

# Sharpening the Saws

for High Performance  
Teams

Seminar Handbook  
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## Introduction

Engaging and retaining staff, creating an attractive company culture, and equipping employees with necessary skills are just some of the major challenges facing today's organizations. This engaging and interactive seminar organised by Top Team Vietnam - in association with EuroCham and British University Vietnam - examines how top employers and market leaders are championing some of these challenges by proactively cultivating new skills, reinforcing principles like teamwork, collaboration and leadership; while fostering the health and wellbeing of their staff and teams on an ongoing basis, with focus on:

- 1) What are the characteristics of winning corporate teams and what sets them apart from their competitors.
- 2) The multiple benefits of continuous staff development and the different ways in which companies are able to provide this.
- 3) The role in which health and wellness affects company dynamics and the ways in which more and more companies are addressing this issue.

## About Top Team

Top Team is Vietnam's leading provider of unforgettable corporate events, first class incentive travel, innovative team building activities and effective corporate training programs.

Since its founding in 2010, Top Team has quickly become the most cited Corporate Events Company in Vietnam, having been featured in Forbes (Vietnam), Time Out Magazine, and the Vietnamese Investment Review. Top Team is also the first and only Vietnam based company of its kind to ever be nominated for an international award (2016 HR Vendors of the Year Awards, Singapore). The company has a well established reputation for bringing imagination and flair to every single event - big or small - and for creating completely unique experiences each and every time.

## About the Speakers



**Dr. Declan Bannon** is a Senior Lecturer at the British University of Vietnam, Academic Researcher, Consultant, Board Member, Executive Director, Chartered Marketer and Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Marketing. With over thirty years' experience in Marketing Management and Higher Education, his specialties are Strategy Development and Marketing for multi-national and SME companies in the UK and Eastern & Western Europe, China and Africa.

Formerly he has worked in the International Pharmaceutical Industry and been Executive MBA Programme Leader and International Marketing Programme Leader at the University of West of Scotland. Declan holds degrees from the University of Ulster, an MBA from Edinburgh University and a PhD in Marketing from the University of the West of Scotland. Previous board appointments include the Chartered Institute of Marketing (Scotland) and West Dunbartonshire Leisure Trust.



**Vanessa Diaz**, Senior Coach for Top Team and a dedicated corporate trainer from the United States, she can point to more than 16 years of hands-on professional experience working with companies including Johnson & Johnson, Cordis Inc, Ethicon-Endo Surgery, Ethicon Inc, Lifescan, Cardinal Health, Sanofi, Wallem Shipping, and Swiss IT Bridge. She focuses on enhancing interpersonal dynamics within organizations and staff engagement.



**Chiara Squinzi** heads Top Team's Corporate Health and Wellness Programs and is founder of La Holista Co. Ltd. A certified nutrition consultant, health and wellness coach, as well as Ashtanga Yoga teacher, Chiara works closely with organizations across Asia to help them perform better by enhancing the overall wellbeing of their staff.

# Notes On Leadership and Teams

*By Dr. Declan Bannon, British University Vietnam*

*Management is about doing it right; Leadership is about doing the right things!*

Leaders are people who do the right thing; managers are people who do things right. – Professor Warren G. Bennis

Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it. – Dwight D. Eisenhower

A Leader is only a Leader if followers wish to follow.

Staff, Employees, junior members to the titled leader are not following a leader if they are doing it by compulsion. They will follow instructions, orders or obligation driven by duty, blind faith, desperation or money.

Follower should follow a true leader, freely, with confidence, trust in the integrity of the leaders, leadership.

That is not to imply the leader is right, has supernatural insight or indeed is always right.

They are human beings who can be wrong, unlucky in decision making, uninformed in a decision making process or just plain arrogant about their own abilities to be right and lead.

In reality, people want to be led with confidence i.e. delegation of intellectual responsibility or simply a 'comfort blanket' because they do not where to go.

A 10-year-old child will be happy to be led by a parent or an older member of their family they trust. Ask that same 10-year-old to manage five, four year olds at a family party – you see leadership.

Everyone has a capacity for leadership, it just depends on the context i.e. leadership by necessity, no other potential leader available (forced into leadership); leadership by acclaim; vanity; and motivated leadership (I want to be the leader).

## **Leadership and Teams**

A political leader, pursuing a passionate, personal cause.

An explorer, cutting a path through the jungle for the rest of his group to follow.

