

SRA APPROACH TO BUILDING & LEADING BEST TEAMS

WHITE PAPER

April 2014



Table of Contents

1	Overview: Why Teams?	3
2	What is a Team at SRA?	3
3	SRA Best Team Model	4
3.1	Team Model Characteristics	5
3.2	Best Team Maturity Model	9
4	Best Team Behaviors.....	11
5	Best Teams Value to Our Customers	14
5.1.1	Best Ideas	14
5.1.2	Best Performance.....	14
5.1.3	Best People	15
6	Starting the Best Team Journey	16
6.1	Step 1 - Exercise Self-Awareness	16
6.2	Step 2 – Practice Connecting	16
6.3	Step 3 – Move out on the Journey.....	16
6.4	Step 4 – Start Other Journeys	17
6.5	Step 5 – Supply the Best Team Outfitters.....	17
7	Summary	17

Note: This White Paper contains the core concepts of developing best teams at SRA. This document will be revised periodically to reflect continually improving information, lessons learned, and best practices. The latest Best Teams material can be found on the SRANet [Best Teams Page](#).

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at bestteams@sra.com.

We hope you have a rewarding journey!

1 Overview: Why Teams?

Much of SRA's work is performed in teams—project teams, leverage teams, leadership teams, interdisciplinary teams, and many others. Large projects have teams within teams, as well as teams that include members from multiple leverage teams. Teams are formed to solve customer problems, capture work, develop proposals and address critical business issues. The success of SRA rests heavily on teams working at their best.

The better equipped we are to develop, sustain, and nurture teams the more likely we will be ahead of our competition. The solutions derived through teams always provide superior results to those which individuals produce on their own. To be a leader in our industry and develop the kind of teams that outperform the competition and produce lasting results for clients, we recognize the importance of having a structured framework to define how we build and lead **Best Teams**.

Developing a Best Team is a *journey* that takes practice and perseverance. Being on the Best Teams journey not only yields better performance for our customers, it also allows teams members to learn and grow personally and professionally. The journey better positions teams to deliver hard results and contribute to SRA being the best place to work.

Instrumental to Best Teams is SRA's ethic of Honesty and Service®. Our core values of quality work and customer satisfaction, taking care of our people, and serving country and communities underpin what it means to be a Best Team. Our culture and values are reflected in the talent we attract and retain to make it all happen—best people. It highlights how we work together and in partnership with our customers to deliver value through innovative solutions—best ideas. Finally, Best Teams provides us an opportunity to increase our levels of execution excellence across our projects—best performance.

2 What is a Team at SRA?

A team is typically a group of 4 – 20 people although smaller and larger teams exist. For the purpose of defining a Best Teams model, SRA uses the following definition:

Teams are diverse groups of people that share a transcendent purpose to which they are all committed, who work towards common goals, who are empowered to innovate, make decisions and solve problems, and who focus on continual improvement of the team and each member within it. Teams produce results beyond that of individuals working independently and are the means by which we create value for customers and stakeholders.

Another defining characteristic of a Best Team at SRA is the critical distinction between working IN and ON the team. As shown in Figure 1, when team members are working IN the team they are conducting the work the team was formed to do including completing tasks, producing deliverables, developing status reports, and so on. When a team works ON the team, it is focused on activities intended to improve the overall performance of the team and its individual members. Teams that create time for such activities are those that reap the greatest benefits and push past the competition. On the other hand, teams succumbing to the pressures of their inbox and fighting the fires of the day remain

mediocre, rather than thinking creatively to continuously find opportunities to work ON their teams.

How much time does a team need to spend ON versus IN the team? While there is no set formula we do know that Best Teams make a habit of dedicating energy to ON the team. We also know that time and energy ON the team is critical in the early days of team formation as the degree to which teams are aligned and connected set the course for achieving high levels of performance. It is also critical to use the focus working ON the team in leading teams through change.

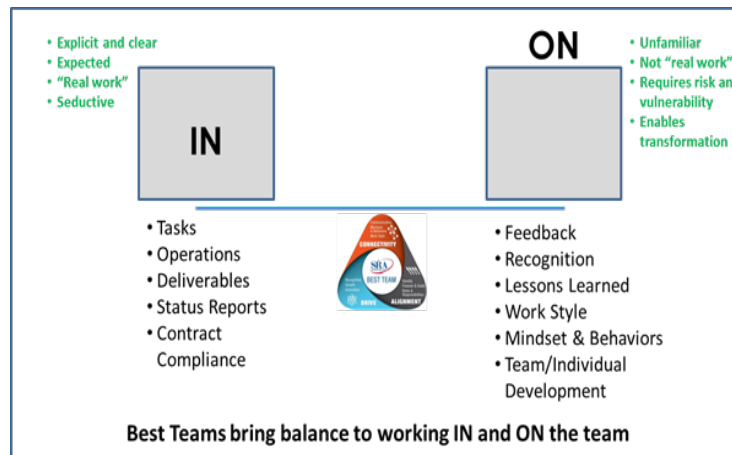


Figure 1 - Distinction of working IN and ON the Team

The team leader is accountable for the performance and results of the team. However, whether you are the team leader, play some kind of leadership role, or are a member of the team at large, SRA recognizes that everyone is responsible for providing leadership and to supporting team performance in everything we do.

3 SRA Best Team Model

In developing the SRA Best Team model, we have identified three fundamental characteristics shown in Figure 2:

1. **Alignment** of team members to clear identity, purpose & goals and roles and responsibilities
2. **Connectivity** of all personnel through communication, shared mindsets and behaviors, and a common work style to ensure effective and efficient work
3. **Drive** from all team members to participate, contribute and affect the team's outcomes.

