



# THE POWER OF COACHING TOP TEAMS

**PRAESTA**

LEADERS IN EXECUTIVE COACHING

## WHY COACH TOP TEAMS?

Economic turbulence and recession create unprecedented pressure on leaders to perform above the ordinary. At no time does the leader's position feel more exposed and at no time is it more critical for them that their top people are working creatively and productively together. The Board and senior team form the lynch pin between the CEO's priority and vision for the business and the ability of the business to make the changes necessary to survive and grow.

As executive coaches, focused on helping leaders develop their potential to deliver greater business benefit, we are increasingly called upon to apply our expertise to the development of leadership teams. Often, as a result of coaching a senior executive, it becomes clear that their business will be best served if we help them develop the leadership impact of their whole team. At other times, we are asked to work with the Board or executive team first so that the leader /CEO and their team develop, in tandem, a common language and expertise.

As times get tougher, the demand for this type of help is increasing. Perhaps not surprisingly, as pressures place greater strain on individual and team performance, top teams are finding that they need to be even more robust in the ways in which they work together. On some occasions, we are asked to help where relationships between high performing senior executives have become deeply problematic, and our intervention serves to enable leaders to address difficult issues constructively, to build bridges, and collaborate effectively to the benefit of the team as a whole and business performance.

“The session you conducted with (our) senior team was outstanding. You really understood the team and took them to a level of candour and comfort that was impressive.”

## WHY PRAESTA TEAM COACHES?

- We are all business people, who know first hand the challenges of bringing people together to deliver better business results
- We bring out the unspoken, challenging agendas and sensitive interpersonal issues that often exist between people at the top
- We use robust challenge and foster a climate of trust and resilience where issues and agendas can be addressed
- We understand what makes leaders effective - individually and collectively - and how they can best bring about change in complex organisations
- We each have our unique style and personal approach, so as a team bring a diversity to meet your different business and personal needs.

“Many thanks for facilitating the off site so well. We have made a really good start and I came away with a real feeling of cohesiveness whereas previously we had been working very much in isolation.”

The CEO, a charismatic and highly effective leader, found it **difficult to let go and to stand back** and allow the executive team members to run with important projects. He felt that they needed to **raise their game** before he could trust them. They, in turn, found it frustrating that he interfered with what they felt they had been given responsibility for and ‘micro managed’ them. This had led into an unhelpful cycle where the executive team stopped taking responsibility because they knew that their work would be re-shaped anyway. They didn’t feel strong enough to give clear feedback to the CEO to ‘break’ the cycle. We provided an environment where these issues could be aired, debated and resolved and to ‘help’ each side to change habitual behaviours and work outside comfort zones.

## HOW DO WE WORK WITH YOU?

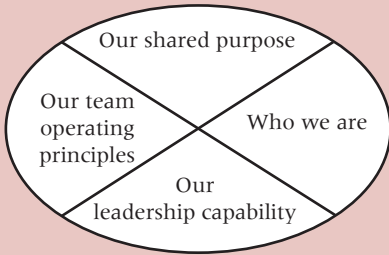
We focus on those areas that will give greatest return for you and your business, in the short and long term, often including:

- Reviewing the top team's strategic direction and priorities
- Resolving conflict between individuals and groups
- Building a new team
- Developing partnership behaviours across team and stakeholder communities
- Raising the leadership impact of the top team

Our experience and research has shown us that our interventions have the most impact when we partner with you over a period of time. We start by exploring in depth the business challenges you face and the issues that the team needs to address and, from this, we design an intervention which will give most benefit to the business, the team and the individual members. This means that we are not simply helping conversations to be more effective when we are present at one or two meetings; we work with your team over time to ensure that new behaviours are embedded and that the team reaches sustained high performance. This often results in a combination of team and one-to-one coaching to deliver the best results.

