HBR Guide to Leading Teams
By Mary Shapiro

Mary Shapiro's new book *HBR Guide to Leading Teams* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2015) shows us how to navigate the challenges of leading teams, not only by being able to make a plan and see it all the way through but also by being able to recognize the patterns that we fall into as co-workers and humans. Shapiro has maintained a position at Simmons College for the past 25 years teaching in the area of organizational behavior, and was recently named the Diane Kagen Trust '77GS Professor for Leadership Development. Her main areas of expertise are team building and leadership, influential communication across diverse stakeholders, and strategic career management.

She guides the reader through the book in its three-part format: building your team's infrastructure, managing your team, and closing out your team.

Through her use of time-tested strategies and structured conversations from past experiences working with teams in a wide range of industries and organizational settings, Shapiro is able to delve into each of these sections to teach us how to "balance skills and styles, establish clear roles, and promote healthy dissent."

Building your team's infrastructure

The first section of the book addresses the question of how to hold people accountable while still being transparent, direct, and consistent.

Shapiro gives you the tools to be able to understand and analyze how team members work together, if you are achieving your goals, addressing and reevaluating conflicts as they arise, all while keeping your team motivated and enhancing your effectiveness altogether.

The important first step she suggests is to state your goals, for both the individuals and the team, then make a contract that clearly states what is expected of each party and in what time frame. Building a "relational foundation for working together" Shapiro points out, may take time up front, but can save time and frustration down the road.

Shapiro points out that what you do as a team leader leaves an impact on the group. If you are unorganized and purely reactionary, then that will trickle down to the rest of your team. Lack of infrastructure and communication can lead to missed deadlines, unorganized work, and overall poor results. Being proactive is not only the ability to anticipate the next action but also to follow-through at the end of the day. Perceiving how to get to the next step in the process and understanding the pattern of how your team works will cause you to constantly obtain the wanted results whether that's the day-to-day tasks or long-term responsibilities.

Managing your team

Knowing when to address a problem on a team is always difficult; people often try to avoid inflaming issues or conflicts by beating around the bush, which can be counterproductive.

Shapiro is savvily tuned into human nature. "We smile and nod instead of proposing alternatives. We give in and do things 'their way.' We'll deny outright that conflicts even exist when asked (the 'Nothing's wrong—everything's great' scenario).

But on teams, conflicts are inevitable."

To get out of the unsolved-conflict cycle—of never being able to talk about what's really bothering you—

you have to address the problem when it starts, Shapiro says. Sometimes that will mean calling people out or pulling someone aside to talk one-on-one.

Giving feedback is an important part of the process. "'Step into my office…I have a little feedback for you,' is not what you want to hear." Typically, our minds go to the same place ("I'm about to get fired"). "Understanding how it feels to be on the receiving end is part of what makes giving feedback to others so hard," says Shapiro.

Learning to adjust your approach to your various team members' styles, and to the challenges of a new project or assignment, can help with reaching your team's short and long-term goals. Shapiro notes that flexibility is key—what works for you, doesn't necessarily work for everyone else; you can gain more when you let go of what you are comfortable with and have an open perspective. Part of the wonders of working with a team is pushing boundaries and developing plans with input and ideas from a diverse group of people.

Closing out your team

So you finished a project and are now getting ready to start the next one. Are you confident with the finished product? Can you repeat the same results? Did you cut corners to get it done on time? Do you know what worked and what didn't? Shapiro emphasizes the importance of reflecting on how each step of the process worked, and suggests marking down what your shortcomings and strengths are as a team. Be sensitive to these areas when your future project is underway.

When the bulk of the work is done, the leader of an effectively managed team will understand the members' working styles and where everyone's expertise lies—the last step is to tweak and adjust the structure to find an equilibrium. "You don't want to experience déjà vu as the same people create bottlenecks, for example, or the same decision-making processes create 'winners' who dominate and 'losers' who drag their feet," says Shapiro.

In *HBR Guide to Leading Teams* Shapiro not only gives us the tools to make and sustain a working team, she also shares insights into how we can continuously improve and never become complacent.

The ability to interpret the patterns we fall into as humans is what differentiates great leaders from the rest. Comprehending what is needed to be done to get from point A to point B is only a portion of the larger picture. Being able to inspire people is a great contribution to strive for. We are thankful Mary Shapiro has written this book to inspire us to be great team leaders.
— *Iman Louis-Jeune*