An exploiter for personal gain.

A Manager who sees things differently based on experience.

### **Strategic Leadership has 7 common themes:**

Organisational direction

Inspiring others to be involved in organisational objectives

Vision about what the organisation can become

Building a management team that can achieve these objectives i.e. goal congruence, commitment, trust, believe,

Dynamic (nice but not necessary), exciting (nice but not necessary).

Enthusiastic, committed and thus inspiring!

But above all – Respectful!

You respect your team members' abilities, invest in them, mentor them, are available for them and trust them, and they will reciprocate with respect and commitment.

Leader of a REAL TEAM!

Yet, while leaders set the direction, they must also use management skills to guide their people to the right destination, in a smooth and efficient way.

### **Note:**

Leadership means different things to different people around the world, and different things in different situations. For example, it could relate to community leadership, religious leadership, political leadership, and leadership of campaigning groups.

This article focuses on the Western model of individual leadership, and discusses leadership in the workplace rather than in other areas.

### **Leadership: A Definition**

According to the idea of [transformational leadership](#) <sup>+</sup>, an effective leader is a person who does the following:

- Creates an inspiring vision of the future.
- Motivates and inspires people to engage with that vision.
- Manages delivery of the vision.
- Coaches and builds a team, so that it is more effective at achieving the vision.
- Leadership brings together the skills needed to do these things. We'll look at each element in more detail.

### **1. Creating an Inspiring Vision of the Future**

In business, a vision is a realistic, convincing and attractive depiction of where you want to be in the future. Vision provides direction, sets priorities, and provides a marker, so that you can tell that you've achieved what you wanted to achieve.

To create a vision, leaders focus on an organization's **strengths** by using tools such as [Porter's Five Forces](#) <sup>+</sup>, [PEST Analysis](#) <sup>+</sup>, [USP Analysis](#) <sup>+</sup>, [Core Competence Analysis](#) <sup>+</sup> and [SWOT Analysis](#) <sup>+</sup> to analyse their current situation. They think about how their industry is likely to evolve, and how their competitors are likely to behave. They look at how they can [innovate successfully](#) <sup>+</sup>, and shape their businesses and their strategies to succeed in future marketplaces. And they test their visions with appropriate market research, and by assessing key risks using techniques such as [Scenario Analysis](#) <sup>+</sup>.

Therefore, leadership is proactive – problem solving, looking ahead, and not being satisfied with things as they are.

Once they have developed their visions, leaders must make them compelling and convincing. A [compelling vision](#) <sup>+</sup> is one that people can **see, feel, understand**, and **embrace**. Effective leaders provide a rich picture of what the future will look like when their visions have been realized. They [tell inspiring stories](#) <sup>+</sup>, and explain their visions in ways that everyone can relate to.

Here, leadership combines the analytical side of vision creation with the passion of shared values, creating something really meaningful to the people being led.

## 2. Motivating and Inspiring People

A compelling vision provides the foundation for leadership. But it's leaders' ability to motivate and inspire people that helps them deliver that vision.

For example, when you start a new project, you will probably have lots of enthusiasm for it, so it's often easy to win support for the project at the beginning. However, it can be difficult to find ways to keep your vision inspiring after the initial enthusiasm fades, especially if the team or organization needs to make significant changes in the way that they do things. Leaders recognize this, and they work hard throughout the project to connect their vision with people's individual needs, goals, and aspirations.

One of the key ways they do this is through [Expectancy Theory](#) <sup>+</sup>. Effective leaders link together two different expectations:

The expectation that hard work leads to good results.

The expectation that good results lead to attractive rewards or incentives.

This motivates people to work hard to achieve success, because they expect to enjoy rewards – both intrinsic and extrinsic – as a result.

Other approaches include restating the vision in terms of the benefits it will bring to the team's customers, and taking frequent opportunities to communicate the vision in an attractive and engaging way.

What's particularly helpful here is where leaders have [expert power](#) <sup>+</sup>. People admire and believe in these leaders because they are expert in what they do. They have credibility, and they've earned the right to ask people to listen to them and follow them. This makes it much easier for these leaders to motivate and inspire the people they lead.

Leaders can also motivate and influence people through their natural charisma and appeal, and through other [sources of power](#) <sup>+</sup>, such as the power to pay bonuses or assign tasks to people. However, good leaders don't rely too much on these types of power to motivate and inspire others.