These characteristics are integrated and must be managed together – they are not steps within a process. Moreover, the most successful teams invest the necessary time required to ensure their team is aligned, connected, and driven to achieve hard results. Each characteristic contains key elements that drive the team's performance. A team progresses on its journey to become more mature in each characteristic through practicing team behaviors consistently. The following sections describe team performance, maturity, and behaviors in more detail.



Figure 2 - Best Teams Model

3.1 Team Model Characteristics

In this section, we provide additional insight and detail into the Best Teams model for each characteristic.

ALIGNMENT

Alignment is setting deliberate goals and objectives against a higher purpose in a way that is achievable by team members.

What is our identity?

For many teams, the composition of team members seems obvious, based on current team membership. However, as goals are developed, the team needs to reexamine its membership to ensure that the necessary participants are involved. This includes members from leverage teams, communities of practice, vendors, customers, or other stakeholder's organizations that could impact achieving goals and enhancing performance. Identifying these other members is critical because it fills gaps where alignment, connectivity, and drive are needed to perform as a Best Team.

What are our goals and measures?

A team without goals is like a ship without a destination. There may be plenty of movement but success will never be achieved – the destination having never been established. The team must develop a set of goals and measures that reflect their mission. It is important to set standards for quality that can be articulated and understood by all team members. These standards can be around documentation, software development coding, ticket documentation, and handling of customer meetings (e.g. recording and posting minutes). By setting these standards, the team is aligning performance to an acceptable minimum level and providing a framework to train – and assess – personnel on job performance. Goals and measures should be reviewed periodically, especially when triggered by changes in project scope, customer feedback, budget, or other factors.

What is our higher, transcendent purpose?

Every team should have a purpose to align and motivate personnel to achieve peak performance. We define transcendent as *lying beyond the ordinary range of perception*. This is to motivate teams to articulate a purpose that is greater than the obvious, stated or contractual goals. For example, on an IT service desk team, the goal may be to meet required service levels but the transcendent purpose is to reduce the downtime to end users to improve their productivity to meet the customer's mission (e.g. fighting cancer). For a SRA management team, the goal may be to grow business within a set of agencies but a transcendent purpose would be to make individual customers believe that selecting SRA over any other contractor will enhance their career potential within their agency. Once a team truly understands their transcendent purpose, it makes clarifies where the team should concentrate its time and focus. For a working team, the goal may be described as "improving talent development within SRA," but the transcendent purpose could be to make SRA a place where people come to learn, grow, and contribute to the success of others.

Developing the purpose is a critical step to building a Best Team. It tends to work best when the team leader partners with the team to develop the transcendent purpose in a group exercise. This process should start with a clear definition of goals; however it may take several iterations to work through the initial ambiguity. In the end, teams will know when they have the right transcendent purpose because it inspires them as individuals and collectively as a team.

What are our roles and responsibilities?

The roles and responsibilities are a linkage between team alignment and each person within the team. If done correctly, a person's roles and responsibilities will not only support the team's goals, but also provide a clear understanding to all team members on everyone's duties and areas of expertise. They also form the framework for empowering people to make decisions, thus improving team efficiency. The roles and responsibilities can be communicated informally for smaller teams, and should be documented, published, reviewed and revised for larger teams. Clear roles and responsibilities is a fast way to empower people and enable the team to effectively and efficiently make decisions.

CONNECTIVITY

Connectivity is the continual interaction of all team members to collaborate, empower, support and challenge each other to achieve higher levels of awareness and performance.

Communication: How do we listen and communicate bi-directionally?

Frequent communication across the team is critical. The more the team members are included in the range of issues and events, the more they can contribute to the success of the team. Each team member is responsible for communicating across the team to identify issues and concerns or to propose innovations. Each member is also responsible for communicating to their peers to clearly understand what their peers are doing and to communicate what they are doing. Continual, effective and candid communication is the most important element of connectivity.

Another critical aspect to communications is listening. Listening is a hallmark of great teams and at the center of effectively giving and receiving feedback. Through listening we demonstrate empathy, empower team members, strengthen connectivity, and build solid lasting relationships. When team members talk more and listen less, they run the risk of squashing innovation, ideas, and motivation. Additionally, strong teams often guide one another to an answer or decision by helping each other

understand thought processes rather than by directly answering questions or providing directions.

The team should develop a communications plan to identify how often you will communicate – formally and informally – and what types of information you will and will not share. Look closely at the information you will not share and understand why it really cannot be shared. Determine how you will get information – again, formally and informally – from all team members. The informal communication mechanisms are a very powerful source of information and equally important to formal mechanisms in fostering connectivity.

What are our mindsets and behaviors?

A Best Team is able to discuss mindsets and behaviors comfortably and often. A mindset affects how you “show up” to your team, such as demonstrating energy, collaboration, and boldness. The mindsets are how the behaviors are practiced by all team members. As a team, you should discuss how important each of the twelve Best Team behaviors are to your team’s success and how you will practice these behaviors. One possible exercise is to share which behaviors are natural for you and which are opportunities for improvement.

Being a part of SRA means approaching our work with an Integrator Mindset, both as individuals and teams. This means that we:

- Have an ‘enterprise’ view where we see the parts of the whole and understand the relationship between them; in this way we can predict how a change to one area will impact another.
- Are extremely adaptive in how we see challenges and develop solutions.
- Take initiative, rather than wait to be handed direction from above.
- Encourage each other to ‘work at the edge’ and take initiative to fill gaps.
- Draw wider boundaries around who we consider to be a part of the team to include leverage teams, partners, and customers.

