

By Peter Burow and Zane Harris

Lead and inspire your team to standout performance

The NeuroPower RELISH methodology shows you step by step how to work smarter not harder in developing high performance teams

Teams and the people in them are responsible for the majority of highs and lows in the life of a leader and usually determine whether they peak or plummet.

Teams are complex and require constant attention, however, we all know that in an ever-evolving fast-paced corporate environment there isn't much time to 'stop and smell the roses'. It is critical to form a compelling strategy to guarantee that your team operates at its peak in order to deliver exceptional results in a contracted business environment.

Neuroscience guides breakthrough performance to move teams ahead of the pack

Leaders are faced with the ever-increasing pressure, not only to perform personally, but to create highly effective and cohesive teams that give them an edge on their competitors. With opinion and literature on 'the right way to lead' reaching saturation, it is easy for a leader to become overwhelmed.

Recent breakthroughs in neuroscience have revealed insights into the drivers behind all human behaviour and how leaders can harness this intelligence. Rather than focusing on control, leaders can focus on the needs and motivations that sit behind human behaviour. The result of which will be significantly increased performance and a much happier team.

Understand and engage the Six Needs individuals have when working in teams

Our work with neuroscientists at the University

of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and the University of Queensland, together with our team's academic research from other neuroscientists around the world has been combined with the latest thinking in leadership and management to create a methodology for team building that explains an individual's six core needs when working in a team.

These six breakthroughs – the **Six Needs of a High Performance Team** - provide a new lens through which leaders can view the complexity and intricacies of human behaviour. They reveal the core elements of human motivation and offer a comprehensive approach for leaders to understand themselves and others in the team environment.

The Six Needs of a High Performance Team can be explained using the RELISH method, which is an acronym for:

1. Relatedness
2. Expression
3. Leading the Pack
4. Interpersonal Connection
5. Seeing the Facts
6. Hope for the Future

The RELISH method explained

1. **Relatedness:** The brain needs to be part of a group that is cohesive, fair and safe and obsesses about the risk of not 'fitting in'.

From our earliest ancestors humans have evolved to

be part of groups, not only to satisfy needs for interaction and companionship but, most importantly, in order to ensure physical survival. The ones who survived were those who could work together to hunt and gather, warn each other about dangers and maintain knowledge by learning from each other. The infants that instinctively stayed in the middle of the group were safer than those that went wandering.

It is not surprising that neuroscientists have discovered our brains are hard-wired to keep us within social groups and are wired to raise the alarm at the mere possibility of social exclusion. Recent studies by Professor Matthew Lieberman at UCLA have revealed that experience of social exclusion activates the same regions within the brain that are activated when a person experiences physical pain, with the alarm signals just as strong. The brain's interpretation of social exclusion mirrors its interpretation of physical danger.

For leaders looking to build a high performance team their first task is to make sure that each member of the team feels secure in the value they add to the group. This isn't about being liked, it's about being respected and valued for the contribution a person makes to the group. When team members don't feel safe or are unclear on how they add value, they may resort to playing politics in order to maintain their position in the group. These divisive strategies can destroy group cohesion and dramatically reduce the team's performance.

Need: To feel a sense of safety and belonging within the group.

Function: The primary social function of Relatedness is to ensure safety by maintaining an individual's position within a group. The need for Relatedness promotes the learning of, and compliance with, specific roles and understood social rules. It recruits the brain's ability to acquire and automate behaviour and patterns of thinking (i.e. culture) so that the individual will be accepted within the group.

Benefit: Team members become more loyal and committed to the team.

2. Expression: The brain needs to express emotions if it is to function properly.

When we become emotional, whether it is a posi-

tive or negative emotion, our bodies become flooded with neurochemicals that change our breathing, heart rate and muscle responses. In the brain, these neurochemicals affect what we can remember, how we perceive the outside world and how we process information. In times like these it is all too easy to find yourself carried away by instinctive emotional responses because our emotions prepare our bodies to run when we are afraid, fight when we are angry and rest and heal when we are relaxed.