## 3. Managing Delivery of the Vision

This is the area of leadership that relates to [management](#) <sup>+</sup>.

Leaders must ensure that the work needed to deliver the vision is properly managed – either by themselves, or by a dedicated manager or team of managers to whom the leader delegates this responsibility – and they need to ensure that their vision is delivered successfully.



To do this, team members need performance goals that are linked to the team's overall vision. Our article on [Performance Management and KPIs](#) (Key Performance Indicators) explains one way of doing this, and our [Project Management](#) section explains another. And, for day-to-day management of delivering the vision, the [Management By Wandering Around](#) (MBWA) approach helps to ensure that what should happen, really happens.

Leaders also need to make sure they [manage change](#) effectively. This helps to ensure that the changes needed to deliver the vision are implemented smoothly and thoroughly, with the support and backing of the people affected.

#### 4. Coaching and Building a Team to Achieve the Vision

Individual and team development are important activities carried out by transformational leaders. To develop a team, leaders must first understand team dynamics. Several well-established and popular models describe this, such as [Belbin's Team Roles](#) approach, and Bruce Tuckman's [Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing theory](#).

A leader will then ensure that team members have the necessary skills and abilities to do their job and achieve the vision. They do this by [giving and receiving feedback](#) regularly, and by [training and coaching](#) people to improve individual and team performance.

Leadership also includes looking for [leadership potential](#) in others. By developing leadership skills within your team, you create an environment where you can continue success in the long term. And that's a true measure of great leadership.

#### Note:

The words "leader" and "leadership" are often used incorrectly to describe people who are actually managing. These individuals may be highly skilled, good at their jobs, and valuable to their organizations – but that just makes them excellent managers, not leaders.

So, be careful how you use the terms, and don't assume that people with "leader" in their job titles, people who describe themselves as "leaders," or even groups called "leadership teams," are actually creating and delivering transformational change.

A particular danger in these situations is that people or organizations that are being managed by such an individual or group think they're being led; but they're not. There may actually be no leadership at all, with no one setting a vision and no one being inspired. This can cause serious problems in the long term.

## Sharpening the Saws for Staff Development

By Vanessa Diaz, Top Team Vietnam

Once upon a time, a man was hiking through a forest when he happened upon a lumberjack cursing incessantly in frustration. The lumberjack was attempting to fell a tree but was having a hard time doing it. Pushing and pulling his saw against the tree, he cursed and cursed as he tried unsuccessfully to cut it.

The man asked the lumberjack curiously, "What seems to be the problem, sir?" to which the lumberjack replied, "I can't cut this damn tree. My saw is blunt."



The man asked nonchalantly, “Well, couldn’t you just sharpen it so it’s no longer blunt?”

The lumberjack complained, “If so, I have to stop sawing.”

“But if your saw is sharpened, you’ll be able to cut more efficiently than when your blade is blunt,” the man explained.

The lumberjack winced, “True, but I can’t stop. I don’t have time,” shaking his head in frustration.

The man left the lumberjack, shaking his head by lumberjack’s poor logic. However, this story applies to many of us, doesn’t it? Cutting too much blunts the blade hence, the need to periodically sharpen the saw to get things done. Right? What would seem to be commonsensical – the analogy of the woodcutter sawing with a blunt blade to the point that he is no longer productive but still keeping at it – strikes at the heart of many organizations.

In theory, we are all shaking our heads at the poor lumberjack who doesn’t get it. In reality however, many of us in management don’t get it. This is what Stephen Covey (1989) uses as an analogy in the book “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” of which number seven is “Sharpening the Saw.” Going back to the analogy, when you have overworked yourself to the point that you are no longer productive, what do you do? Common sense dictates that you pause and take a break. Go on vacation and recharge your batteries. Go to a scenic tourist destination and take selfies. Post it on Instagram. However, this is not what “sharpening the saw” means. Taking a break means putting the saw down. If you no longer use the blade after putting it down, it will still be dull when you use it again.

So what does sharpening the saw mean? Sharpening the saw is not synonymous to resting or pausing, but to activity. It means doing something still in order to do better at what you are doing. It means continuous improvement, continuous development. While downtime is needed in order to prevent burnout, the way towards productivity is by sharpening the blade, learning new techniques in woodcutting, exercising to have more stamina, and exchanging skills with other woodcutters. Hence, it is important to ask how we are doing as leaders in our organizations. How are our respective blades doing? How are the skills, knowledge, motivation, commitment, intra-organizational relationships and interpersonal relationships doing in the departments we lead? Today, I make out a case for continuous improvement among organizations. I’m going to tell you what is it and why organizations need to do it now.