Best Teams working with an Integrator Mindset also understand that change happens. They are not only ready to address change but create change to drive even better solutions and meet team goals. They recognize that change can affect team performance and work even harder to maintain—if not raise—performance in turn. Most importantly, Best Teams assess changes that could impact their transcendent purpose, goals and measures; they assess if these factors change as a result. If so, they recalibrate accordingly and move ahead.

What is our work style?

Work style addresses meeting rhythms, decision making approaches, and ground rules that the team should establish and track in order to work better together. For example, ground rules could be about topics such as looking at PDAs during meetings, taking laptops to meeting to multi-task emails, sharing air-time with other members, ensuring everyone participates, taking meeting minutes, setting agendas, and other similar tasks.

Similarly, as a team, determine how decisions will be discussed and made. This is tied to how each team member feels empowered to make decisions, but addresses the *overall team decision process*. Will decisions be made by voting or by the leader, based on the input of the team? In many ways, being explicit about what is the decision making process is more important than the process itself. Clarity reduces confusion, anxiety, and friction allowing for more energy to be put towards quality information to support effective decisions.

A key aspect of a Best Team is positive conflict. A strong team will have lively discussions to ensure that all perspectives are considered. A Best Team encourages and even draws out dissention or contrary views to be able to understand all angles. As a team, discuss this process and set the tone for open and candid discussions from the outset. Be prepared to call on people who contribute less than others. Also discuss how you will handle giving everyone “air-time.” In many teams – the 80/20 rule applies; 80% of the talking is done by 20% of the people. How will you mitigate this dynamic?

How do we create meaningful empowerment?

As a team determine how empowering team members can make achieving goals more effective and efficient. For example, determine which decisions can be made directly by a team member and which decisions should be raised to the team or to the team leader. Set guidance on decisions and be prepared to support this structure by supporting the decisions made by each team member. Recognize that empowerment is not the absence of having controls in place, but rather engaging the team to help establish process, set boundaries, and share in the responsibility of producing results. Great teams are equal parts effective team leadership and empowered team members working at their best.

DRIVE

Drive is the passion and energy that is critical to a team’s momentum and success. In a Best Team, drive is continually fueled by success, growth, respect, pride, and fun.

Recognition: How do we recognize contribution and impact?

Drive and motivation are essential for Best Teams. There is an expected level of drive from all team members. A high performing team understands that drive is enhanced by ongoing recognition, personal growth, and a sense of achievement. It is important to determine as a team how to make the work challenging, rewarding, and fun. Recognition is a powerful and often under-appreciated motivator for sustaining team drive. Best Teams determine how to recognize important contributions and how to hold the team accountable for continuing to recognize contributions. The forms of recognition can range from a simple and timely thank-you to job rotation to more challenging assignments, bonuses, and promotions. Recognition must be a well-considered program that is practiced consistently and continually.

Growth: How do we create an environment for learning and growth?

A Best Team provides opportunities for advancement, education, and career growth. Best Teams determine how they will support these areas within your team. For example, challenge team members to become experts in their fields. Encourage them to take training, provide briefings on best practices, propose innovations for process, organization and tool improvement, and mentor others in best practices. Make the team a true learning organization where best practices are continually improving and each person’s career potential is higher from being on the team. Decide how you will conduct deliberate reviews of team performance (versus solely individual performance) and establish a habit of giving feedback on a regular basis.

Innovation: How do we get Best Ideas?

A consistent element of promoting team drive is to encourage creativity and autonomy. Determine how your team will encourage, assess, implement, and recognize innovation. Live the best idea mindset by encouraging ideas, helping team members improve them, and then implementing the best ideas to achieve team goals and deliver best performance.

3.2 Best Team Maturity Model

Team Performance Curve

Figure 3 shows a team performance curve, mapping team maturity stages against Performance and Energy. As teams form and begin to work together, they should endeavor to move through the team performance curve to maximize team performance and energy. They do this through working ON the team together, acknowledging growth and development areas, and celebrating team accomplishments.

