Building Team Resilience Through Positive Mood

- Marcia Hughes and James Terrell

Positive attitudes on your team will build resilience and influence every dimension of teamwork. Positivity will impact how well people get along with one another, how pleased they are to be on the team, their motivation and their creative thinking. That is why this is one of the seven team competencies the TESI® (Team Emotional and Social Intelligence Survey®) measures. Research Dr. Barbara Fredrickson describes in her books Positivity and Love 2.0 provides the scientific grounding to prove the power of positive engagement. Because most work is accomplished through teams, we are finding a tremendous thirst to better understand what this means for teams and how to assist teams in growing their positive mood.

Developing teams is a complex challenge that never stops requiring positive and proactive attention. One of the challenges to team effectiveness is the tendency for people to think and act individually and objectively, that is to focus exclusively on the task rather than each other. Busy team members can become so externally focused on projects and customers that they don’t focus on themselves or on the team. This lack of internal team focus can feel safer for several reasons: 1) addressing interpersonal relationships can seem much less controllable or scientific and less predictable and thus too uncertain; 2) team members may not be trained to be good at team or human dynamics, they enjoy being an expert but they aren’t expert in this situation; 3) their external focus in getting all the jobs done may leave them drained with little energy left for the team, and this is often compounded by highly demanding organizational politics; and 4) the team leader may be a technical expert in his/her production world but likely is not trained to be a team leader and to manage complex interpersonal situations and to build motivation while maintaining accountability; and 5) the full organization may not be aware of the challenges their teams are experiencing nor understand how they could support the team in effective change. This is why your team needs to make conscious, intentional efforts to build its positivity and resilience if you want to maximize productivity.

Art Aron, a human relations scientist, conducted research that shows how people move from a sense of separation – me and you – to a sense of being together - us or we. His research was done with couples, but the same principles apply to teams, which are a group of people working together to solve problems. The more overlap the individual team members see between each other, the more likely they will have a sense of “us” and that leads to a series of positive results. The more positive we are with each other, the more overlap we see between ourselves and others and that leads to feeling more openness and connection with others. In turn, this increased connection leads to helpful responses
among team members that build trust – team members learn they can rely on considerate
and supportive responses from one another. Most people will say they agree with the
maxim that “All of us are smarter than one of us.” Understanding the dynamics of positive
mood helps show us how to act in order to achieve its powerful effects.

Fredrickson writes that positivity broadens one’s view from “me” to “us” and then to “all of
us” not just the part of the group that looks or thinks like you. Thus building positive
attitudes within your team will expand the effectiveness of your diversity efforts. We often
talk about emotions being highly contagious and that’s so for positivity, as well as for
negativity. This makes it important for team leaders as well as all team members to be
intentionally positive. Fredrickson explains that “positivity spreads because people
unconsciously mimic emotional gestures and facial expressions of those around you …
positivity breeds helpful, compassionate acts.” Furthermore, she points out that when we
act positively with others we are likely proud of our engagement and “pride broadens your
mindset by igniting your visions about other and larger ways in which you might be
helpful.” (Positivity, pp. 69-70) We are certain that’s what you want for your teams.

Furthermore, positivity is central to the ability to collaborate which is based on the ability to
work jointly with one another, to listen to different perspectives and to find common
answers. Collaborative Growth’s team model demonstrates how we bring team emotional
and social intelligence competencies together to create collaborative intelligence. Frankly
one of the easiest team strengths to build is positive mood so practice this and you will
also build your team’s resilience.

**Building Resilience and Positive Mood**

Resilience and positive mood are tightly connected. Resilience includes the ability to bounce back and relies on
teams having a reserve to tap into when big challenges hit. That reserve is built by how we treat each other and what we
expect of one another. The more positive members of a
team are, the deeper the reserve and the less often they are
likely to need to tap into it. Positivity builds perspective so
teams take challenges in stride rather than making a big deal
of them and increasing their stress instead of their resilience.
Use your emotional intelligence to grow your teams’ positivity and resilience. Key team competencies focused on in the TESI are Positive Mood and Stress Tolerance. Of course while you’re building this team competency you will find that some team members are more positive than others so you will need to work with the whole team while respecting the individual differences as the team builds composite resilient strength. Tips you might use are:

- **Build the habit of finding people doing something well and publicly thank them.**
- **Start team meetings with a discussion of something that’s worked well recently.** Then the team can move to strategic analysis and of how to cross map that skill to other requirements.
- **Social connections are at the heart of team success so take time for building connections – and emphasize it even more if you have a virtual team.** Do something fun together, have a pot luck lunch, and start meetings with going around the team and asking everyone to comment on something particularly interesting or important to them.
- **Find purposefulness in the team work so the team feels the sense of being a part of something bigger than itself.** A traditional way to do this is with Mission, Vision and Values statements. Make sure those statements are meaningful and that the team feels ownership and takes pride in them or they won’t help.
- **Support team members in taking time to be relaxed with each other so caring relationships are built resulting in the natural desire to shield each other's back when needed.**
- **Respond to comments made by one another.** People want to be heard more than they want to be right. Applying skills such as active listening and empathetic responses will help people feel acknowledged and valued and that builds positivity and engagement.
- **Intentionally tap into the team wisdom.** Your team knows what they need, however you may need to facilitate their recognizing and employing that wisdom. Take creative brainstorming time to explore topics such as: “What works that we can expand?” and “What do we want that we can influence?”

Recognize that positivity and trust go hand in hand because positivity supports deepening relationships. Develop positivity deliberately and expansively for the benefit of all individuals, teams and the organization.