### *What is Continuous Improvement?*

Continuous improvement, sometimes called continuous development is an ongoing effort in improving products, processes or services through incremental or “over time” improvements or breakthrough “all at once” improvements. In Japanese, the phrase is referred to as *kaizen* which means “good change,” to connote that for organizations to stay efficient and productive, they need to continuously improve in increments or through breakthroughs. *Kaizen* is associated with several best practices such as lean manufacturing and other processes that promote optimum efficiency and reduce waste. Some people consider the phrase “continuous improvement” to be synonymous to “innovation” or the continuing quest to do better. We all know that innovation is a make or break value for organizations. Indeed, innovation is at the core of organizational renewal programs and total quality management.

Innovation is a key strategic resource for organizations. Organizations which are able to improve or renew their products, services or processes create distinct competitive advantage. Innovation is seen in many forms such as creating new products to capture new market shares, improving quality management, increasing profitability by reducing waste, and creating allies and partnerships based on innovative products and processes. All of these forms

of innovation have one thing in common: they all involve incremental problem-solving and learning in order to effect “good change.” However, innovation is painstaking as it is not usually of the “breakthrough” kind. It is more like an elaborate process that, as Edison puts it articulately, requires perspiration more than inspiration. Studies also attest that innovative organizations implement systematic learning in order to achieve organizational success. In order to develop highly effective teams, managers need to be appreciate the value and necessity of continuous training and development.



*Seeking to understand to be understood (before acting), beginning with the end in mind, putting first things first: A snapshot from event participants*

#### *Continuous Training – Why Is It Needed?*

Whatever industry you come from, it is a cardinal rule that companies need to invest in employee training and development in order to compete. Firstly, training programs help reduce errors in performance which would be costly to the organization. Secondly, developing skills and knowledge enable better employee retention, commitment, and loyalty which in the end, boosts organizational performance and productivity.

Despite this established fact however, many companies are more keen on investing time and money on induction trainings in order to orient employees on how to perform processes and integrate with how the companies does things. Frequently, management overlooks the need to continuously train and develop employees in order to boost productivity. Today’s employees expect continuous training and development. Survey research shows that 39.3 percent of potential employees prioritize “growth” as a core value in assessing job prospects. Job seekers are more likely to switch to companies which offer better opportunities for growth. Hence, instead of investing only on

induction trainings, managers need to design continuous training programs in order to develop highly effective teams within the company. In this manner, transfer of new knowledge, skills and processes will ensure that each employee is competent enough to perform and do their tasks efficiently. In order to appreciate such, managers need to understand how continuous training and development impacts organizations. Three of the most significant benefits of continuous development include:

1. Reduction of weak links in the organization;
2. Enhanced employee satisfaction; and
3. Improved employee performance.

First, continuous training programs allows employees to build and strengthen their skills in order to reduce errors and weak links which may compromise productivity. Training is an effective way in ensuring that mistakes in the implementation of new processes are not repeated. As a result, there is reduction of costly waste which improves the company's bottom line.

Second, training enhances employee satisfaction. As earlier said, employees now expect growth during their stay in the company. Having access to continuous training programs and skills development demonstrates value as far as the employee is concerned. In this manner, managers are showing that the company is also interested in their intellectual development. When employees are given opportunities for growth through trainings, they are more satisfied with their jobs. Hence, the company would benefit from employees who work harder and would also decrease the turnover rate.

Third, continuous training boosts employee performance. Gaining additional knowledge and skills is an empowering tool for employees. It provides them the confidence to perform new tasks and developments and allows them to brace for significant changes in the industry with their new understanding. Employee confidence is crucial because it pushes them to be better at what they do in order to contribute new ideas for the company's benefit. Empowering employees leads to enhanced employee performance which in turns boosts organizational productivity. A team which is composed of highly competent employees will enable the company to remain competitive and retain a position of strength in the industry.

### *Learning Organizations*

This leads me to tackle how developing a learning organization is essential in continuous improvement. In order to develop highly effective teams, it must be a company habit to learn. A learning organization is one skilled at the creation, acquisition, and transfer of knowledge and changing its behavior as a result of new insight and knowledge. If we are to push for continuous improvement in order to enhance organizational productivity, we must struggle not only to develop learning teams but a learning organization.