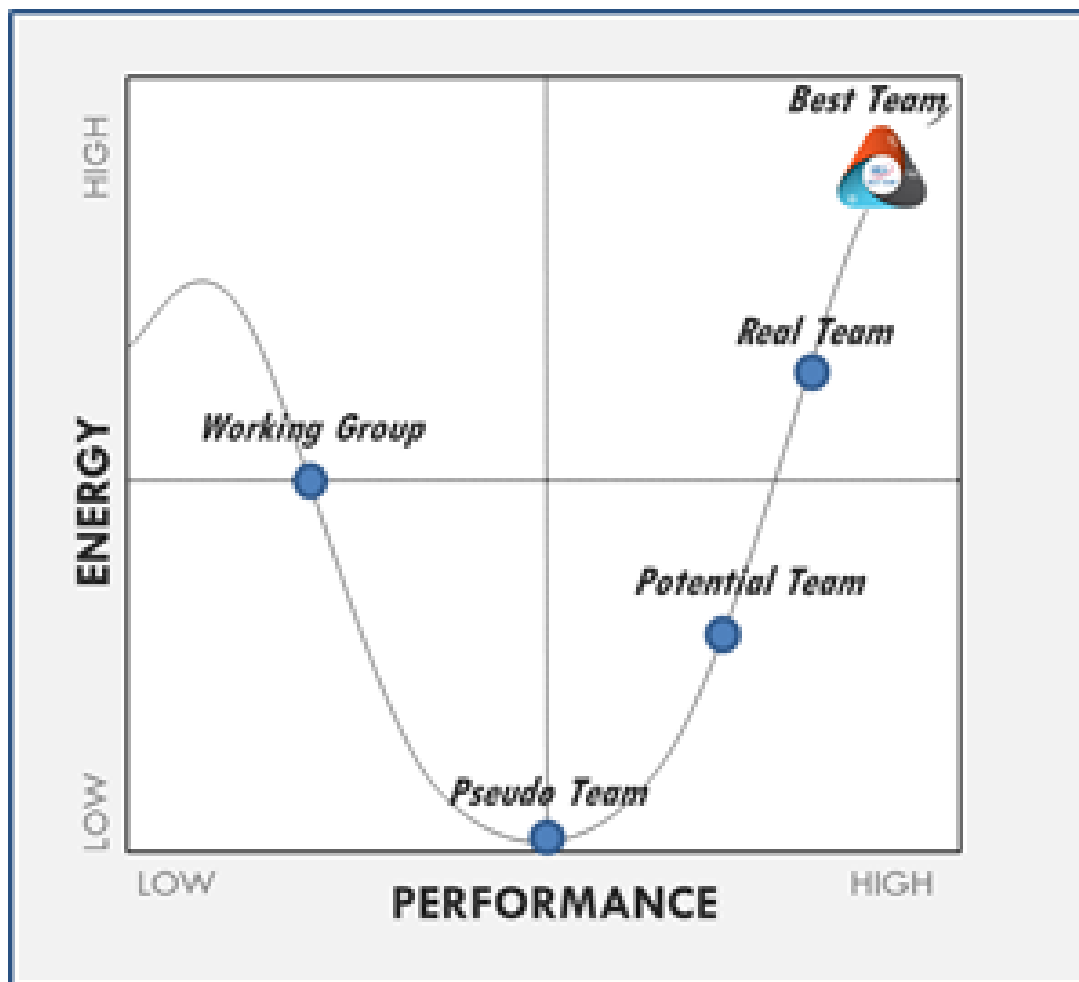


Figure 3 - Team Performance Curve

Assessing the Team

To gauge where your team is along the maturity model, use the tool on the following page, Figure 4, to assess where the team is regarding alignment, connectivity and drive. See the [Best Teams Page on SRAnet](#) to download the full document including diagnostic questions. As teams embrace the Best Teams mindsets and behaviors and work together they tend to mature. This journey could be mapped against the Best Team Maturity Model.

Characteristic		TEAM MATURITY LEVEL			
		PSEUDO TEAM	POTENTIAL TEAM	REAL TEAM	BEST TEAM
ALIGNMENT	Identity	Team membership is unclear and a potential source of confusion or friction.	Team membership is clear.	Team members bring complimentary skillsets and ways of thinking. Goals are assessed to ensure necessary resources are identified.	Team membership adapts based on current goals. Partners, clients, and stakeholders are considered part of the team and treated as such.
	Purpose & Goals <i>(Hard Results = financial results, win rate, retention, etc.)</i>	No formal purpose or goals. Little focus on collective performance. Measures are not clear. Inconsistently achieves hard results.	Goals are documented and communicated to the whole team. There are measures aligned with the goals. Some focus on achieving goals and collective performance. Frequently achieves hard results.	Team develops a transcendent purpose to align and drive the team. Team's focus shifts to achieve the transcendent purpose. Collection and assessment of measures are routinely performed. Consistently achieves hard results.	The transcendent purpose drives continual achievement, broadens team goals, and improves measures. Achievement of outcomes builds team pride. Consistently exceeds hard results.
	Roles & Responsibilities	Roles and responsibilities are informal and often unstated.	Roles and responsibilities are understood and carried out on an individual level.	Roles and responsibilities include empowerment and autonomy. Team members understand each other's duties and areas of expertise.	The integrator mindset is practiced to support collaboration and agility. There is a high degree of trust and reliance on one another. People work beyond their roles and are able to perform another team member's work, if needed.
CONNECTIVITY	Communication	Lack formal or effective communications. Communication is primarily one direction from leader to team.	Reliance on formal communications. There is bi-directional communication between the leader and team.	Effective formal and informal communications. There is regular communication and exchange of information across the team. Team members practice active listening.	Team invests significant time in effective formal and informal communications. Team members practice 'straight talk.' There is full participation and collaboration across the team.
	Mindsets & Behaviors <i>See "12 Behaviors of a Best Team"</i>	No shared understanding of team mindsets and behaviors.	Shared understanding of some team mindsets and behaviors.	Team mindsets and behaviors are explicit, discussed, and practiced regularly.	Team mindsets and behaviors are practiced and reviewed regularly and define the team's culture. A clear focus on behaviors drives continual improvement.
	Work Style <i>See "Best Teams IN/ON"</i>	Infrequent and unproductive team meetings. Team members are often unaware of conflict. Decision making process is unclear or non-existent.	Team meetings are planned and conducted. Conflict is hidden. Decision making process is articulated and sometimes followed.	Highly effective meetings resulting in increased shared understanding. Team encourages positive conflict to broaden alternatives. The process for decision making is explicit. Team spends some time working ON the team. The team improves work quality and performance.	Members regularly engage in healthy debate. Reasoning behind decisions is clear. Team regularly spends time working ON the team. There is a culture of high quality work and performance. Work style is fluid and fun!
DRIVE	Recognition	Infrequent or no recognition.	Occasional recognition by leader.	Frequent and consistent recognition by the leaders using formal and informal means.	Frequent and consistent recognition across the team using formal and informal means by all team members.
	Professional Growth	Learning is ad-hoc and needs based. Informal mentoring. Lack of focus on collective improvement of the team.	Team capabilities are somewhat understood. Learning meets short term tactical needs. Some deliberate effort to improve team performance. Some formal mentoring. Team is leveraging CoP reach-back.	Team capabilities are clearly understood and anticipated – skill gaps identified. Learning meets team and individual development needs. Deliberate focus on individual performance. Formal and informal mentoring. Team members are active in CoPs.	Team skills and depth are actively managed and addressed. Team members are committed to one another's development. Regular practice of giving and receiving feedback. Mentoring expanded to support all levels and directions. There is a culture of continuous improvement.
	Innovation	Infrequent innovation.	Innovation leveraged to solve a specific issue.	Team promotes exploration of new ideas and there is some tolerance for experimentation and failure.	Team implements formal mechanisms (meetings, recognition, mentoring etc.) for innovation. There is a healthy tolerance for experimentation and failure. The team practices unconstrained thinking and consistently works together to bring forth best ideas.