Although strong emotional reactions were critical to the survival of our ancestors, they create a lot of conflict and can often be disruptive. Workplaces often expect employees to try to eliminate, suppress or ignore their emotional responses. This is exactly the wrong approach to achieving high performance teamwork.

Studies conducted by Matthew Lieberman at UCLA show that being asked to control our emotional responses (called 'masking') can dramatically reduce performance on even simple cognitive and physical tasks. When we ask our teams to 'control their emotions' at work, we force them to use parts of their frontal lobes (the 'higher thinking' part of the brain) to keep the brain's emotional system quiet, but this reduces the brain's capacity available for any complex thinking.

So what's the alternative? Lieberman's studies have shown that the best way to manage emotional reactivity is, in fact, to become aware of them and to find the right word to describe an emotion. This approach (called 'labelling') leads to big decreases in activity in the amygdala (the brain's 'danger detector'), meaning we get over it faster.

To build effective teams, leaders need to understand that emotional responses are an inevitable part of working in teams. If team members are emotionally triggered by each other or by external inputs but are unable to express this within the group in a constructive way, their agility, creativity and overall mental capacity for completing complex tasks will diminish. As a leader, creating a culture that enables your team to identify and label their emotions appropriately can liberate a surprising amount of enthusiasm and creativity that will then fuel your team's performance.

Need: To have the freedom to express emotion constructively when it arises.

Function: The primary social function of Expression is to draw us towards rewarding, pleasant outcomes and away from negative or painful outcomes. It promotes survival through a diverse range of internal states that drive rapid behaviour in response to changing external circumstances. Once our emotional insights are shared with the group through expression, the brain can get on with more valuable tasks at hand.

Benefit: Team members are able to express themselves constructively and quickly generate innovative and thoughtful responses to immediate problems.

3. Leading the Pack: The brain needs status to feel as though we are achieving.

It's taken a while, but we now know for sure that your grandmother was right: money can't buy happiness. In fact, studies of hundreds of participants across many cultures show that once our basic needs have been met, the relationship between money and happiness is astonishingly small. And more importantly for teams with high performance demands, multiple studies have shown that monetary incentives can actively inhibit the brain's ability to respond adaptively to solve problems.

So how can leaders find ways to motivate their teams to brilliant performance? Building evidence from research conducted by people such as Dr Caroline Zink and highlighted by authors such as Daniel Pink, show that status, recognition and independence are key drivers of motivation and performance and in most cases have a greater long-term effect than money. In a team environment, we all have a need to be personally successful and to be recognised. Recognition for work well done triggers the release of dopamine (the neurochemical responsible for creating positive emotions like satisfaction and pride), while having a high status within social groups leads to the release of serotonin, which boosts positive moods and physical resilience.

To drive high performance, leaders must align individual aspirations and motivation with the team's goals and have the ability to redirect individual competitiveness towards shared competitive advantage.

Need: To set and achieve goals that allow for personal and group success.

Function: The primary social function of Leading the Pack is to allow individuals to pursue individual goals, either within the constraints of their social network or by competing to change their position within the network structure. It promotes survival by enabling individuals to focus on personal goals even when that involves competition with other members of the group. Fulfilling this need recruits parts of the brain called the striatum involved in reward, motivation and drive.

Benefit: Team members are highly motivated and put in significant discretionary effort.

4. Interpersonal Connection: The brain needs to feel connected with, and genuinely understood by others.

If one person was to watch another person hit their finger with a hammer, something amazing happens in the onlooker's brain. European neuroscientists, Dr Peter Their and Dr Giacomo Rizzolatti, discovered that the same regions light up in the brain of the person watching as in the brain of the person who is actually hit by the hammer. This is because the brain's mirror neuron system is dedicated to helping us interpret and understand others. This system helps us feel what other people feel and is intrinsically linked to the positive relationships we form with others. It allows us to empathise and understand others, to feel what they feel, and put ourselves in others' shoes.

