment includes:

- Fostering strong working relationships and mutual working agreements among team members;
- Building the trust that allows for conflict and commitment;
- Taking responsibility for the top team's success and on-going performance;

Since no two top teams are exactly alike or in the same stage of development, we work with our clients by assessing how the team is functioning from the perspective of the leader (typically CEO or Business Unit President) and their top team members. We then develop a customized approach to create alignment and move the team's performance up the curve as quickly as possible through top team alignment sessions.

**Examples of Top Team Alignment:**

Whether the team is struggling in its day-to-day collaboration and needs to get back to winning, or simply desires to step up to the next level, our top team alignment services can assist top teams in reaching their full potential. Here are some examples:

**New CEO & Top Team Prepare For IPO & FDA OK** – The newly-hired CEO of a privately-held, venture-backed medical technology company headquartered in Israel creates an executive team made up of six Israelis and three Americans. Company is on the fast-track for FDA approval and an IPO. Team alignment session held to create team purpose, clarify annual performance goals and agree on norms of behavior. Feedback and cross-cultural awareness sessions held to build capabilities and strengthen relationships. Assessments and coaching for each team member to improve their emotional intelligence and use of leadership and behavioral styles. Workout session held to create clarity and improve working climate for team.

**Venture-backed Start Up Poised To Innovate** – CEO of a well-funded interventional cardiology start up with innovative, potential game-changing technology platform needs to create the strategic plan for the company and “tighten the culture”. Vision, mission, values and norms of behavior defined. Three year strategic plan and corresponding annual operating goals developed for the team and each member. Relationships among team members strengthened and working agreements created for all. Clarity created by agreeing on roles/responsibilities and expectations.

**Mature Team Steps Up To Next Level** – US-headquartered, large revenue, market-leading medical products company has CEO who wishes to raise the performance of an already high performing top team. *Top Team Check*, our proprietary leadership team assessment tool, used to assess CEO and top team members’ perceptions of team performance. Team purpose clarified. Team norms of behavior revisited and refined. Roles/responsibilities session held to clarify expectations. Feedback skills session and climate workout sessions to improve the flow of feedback and identify areas to improve working climate of top team.

**Diverse Leadership Team Needs To Perform To Gain FDA OK**– General Manager of the Canadian-operation of a global medtech corporation needs to build his team’s leadership capability and scale up for an FDA-approved manufacturing operation for the company’s most profitable product. Leadership team consists of four Canadians and one each from the USA, Italy, South Africa, Netherlands, Russia, Taiwan and Philippines. Vision, mission, values and norms defined. Cross-cultural and behavioral styles workshop held to promote mutual understanding. Goal setting and roles/responsibilities sessions held to clarify expectations. Individual coaching provided to raise the performance of each team member.

**Identify CEO’s Successor And Improve Team Performance** – Board of Directors and CEO of a publicly-traded biotech company seeks to prepare and identify a successor to the CEO from one of the four top “insiders”, while simultaneously improving the top teamwork of CEO and her direct reports. Used *Top Team Check* to assess team performance. New purpose, goals and norms of behavior defined for top team. Emotional intelligence, leadership style and working climate assessments administered for each executive and individual and team coaching provided. Collaboration and team performance dramatically increased and a successor was identified.

**Global Project Team Consolidates & Reduces Expenses** – Business Unit Senior Vice President of an Italian-headquartered conglomerate seeks to continue market leadership by creating centers of R&D and marketing excellence and reducing supply chain and manufacturing costs. Global Project Team made up of participants from four countries to drive the initiative. Team

alignment sessions held to clarify expectations and objectives, provided project management tools and skills and team leadership coaching.

## **The Role of The CEO**

The “red thread” that runs through each of these examples is the CEO’s leadership. In every case, the CEOs desired and believed that improved team performance could occur. The CEOs were role models for on-going improvement and were fully engaged. The CEO’s leadership determines the difference between a high-performing top team and a frustrating, waste of time and executive energy.

So the questions for CEOs to consider are:

- Is your top team truly a strategic asset, performing to its full potential? Is yours a team a competitor would want to compete against?
- How do you gain leverage in the performance of your top team? What are the critical few differences that will result in extraordinary performance for your top team? What’s the “20” that gets the “80”?
- In an increasing global and complex world, if you could improve the alignment and performance of your top team, what would be the benefit?

By creating clarity, building capabilities and increasing commitment, the top team becomes a more cohesive, supportive group, able to perform at a higher level, sharing similar expectations of high individual and team performance. Respect in differences of perspective, values and approaches allows for trust, enabling the team to perform, to grow and to fulfill critical objectives of the enterprise. And a cohesive, high-performing top team is a competitive advantage that has largely been untapped and cannot be duplicated by your competition.