Figure 4 - Best Team Maturity Model

4 Best Team Behaviors

Understanding and implementing the Best Team characteristics are only part of the journey to become a Best Team. At the core of team performance are the behaviors practiced by the entire team. As individuals, we have behaviors that come naturally to us and behaviors which we need to improve. The Best Team journey is about improving and practicing all these behaviors together.

Behaviors are the mindsets, beliefs, and ways in which one operates or conducts oneself, especially toward others. When teams embody the following behaviors – or ways of *being* – and then take action accordingly they create the conditions for great performance. Furthermore when all team members practice these behaviors consistently the results are extraordinary. The behaviors below include and expand upon the five leadership behaviors emphasized in Leading with Honesty and Service – **Accountable, Adaptive, Bold, Collaborative, and Selfless**. These five leadership behaviors together with the additional seven make up the Best Team Behaviors, shown in Figure 4, mapped to SRA’s overall progression of Leading with Honesty and Service. These behaviors are described in detail in Figure 5.

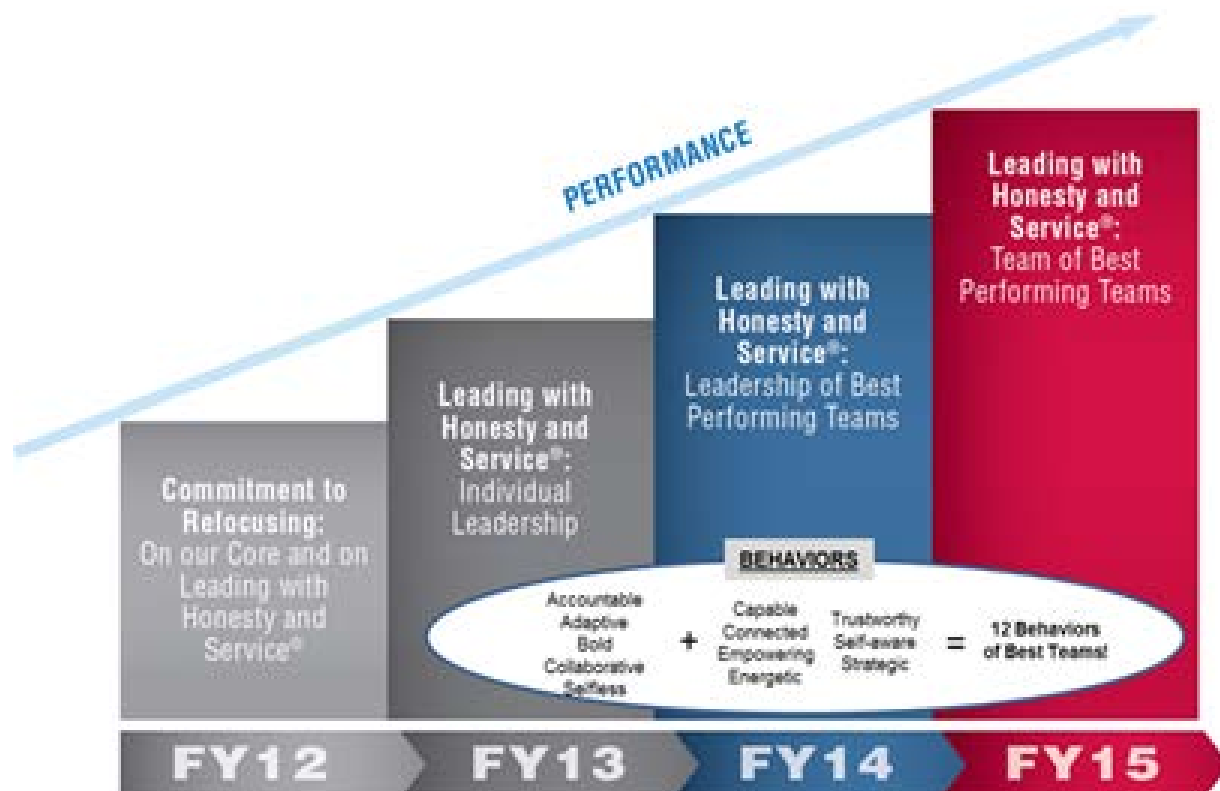


Figure 4 - Leading with Honesty and Service Roadmap

Behavior		Examples of Practicing the Behavior	Examples of Not Practicing the Behavior
Accountable	There is a direct correlation between the practice of accountability and the level of trust a team has for one another.	Taking personal ownership in getting the job done, producing results and fulfilling on the mission. Understanding and broadening the scope for what you are accountable. Starting the practice of accountability by looking in the mirror. Doing what you say you will do and keeping your commitments. Making things right when you are wrong. Supporting others in their being accountable. Giving feedback knowing it will improve their performance, and they can take it. Shedding light, not heat. Giving credit where credit is due. Discussing and defining accountability for your team.	Saying "it's not my job." Making excuses for not delivering. Shirking responsibly in failure. Hogging the spotlight in success. Backing off your expectations of others.
Adaptive	The ability to adapt to change creates the capacity for a team to thrive. Like Darwin says, it's not the strongest that survive; it's those who adapt most quickly who survive.	Anticipating change. Accepting change. Driving change. Recognizing what you must first learn to solve a problem. Being ready to scrap work and change course. Seeing the challenges, helping people shift perspectives, and mobilizing them to tackle the challenge. Inspiring innovation. Being persistent and keeping at it. Embracing change from other sources than yourself. Making sure your team members know you have their back as they adapt and drive change.	Being wed to how we did it in the past. Trying the same solution and expecting a different result. Not looking for upcoming changes. Dismissing others' resistance to change (hint: support them through 'the transition curve.')