When we feel empathetic towards someone, the brain triggers the release of the neurochemical oxytocin which fosters love and forgiveness and strengthens the bond between people. Oxytocin is particularly evident in new mothers when they are forming an attachment with their child. It is also crucial in day-to-day work life for establishing strong interpersonal connections between all people.

In order to create a high performance team, leaders must create a sense of empathy and dare we say it... even love... within their teams through facilitating processes whereby team members really get to know each other's strengths. This involves learning what people are passionate about doing and where they shine the most, which is the essence of embracing diversity. Diverse teams are not always easier to manage but they make better decisions and create better solutions.

Need: To feel understood, supported and connected to others on a personal level.

Function: The primary social function of Interpersonal Connection is to foster understanding of the thoughts and feelings of others and promote altruistic behaviour based on positive emotion. It promotes survival by enabling cooperation and mutual support with others in the group through close personal relationships.

Benefit: Team members have empathy for each other and a clear understanding of the strengths of other people in the team. The team becomes cohesive and 'shares the love'.

5. Seeing the Facts: The brain loves feedback and seeing progress.

The brain is a complex self-regulating machine that adapts constantly to external feedback. The primary source of this feedback is through the eyes and large regions of the brain associated with visual processing. Often we 'need to see it to believe it' and the brain is always looking for continuous feedback. It is very important for human motivation to be able to see continuous improvement in our situation whether this means achieving more, learning more or making more of a difference. Motivation quickly diminishes when we can't clearly see the progress we are making.

Leaders must become skilled at being able to simply and accurately measure and track the performance of their team and the people within it. Leaders need to spend time developing their ability to provide constructive feedback that assists and encourages a person's development.

Need: To have the information needed to assess how progress is being made towards goals; to have the resources available to cope with current and anticipated demands.

Function: The primary function of Seeing the Facts is to perceive, interpret and recall relevant explicit information and patterns of data that can help an individual achieve their goals. It promotes survival by allowing individuals to perceive the reality of their situation.

Benefit: Team members have a clear understanding

of how the team is progressing and so can adapt and change their approach to achieve their desired objectives.

6. Hope for the Future: The brain needs hope for the future in order to be able to move forward.

The brain is an anticipation machine - constantly projecting into the future the consequences of staying on its current path. Importantly, our level of hope is directly linked to our sense of whether our current path will lead to a positive future. Vision is the end result of a current trajectory. We call vision a lag indicator rather than a lead indicator. If, as a leader, you have been able to effectively implement the previous five steps then your team will naturally be more optimistic and hopeful about their future and being a part of your team.

In order for a team to have vision for the future, leaders must effectively implement the previous five steps and show their team that by continuing along their current trajectory, a positive future state exists.

Need: A sense of positive anticipation for the future.

Function: The primary function of Hope for the Future is to anticipate the future so that the brain can 'download' new ideas, paradigms or concepts if there are fundamental changes in the world ahead that require a new map of understanding. Hope for the Future promotes survival by allowing individuals to adapt to major changes in their external environment that require completely new approaches.

Benefit: Team members have a sense of the team's current trajectory and are optimistic about future opportunities and challenges.

RELISH-ing Teamwork

In our experience, when these Six Needs are met in teams, the results are exceptional. Team members work remarkably well together achieving outstanding results in a way that brings great satisfaction to each individual. Leaders who understand and use this insight can empower their teams to achieve what other teams only dream of.

Creating high performance teams is not a simple task. It takes commitment, time, energy and internal fortitude from a leader and commitment from the

team members. The effort is well worth it and will deliver exceptional outcomes - your people will feel engaged, motivated, fulfilled, self-actualised and optimistic about the future.

And, of course, so will you.

We have found in our work with CEOs, leadership teams, senior executives and senior partners of many of Australia's largest firms that while working in high performance teams is the highlight of their working life, for the most part, it seems to be more a matter of good luck than good management. By using the RELISH method you can change that.