In reviews of organizations, learning organizations are considered to be those which are skilled at five main things:

1. Systematic Problem-solving
2. Experimenting with new ideas and approaches;
3. Learning from mistakes and history;
4. Learning from best practices of other companies; and
5. Quick and efficient knowledge transfer.

It may seem daunting to possess all these activities in a company but this is what a learning organization looks like. An innovative company, a company that continually improves itself carries with it a new mindset and pattern of behavior which is embedded from top to bottom level of the hierarchy. A learning organization is one that have created systems and processes and provides adequate support for them to the extent that the spirit of innovation is embedded into corporate culture.

One company which demonstrates this is Xerox. Xerox is an innovator in processes. In 1983, the company's senior managers launched a breakthrough initiative called "Leadership through Quality" in order to develop efficiency in processes among employees. Under this program, employees were trained in small teams which taught them how to develop problem-solving techniques. This initiative led to the creation of a six-step problem solving process which all employees use to solve problems. Employees were trained in four major skills for several days in training sessions held as "family groups." The result of this initiative is that Xerox has a common vocabulary, common protocol, and consistent approach to decision-making and problem-solving. The initiative cut down internal costs due to errors.

The Xerox experience tells us it can be done and it must be done. In this age of intense competition, organizations need managers who recognize that only by nurturing a culture of continuous improvement can organizations meet challenges head-on successfully.

Going back to the analogy of the woodcutter, as managers, we are tasked to ensure that our employees are able to cope and develop themselves into highly effective people. Instead of giving them the opportunity to improve, we need to stop working with a blunt blade and proactively keep our blades sharp.

# Corporate Health & Wellness: How and Why?

By Chiara Squinzi, Top Team Vietnam

From IT companies like Google and Facebook to investment and petrol companies, corporate health & wellness programs are becoming more and more popular these days. The programs can help with smoking cessation, weight loss and obesity prevention, diabetes / blood pressure / cholesterol management, sleep hygiene and most importantly stress management.

**The reason for companies to give attention to these issues is simple: Corporate wellness programs bring many improvements** such as lowering absenteeism, increasing job satisfaction, heightening employee energy (and therefore work productivity), improving employee retention, and even resulting in practical outcomes such as reduction in healthcare costs.

The American Journal of Health Promotion, found that companies with wellness programs experience 25 percent lower sick leave, health plan, workers' compensation, and disability insurance costs compared to companies with no such programs. Furthermore, a 2014 Harvard Business Review study of 20 companies found an average annual healthcare cost increase of just 1 to 2% for companies with wellness programs, compared to the 7% national average.

**Health & wellness initiatives can be summarized in three main areas: body, food and mind.**

To take care of the body, companies can offer:

- wellness retreats
- yoga classes
- quit smoking programs
- fitness challenges
- weight loss initiatives / competitions
- sleep hygiene
- desk stretching
- free chiropractic adjustments

To take care of the nutritional health, companies can offer:

- healthy cooking classes
- healthy recipe exchanges
- company's kitchen set-up / cleanup
- provision of healthy snacks, drinks and meals
- incentives for healthy eating

To take care of the mind, companies can offer:

- lunchtime stress-management seminars
- relaxation sessions
- mindfulness classes
- group meditation
- appreciation exercises

**Some examples of low cost & practical activities a company can start immediately with are:**

- Set up a 30-minute yoga practice at 4.30 pm on Fridays
- Set up a 'lunchtime 15 minute walk' challenge with employees
- Suggest and remind your employees to get the full amount of sleep they need to feel at their best: 8h / day
- Set up 'desk stretching' posters around the office
- Organization of healthy cooking classes instead of company dinners
- Cleaning of the kitchen / kitchenette from soft drinks, low quality coffee / milk, cookies and other pre-packaged foods. Offer natural sparkling water, fruits, nuts and healthier snacks like La Holista's instead.
- Screen documentaries like 'Food Matters', 'Forks Over Knives', 'Fed up', etc.
- Establish a daily 1-minute company meditation session at the start of the working day
- Invite a monthly guest to introduce a new type of meditation technique
- Offer information on free meditation groups in the city the company is based

For more information about the content of these talks, please contact [info@topteam.co](mailto:info@topteam.co)