Bold	The Best Ideas surface when people are unconstrained in their thinking, take personal risks, and move in a new direction and others step up and follow.	Addressing the tough stuff directly. Acknowledging what is unsaid. Challenging the status quo. Being unconstrained, and taking personal risks to improve yourself and the team. Looking beyond the obvious to discover and solve the real problems. Encouraging experimentation and unconventional approaches. Tolerating risk.	Avoiding constructive conflict. Holding back when you know what needs to be done. Being quick to return to your comfort zone when something goes awry (HINT: stretch yourself). Equating being bold with being an extravert.
Capable	Best teams focus on improving skills and talents and delivering reliable and consistent results to achieve high levels of performance.	Working hard. Working smart. Demonstrating competence and improving skills. Delivering results. Establishing a track record of getting things done. Understanding the capabilities needed to thrive and develop those capabilities in yourself and others. Ensuring you and your team can do what you say. Being credible when mentoring others. Being on time and within budget. Operating from a place of deep understanding of customer needs and wants.	Not improving your skills to deliver expert support. Accepting mediocrity. Over-promising and under-delivering. Not providing expected levels and quality of support.
Collaborative	Best performing teams recognize that collaboration is more than just people working together; it's a mindset shift from an individual focus to a team orientation. It affects how the team works in every respect, including what the team values and rewards.	Letting go of the need to do it all by yourself. Trusting in the power of the team and its ability to deliver results that are better than anyone individual's contribution. Encouraging diverse thinking and skills. Generating knowledge and sharing it. Using other's knowledge. Seeking help and offering help when needed and respecting others' viewpoints and ideas. Looking beyond obvious team boundaries to seek help across all possible sources – corporate, customer, industry, or colleagues.	Being directive or having to have the best idea. Monopolizing your team members' time (use it to support them in their efforts to collaborate). Viewing the need to collaborate as a sign of weakness, not strength.
Connected	Good teams focus on effective communications. Best Teams focus on being connected– where communication is open, fluid, constant, and real.	Practicing great communication. Communicating often and consistently. Using formal and informal communication mechanisms. Recognizing that listening is a powerful form of communicating. Seeking to understand other's perspectives. Giving context, followed by guidance and direction when necessary. Being transparent and unfiltered. Explaining the thinking behind decisions. Being responsible for building complete situational awareness across the team. Building pathways for communication across the team. Encouraging dialogue and debate. Making everyone feel like they are an important part of the team.	Believing that connecting is one-way communication. Relying only on email. Abdicating responsibly for communicating to someone else. Thinking multi-tasking is acceptable in the presence of others. Connecting with only a select few leaving others feeling on the outside of an inner circle.

