



Talking teamwork

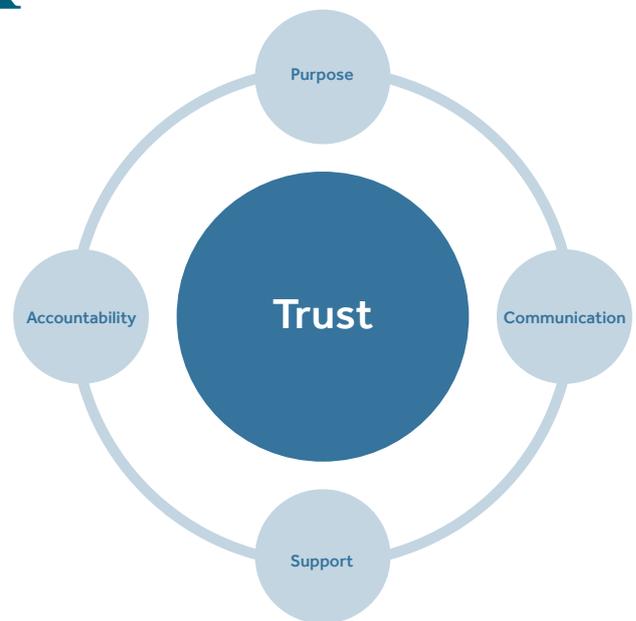
Teamwork is more than simply working together on a project. It's connecting with your teammates, sharing troubles and goals and, most importantly, trust. But this might seem tough at the moment due to the distance separating us all. We caught up with two Olympians, Lizzie Simmonds and Henry Weir, to discuss teamwork and how to stay connected from afar.

Like many other things, our interactions as a team have had to migrate into a virtual space. It's relatively easy to control our individual performance while working from home, but it's harder to connect, interact and perform as a team. After all, what makes a team great often involves getting heads together around a table, problem solving with a flipchart, and building those important relationships in person.

How can we help our team adapt to the current climate so that it not only survives these challenging times, but thrives? If we navigate the current challenges effectively, there is a real opportunity to strengthen the connections within our team and ultimately become a stronger unit.

What makes a team successful and how can I increase my team's cohesion during challenging times?

There are four key components: purpose, communication, accountability and support. These are all underpinned by trust.



Purpose

A clearly defined purpose gives a team direction and motivation. Even if team members come from different backgrounds and have varying levels of experience, a common purpose helps unite the group. Normally, purpose is discussed within teams. But it's easy to disregard when the pressure is on and we're scrambling to adapt to change. So, if you haven't checked in with your team on purpose recently, make some time to do it over the next few weeks.

You might find your team's purpose has shifted as business objectives and personal circumstances change. If this is the case, it's even more important to check in with your team, assess how the landscape has changed and ensure that everyone is aligned going forwards.

Communication

Communication is crucial. Having structures in place that allow individuals to speak freely, without judgement, is incredibly important. Communication isn't always easy – there needs to be space to challenge other team members, raise concerns and ask questions. The most damaging thing for a team is not conflict; it's a culture where individuals don't trust their contributions can be heard and appreciated in an objective way.

Communication is something that has changed significantly for most of us recently – as we work remotely, catch up on video conferences, and minimise face to face contact. Though most teams have adapted well to these challenges, some are finding it hard to maintain the easy flow of communication that comes naturally in an office environment. If you find your team isn't connecting as well as usual, then discuss whether you need to have more structure in place to facilitate communication. This doesn't have to be big team meetings; it could be smaller peer groups who feed back into a centralised group.

Accountability

Accountability is one of our values and can be the hardest behaviour to get right, but it can have a huge impact on a team's overall dynamic. Accountability means taking ownership, both as individuals and collectively, of successes and failures. It means challenging those who aren't pulling their weight and allowing yourself to be challenged if you aren't fulfilling your role.

Getting accountability right is even trickier at the moment, when the team aren't collaborating in person. It's hard to know what your colleagues are doing if they're not working alongside you, so trust plays a crucial part here. Setting goals can also help with accountability – sharing these goals amongst the group means you have real time measurements of progress every time you check in together.

Support

A successful team doesn't just spend time collaborating on work problems; they also invest time into social connections. Getting to know your teammates beyond their working role can improve cohesion and team dynamic and can make it easier for people to share personal challenges or goals.

What many of us are missing at the moment are those coffee breaks, water cooler chats or after work drinks that allow us to connect with our colleagues on a deeper level. Now that we're working remotely, these connections are less likely to happen spontaneously so reproducing them needs to be intentional. Whilst the majority of daily meetings will (and should) have a formalised agenda, make sure your team also finds time to connect socially. Sometimes the real magic happens during those coffee break chats. Don't forget about them just because they can't be done in person.

Trust

All four of these elements are underpinned by trust. Trust that everyone buys into the team's purpose and direction. Trust that everyone is doing their best to advance the team towards success. Trust that you operate in a space where you can challenge others, and they can challenge you, and that conflict can be resolved objectively. Trust that you are there for one another, not just with working problems but personal challenges too. Without trust, the team dynamic becomes undermined and it's hard to operate effectively.

Together, #wecandothis

Lizzie Simmonds



Henry Weir



Lizzie is a retired British swimmer who has won medals at World, Commonwealth and European Championships, and has represented Great Britain at two Olympic Games. She retired from professional competition in 2018 but still has many roles within high-performance sport, including supporting fellow athletes throughout and beyond their sporting careers. Lizzie has also developed a successful programme transferring the systems and habits of elite performers into the corporate world and works with companies to help staff find ways to prioritise their own physical and mental health

Follow Lizzie's story on Twitter @LizzieSimmonds1

GB and Olympic hockey player Henry Weir was just 15 when he was called to spearhead Crewe Vagrants' title charge – and his career has not slowed down since. Henry made his international debut in December 2012 at the Melbourne Champions Trophy and in 2014 took bronze at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Since then, he has won 180 international caps, was an Olympian in 2016 and is on track for Tokyo in 2021.

Follow Henry's story on Instagram @henryweir_