The CEO of an organisation had **recruited the executive team over a period of six months** and the team was now in place. The agenda was huge and **immediate**. The challenge was to help the team to get to know each other's strengths and working styles very quickly so they could work together to maximum effect and to use this to facilitate them in testing and confirming the draft strategy and taking ownership of it.

## FOUR INTERRELATED AREAS OF FOCUS



**From our experience, a high performing team needs to spend time together exploring and reaching agreement on four key domains:**

- 1. Shared Purpose:** What is this team here to provide? What will success look like in 2-3 years' time? What do our stakeholders want and need from us?
- 2. Who we are:** Who are we as individuals? Who are we as a team? What are our values and assumptions about the business and about each other? How do we reap the benefit of our diversity? What are our relationships like, and how can they be improved?
- 3. Our capability:** What are our skills and strengths as leaders? What do we need to do as leaders to create the change in the business that we want to see? How can we be role models, individually and collectively?
- 4. Our team operating principles:** What are we each accountable for and how are we interdependent? What processes, within the team and within the wider business, do we need to enable us to be effective?

As a result of some challenging business issues, the CEO and Manufacturing Director had reached a stage where **their relationship had become deeply problematic**. We worked with each of them individually and together to help them air and address their differences, reach an understanding and appreciation of each others' perspectives and build a productive and respectful relationship, to the benefit of themselves and the overall business.

## WHAT APPROACH DO WE USE?

### Immersion

We spend time with you understanding the business vision, needs and goals, your role in the marketplace, the culture of your organisation, and what steps you have taken to date to bring about change. We also agree with you the diagnostic work that we will undertake.

### Inquiry and diagnosis

We always acquire a number of stakeholder perspectives of the top team – internal, client / customer. We look at the team's needs, using an appreciative inquiry approach to take the emotional pulse of the team; we might put in place 360 degree feedback and other psychometrics.

### Detailed design

We discuss with you what we have found to be the critical issues facing the team and how these can be addressed; we agree content, approach, pre-work and communications, roles and ways of working; we prepare with care how the meetings will be orchestrated and resourced to get the best result.

### The Programme

We focus on business outcomes; we work with you to create clarity of purpose, accountabilities and roles; we encourage a transparency of process so that

“The rapid syntheses of the results and the insightfulness of the feedback provided to the company were rich in interpretation and commentary, which combined with your preparedness to explore possible situations and consider implications proved invaluable in our making the right decision both for the business and the individuals.”

participants understand the interplay between content, process, relationship and team dynamic; we create a safe container in which people can air frustrations, give robust and challenging feedback and address difficult issues together; we give attention to individuals, the team, the leader, the organisation and outside world; we ensure that clear actions and commitments develop from the meetings.

## Review and follow up

We summarise outcomes and recommend actions and next steps.

## Build processes for embedding learning and sustaining momentum

We work with you to ensure the actions, behaviours and processes needed are in place so that operating as a high performing team becomes a way of life.

“You demonstrated a unique ability to enable two key members of our team to build a strong and positive working relationship out of a situation that was severely problematic. This has had a very positive impact on both the individuals and the business. As a party to this work, I found it hugely beneficial not just in dealing with the specific relationship but also to my own personal development.”

The Chief Executive of a multinational company with a leadership team drawn from **six different nationalities** wished to improve team working among the group and help group members build a common view of the best way to operate in the five countries in which the company traded. Working closely with the CEO to help him fully articulate his vision and goals, and then with the CEO and his team together, we helped them work through **intercultural issues** and develop a common language and understanding. The company became a world class business, and was subsequently sold to a global leader in the sector.

## OUR TEAM COACHES

Mairi Eastwood, Peninah Thomson, Barry Woledge,  
Hilary Lines and Jacqueline Scholes-Rhodes

## FURTHER READING

Heather Dawson, Thriving in a Faster Faster World, Praesta 2007  
Peter Shaw and Jane Stephens, Riding the Rapids, Praesta 2008

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