Behavior		Examples of Practicing the Behavior	Examples of Not Practicing the Behavior
Empowering	Best Teams rely on empowerment – give people the autonomy to be great and the support to learn from failure. This not only improves efficiency, it develops team members into higher-valued contributors.	Giving team members the power to perform. Setting context and getting the resources your team needs to succeed. Delegating. Following-up, mentoring, and recognizing contributions. Sharing the weight on your shoulders with your colleagues – they can handle it and support you. Trusting in your team members to get the job done. Creating opportunities for others to shine. Teaching people rather than give them the answer. Expecting everyone to contribute. Finding the strengths in others. Relinquishing leadership – lead by getting out of the way. Being willing to work for any one of your team members. Tolerating risk and failure. Making giving praise and feedback a habit. Being grateful and saying thank you.	Fearing giving problems and challenges to the team, especially if you think you're "protecting" them from a hard truth. Micromanaging. Issuing excessive data calls. Being controlling. Believing you are the only one who can direct action. Getting frustrated and just doing it yourself. Demotivating team members by over perfecting their work.
Energetic	Passion and energy are contagious. If you are not bringing energy to the team who will?	Being passionate. Having a can-do attitude. Grounding yourself in the transcendent cause. Rallying the team around the mission. Creating a place where people feel what they do matters. Focusing on the things you can control. Using positive energy to drive focus and high morale. Fostering energy in others. Doing what you need to do to work through the transition curve.	Being a Pessimist. Spending your time dwelling in the issues, challenges, and concerns you cannot control. Ignoring tough issues in an effort to keep things positive (it won't work). Running yourself into the ground and expecting to not impact the team (recognize when your energy is low and take actions to recharge). Believing that energy is not important in a thriving team.
Self-aware	Self-awareness is the first step on the path to personal development and improvement, leading to a Best Team environment.	Knowing yourself – strengths and weaknesses, passions and drivers, hot buttons and triggers. Reflecting often. Being a constant learner. Recognizing what stops you. Seeking feedback and acting on it. Appreciating the impact you have on those around you. Being responsible for continuously improving yourself and the team.	Believing that your position, experience or title makes you "perfect" or beyond introspection. Ignoring your weaknesses or strengths. Letting your weakness become the team's weakness. Assuming your knowledge and skills will be sufficient for tomorrow's challenges.
Selfless	Selflessness is the cornerstone of trust. Putting the wants and needs of others ahead of your own and striving to meet the team's goals is a deeply valued at SRA and fundamental to creating a Best Team environment.	Being generous with your time and knowledge. Really caring about others and their development. Giving other team members the opportunity to shine. Respecting and honoring the team decision even when it is not your first choice. Subordinating personal interests to what's good for the customer, mission, or team. Seeing your primary goals as helping our company, serving our communities, and strengthening our nation. Making time for others. Understanding that your success is based on the team's success.	Viewing the team as working for you – it's the other way around. Using the team to elevate you and make you successful. Being driven by making yourself look good or not look bad. Believing that your success as a team member is not related to the team's success.
Strategic	Not everyone is born with the 'strategic thinking gene.' Leaders and team members need to collaborate and put energy toward tracking strategic issues and developing their capacity for strategic thinking.	Looking at challenges and opportunities with a long-term, wider-scope perspective that benefits the people, team, customer and/or company. Setting and communicating vision. Defining a compelling purpose around which the team can rally. Looking at short term decisions as building blocks for long term improvement. Learning to reframe problems and see opportunities. Looking for ways to develop people and capabilities with limited resources. Anticipating and driving change to improve team value.	Constraining your thinking to the immediate challenges and scope. Not taking the time or perspective to see what could be possible with current resources. Focusing more on team goal achievement than the transcendent purpose that drives the team. Being driven by your to-do list.
Trustworthy	On a Best Team, there is a deep sense of trust across the team. And as result the work is more enjoyable, relationships are more rewarding, and performance is extraordinary.	Being worthy of trust. Being transparent, empathetic, candid, sincere, compassionate, and vulnerable. Bringing your whole self to work every day, including your imperfections. Engaging in deep and meaningful conversations. Actively listening. Courageously sharing hard truths. Keeping private the concerns of others. Practicing straight talk. Being credible by keeping your word. Being authentic in all that you do. Being the first one to introduce yourself, share insights, offer your personal experiences, or address a sensitive issue.	Believing that a team member or leader needs to be perfect. Pretending to be somebody you are not. Having a hidden agenda. Spinning the truth.

Figure 5 - Best Team Behaviors

5 Best Teams Value to Our Customers

Again, Best Teams support our customers, enhances our talent, and contributes to SRA being a thriving organization. Best Teams are directly linked to SRA's ability to produce hard, measurable results – industry-leading win rates, employee retention, financial results, and more. A Best Team knows which hard results support their success and demonstrate their commitment to continual improvement. As the team develops and move along the maturity model, a Best Team should also be tracking their identified hard results over time. This may go beyond the traditional or existing customer feedback forms and venture into different team metrics; for example, measuring improved customer intimacy or being able to link additional new business to overall team development.

5.1.1 BEST IDEAS

Our distinct ability to generate and deliver best ideas to our customers emanates from our longstanding commitment to an ethic of honesty and service. Our unique focus on integrity, quality work and customer satisfaction, taking care of our people, and serving our country and communities results in a culture of innovation that enables the creation of the best possible ideas and solutions, as evaluated from our customers' perspective.

High quality solutions, aligned with purpose and goals

By focusing on alignment, the team will develop ideas that are tightly aligned with team purpose and goals, reducing effort on discussing ideas that may not be germane to the team. Having a clear understanding of goals will help to focus teams on ideas that will matter to the team's outcomes.

Broad participation from people bringing creativity, insight, and unconstrained thinking

A key attribute of a Best Team is the inclusion of all team members in innovations and problem solving. Often, the best ideas come from people that do not speak often in team environments. Leaders that seek out ideas from the quieter team members may find a wealth of ideas, insight and perspectives. In addition, leaders that remove constraints and encourage team members to not only think "outside the box" to come up with creative ideas.

Innovation for today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities

A high performing team will not only solve today's problems but will anticipate tomorrow's problems or opportunities. With a deeper understanding of a transcendent purpose and an environment for unconstrained innovation, teams can work together to see around the next corner for opportunities to improve the customer's or SRA's business.

5.1.2 BEST PERFORMANCE

Our people work together to achieve the highest possible levels of team performance in support of our customers. Our proven approaches and methodologies to standing up teams, developing teams and continuously improving team performance result in teams that consistently deliver the best performance.

High quality work

Quality of work – as well as best ideas – is important to our company's success. Customers should

expect the highest quality of work from SRA. High performance teams focus on quality and have a well-known and followed set of quality standards.

High productivity

A Best Team greatly improves productivity because leaders have delegated the work down the team to the appropriate people. Leaders help their team members to be successful in performing the work - providing alignment, connectivity and drive and then empower the team to be successful. In a true Best Team, all team members are each performing at their highest levels in alignment with team goals and purpose.

Continuous improvement of how we work together

A Best Team pays continually attention to the team performance. As a result, the way people work together continually improves as more people work within Best Teams. The elements of building, leading and participating in a Best Team become second nature and the overall quality and productivity of our work increases.

