



# Maintain high performance

## How to handle an ineffective team member

Someone once told me, “A mother is only as happy as her least happy child.” When I became a mom, I realized that is one of the most truthful statements ever. When one of my children is sick or miserable, it’s impossible for me to focus and be 100 percent right with the world.

I have observed the same phenomenon with teams. Much is written about what high-performing teams look like: they communicate well, they are aligned, they are clear on their purpose and success metrics, and they hold themselves accountable.

However, rarely is it acknowledged that a team is only as effective as its least effective member. It’s like a chain being only as strong as its weakest link. A team cannot realize its full potential if one member is unhappy, working against the team’s vision and efforts, or is behaving inconsistently with what the company is trying to instill in its culture.

### The multiplier effect

In mathematical terms, a team’s divisor should be one. The team is as good as it is, not compromised by any single variable. And, when the team is really rocking, there is a multiplier effect that makes its value greater than it otherwise should be. The multiplier comes when teams are hitting on all

cylinders and become greater than the sum of the individuals.

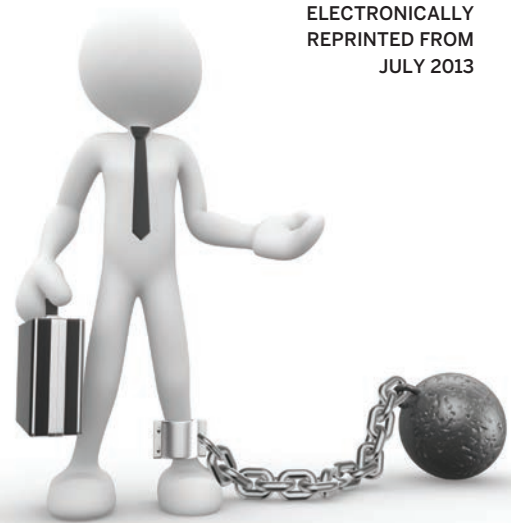
However, a non-contributing team member — or worse, one who works against the grain of the team — is like having a divisor greater than one. This diminishes the size of the end product, no matter how large the starting number is. The team will always be less than what it could be.

This weakening of potential can manifest itself strategically, operationally or culturally.

Strategically, it shows up as a leader not supporting enterprise initiatives, not putting the best talent on companywide efforts that will drive major changes, or focusing on a single vertical at the expense of other verticals or the enterprise as a whole.

Operationally, it shows up as a leader running the business in a way that dishonors agreed-to strategies and priorities, or engages in practices that do not support company policy or commitments, or making decisions that favor the local to the detriment of the whole.

Culturally or behaviorally, we see things like not speaking up in meetings on important topics for which they have relevant input, or making/implementing decisions without gathering input from key stakeholders, or behaving in ways that don’t align with the company’s stated values.



### Poorly functioning teams a hazard

The ongoing cost of a poorly functioning team can be high. So what can you do about an ineffective team member?

Always start by making the person aware of the effect that his/her actions are having on the rest of the team and the company — and do it in a way that enables learning on both sides. There may be factors not apparent to others that are causing the team member’s behavior.

The conversation must be about listening as well as telling. Feedback should be given by the person’s boss, a senior HR person, or an outside adviser who may be hired to do a 360 assessment. It is important that the dialogue be constructive to enable a more productive future.

If the feedback changes the behavior, that is wonderful. But if not, then ultimately you have to decide whether this individual’s value outweighs his/her cost. If you can’t change the person’s behavior, your behavior may be to change the person. ●

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