Business Growth

Through generating best ideas, understanding the transcendent purpose for account management and program success and providing best performance to customers, SRA can expect business growth. Customers need help from partners such as SRA and though the best ideas/best performance model, they will see that they are better off going with SRA than any other contractor.

5.1.3 BEST PEOPLE

We attract and retain the best people by creating and sustaining a thriving environment. We are committed to providing our people with career opportunities, professional development and training. Our unique culture, rooted in our ethic of honesty and service, enables SRA to be the best place to work.

Team Trust

Team trust is a critical element to Best Team success. This is both an input to Best Teams and an output from Best Teams. With team trust, team members participate actively in achieving the team's goals

Personal Growth

A Best Team focuses on individual growth and development because that is a critical element to optimizing team drive. As people learn and develop, they provide better ideas, enhanced performance and achieve higher career potential. They become more valuable to SRA and to our customers and become tomorrow's team leaders.

Fun

A key outcome of a Best Team is fun. Teams that work well together, accomplish goals and generate ideas tend to like each other and have fun together. They take their work seriously, but allow for plenty of levity in their interactions and daily routines. Within Best Teams, people tend to really care about their team members. There is a very positive attitude and a sense of team pride and accomplishment.

6 Starting the Best Team Journey

A team develops into a Best Team over time by focusing on Alignment, Connectivity, and Drive, and practicing the behaviors to improve team performance. At SRA we believe that everyone on the team has the ability to impact and improve performance. Every team's journey will be different, based on current maturity, team challenges, and team goals. Best Teams never end their journeys; they are always trying to find ways how they improve together. Below are some tips on getting started.

Note: *This section identifies some artifacts that are still under development at the publication date of this paper. If the identified artifact is not on the SRANet [Best Teams Page](#), please contact bestteams@sra.com for assistance.*

6.1 Step 1 - Exercise Self-Awareness

"The place to improve the world is first in one's own heart and head and hands." — Robert M. Pirsig

The first important step in self-awareness is realizing that you need to spend some of your valuable work time working ON the team. This is very important work that will lead to better performance of your team and better value to your customers. You may need to have a candid discussion with your customer that the meetings are truly focused on meeting the contract requirements. These meetings are to "sharpen the saw so that your team can cut down the trees faster" – to borrow from Steven Covey.

To start the Best Teams journey, first look inwards. Determine that you are willing to invest the time and improve team performance and are willing to address your personal behavioral challenges. Review the best teams material on the SRANet [Best Teams Page](#). This site includes Best Teams materials, success stories, contacts, and a reading list of popular books and videos on team and individual performance. The Best Teams Overview document is a simple two-page document that you can share with your team to build awareness.

6.2 Step 2 – Practice Connecting

As teams start the Best Teams journey, the natural first step is to focus on goals and purpose. However, to have more effective sessions on team alignment, start with team connectivity exercises. There are a variety of exercises that will build team cohesion and establish a better working relationship that supports crafting the team's goals and purpose. Relevant exercises can and others can be found on the SRANet [Best Teams Page](#). After the connection exercise, you should discuss the Best Teams Overview document and identify as a team (or let team members identify as homework and share later) where your team is on the maturity model. Have a meaningful discussion about why you think you are where you are. Also – identify the areas that you as a team believe should be addressed next. This becomes a high-level roadmap for your journey.

6.3 Step 3 – Move out on the Journey

Now that you have decided to start this journey and identified your high-level roadmap, start out on the journey. Set up a meeting rhythm of when your team works ON the team. Leverage the materials from the SRANet [Best Teams Page](#). Engage Best Team mentors that can help to facilitate discussion or

provide personal coaching for your best team's journey. Be mindful of what works and does not work. Also – look for real outcomes of the best teams journey that you can share with the rest of SRA.

6.4 Step 4 – Start Other Journeys

Many teams are really a team of leaders for other teams. If this is the case, at some point in your journey you should challenge your team members to start the Best Team journey for their team. They are learning from their own experiences with your team and should be ready to start their own team journeys as well.

6.5 Step 5 – Supply the Best Team Outfitters

Now that you are an accomplished and recognized best team, give back to SRA by improving the Best Team materials. Share with us what worked and did not work. Give us your success stories for capture and proposals. Identify team members anywhere in your team of teams that excel as team leaders or could be potential team leaders in the future. These are the people that understand and apply the best team characteristics and behaviors consistently and have the ability to get the most from other people.

7 Summary

Building a Best Team requires a focus on Alignment, Connectivity, Drive; as well as recognizing and practicing the Best Teams mindsets and behaviors. By providing a sense of purpose, distinct goals/measures and clear roles and responsibilities, Best Teams align around a clear and common destination. By providing continual formal and informal bi-directional communications, listening, empowering, and establishing common behaviors, mind-sets and work rhythm, leaders provide the connectivity within the team to work together effectively. Recognizing accomplishments, mentoring poor performance, and implementing a learning environment, Best Teams can foster drive that accomplish efficiently meet the team's goals. By focusing on the team performance more than the execution of the work – collectively the team can improve the performance of others, resulting in an atmosphere of best ideas, best performance, best people and fun.

As teams at SRA embark on their journeys, we intend to stand up a Best Teams Support function. The Best Teams Support Team will bring together talented professionals from across HR, the Capability Centers, PM&EQ, and the business and include experienced project managers, organizational development specialists, facilitators, and coaches. We will offer team building support, effectiveness assessments, leadership coaching, sample artifacts and assistance in any area of team dynamics and evolution. Our goal is to accelerate the dissemination of and adoption of the SRA Best Teams principles and practices so that we can win and deliver high quality work by having the best teams in the industry.