BE A
BETTER
TEAM BY
FRIDAY

Sample Preview

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YOUR TEAM'S UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

The title of this book, *Be a Better Team by Friday*, is both an *assertion* and a *promise*.

The *assertion* is this: in a matter of a few business days, your team's performance can skyrocket. Longstanding tensions, interpersonal breakdowns, communication challenges, overwork, lack of focus, complaining, and stress can dissolve, replaced with the excitement of new possibilities. Your team can quickly propel toward goals that, until now, seemed out of reach. In just one week, you can experience a transformation from "okay" to extraordinary.

The *promise* is that the practices outlined in this book will get you there.

Of course, the gains you experience in one week are just the beginning. As we all know, a few days of exercise will make you feel good, but it takes long-term, consistent effort to get into top shape.

Just like with your personal health, creating a high-performance team requires discipline. If your team has gotten a little "soft around the middle," you're probably experiencing communication breakdowns, leadership challenges, and overall team frustrations. And you're trying to figure out what to do about it.

This book is the answer. Like a personal trainer's fitness plan for your work teams, the practices in this book make up the playbook your team needs to get back into shape.

But we want to help you do more than tighten up that soft middle. We're here to help your team reach peak performance.

Most companies that come to us feel things with their team are *pretty good*. But, in a way, that's their struggle. They're stuck in *pretty good* and don't know how to help their team reach its *full* potential. Teams in today's fast-growth companies need to adapt quickly to cross-functional projects, new hires, market fluctuations, and social changes (e.g., COVID-19) that require collaboration, accountability, ownership, and the know-how to get things done. The companies that can do this flourish. Those that don't get left behind.

Many company leaders might even see what's in their way, but don't know how to overcome the obstacles. They can't find an effective way to scale leadership beyond a select few superstars who seem more naturally skilled at leading than others. Or they have siloed teams that don't work well together—whether across acquired companies or internal departments. They want to optimize communication so that it feels like one team all running in the same direction, but they can't figure out how.

We've seen these same struggles across industries from tech and finance to healthcare and logistics. Leaders want to help their

teams work together better. These leaders are smart, successful people whose entire careers are built on high performance. They're stuck, though, on how to help their teams be their best.

BLUECASE was born out of a curiosity to solve this dilemma.

As a kid, David was fascinated by superheroes. That interest continued into adulthood and evolved into a quest to understand why certain individuals and teams can do things that most of us can't. He traveled the world looking for insight. He interviewed or trained with coaches, professors, accomplished martial artists, and esteemed monks who could perform almost superhuman feats. In the process, he earned a PhD in high-performance psychology.

Having come from a family of entrepreneurs, David became frustrated by the gaps he saw in business leadership. He witnessed toxic company cultures and disheartened employees. People in power at some of the world's biggest companies weren't guiding their teams in ways that helped them be and do their best.

That frustration inspired David to ask, "What could you achieve if you combined great business practices with high-performance leadership? What if you could fill a company with leaders operating at the highest performance levels possible? Not just the CEO, but *everyone*?"

This led him into the field of management consulting, where he worked with leaders in Fortune 100 and Financial Times Stock Index (FTSI) 100 organizations, including NASA, Starbucks, Novartis, and Chevron. After accruing substantial experience working with leadership teams globally, he started BLUECASE in 2013 to formally merge high-performance psychology with strategic consulting.

He believed that if he could help businesses blend practices used by high-performing teams with leadership development

and strategic planning, it could have a huge impact on the world. Organizations would be healthier. Employees would thrive at work and carry that great energy home to their families. They could achieve exceptional results *and* make people's lives better.

David couldn't create an approach to effectively scale leadership across entire companies all on his own. For this reason, he brought me in to help turn BLUECASE into a firm with the ability to scale high-level expertise and a powerful leadership methodology beyond just a few individuals at the C-suite.

By the time I partnered with David, I'd spent my career exploring questions similar to David's. I was first inspired by a pep talk I'd heard years earlier by longtime University of North Carolina Tar Heels basketball coach Roy Williams.

While still in school, I was working as a server at the UNC-Chapel Hill alumni center on the night Roy Williams and his team were there for a dinner to kick off their first game of the season. I was standing in the back of the room as Williams addressed the team. While the coach spoke, the players were hanging on his every word as if he were addressing each of them individually. I was so inspired and fired up by Williams' talk that I felt like *I* could have won a national championship.

Keep in mind, this was 2003, and Williams had taken over a Tar Heels team that had been the losingest in school history since 1962. He took that *same group of players* and turned them into NCAA champions within his second season of coaching them. It was clear that Williams had something that most people don't.

Ever since then, I've wanted to figure out: *What was that? Why do some people seem to have a unique ability to elevate groups and lead them to achieve greatness?*

I devoted the next decade to finding out. I earned a degree with a focus in business ethics (which people love to joke is an oxymoron) and studied educational and performance psychology as a teacher. I then moved to business coaching and consulting, working at a firm that was the world's largest coaching company at the time. Over the past thirteen years, I've led hundreds of executives, directors, and managers through cross-functional leadership trainings, and coached public and private CEOs, business leaders, TEDx presenters, poker players, musicians, academic professors, and athletes to perform at optimal levels. I've also designed or executed leadership development and consulting approaches delivered inside some of the world's largest oil and gas, construction, and mining companies.

David and I both discovered, in our work across industries and company sizes, that even the most well-intentioned leaders need an operating system to help their people unlock their full potential. Creating great teams is so challenging because the problems holding them back are often hard to identify or seem hard to fix. Maybe your team has interpersonal tensions, or you experience a lot of overwork but things still seem to take forever to get done. Or you suffer from "everyone's too nice," so you can't talk about what's in the way. Hidden agendas, competing priorities, lack of ownership, personality differences—even the world's best MBA programs don't prepare leaders for elusive problems like these. Your problems become more complex and complicated when growing your company at high speed. Sometimes, these challenges can seem impossible to solve.

We promise you it's not impossible. It's just that hiring great talent isn't enough. High-performing teams get that way because

they *learn how to work together*. They communicate with a shared language that is easy to teach and understand. They commit to a shared set of practices that, when applied consistently, allows them to always come out on top.

You're holding those practices in your hands.

WHAT SETS HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS APART

*"Success is the product of daily habits—
not once-in-a-lifetime transformations."*
—JAMES CLEAR, *Atomic Habits*

Be a Better Team by Friday contains the foundational skills and tools that turn groups of high-talent individuals into extraordinary work teams. In this book, we've consolidated these skills into seven distinct practices—field-tested techniques that will have your executive and management teams, and, ultimately, your whole organization achieve high performance.

These practices stem from our years of working with hundreds of leaders and studying the habits that help high-performance teams reach exceptional levels. As we honed our method, we were especially interested in the 80/20 approach. We wanted to know, out of all the tools that high-performing teams were using, which ones would have an emergent effect and make the biggest impact. And we've narrowed it down to these seven key practices:

1. **Choose Your Mindset**: Understand that your mindset is a choice, and that high performers choose their mindset constantly.

2. **Get Real with Each Other**: The best teams build trust by listening deeply and being direct, empathetic, and vulnerable with each other.

3. **Know the "Fundamental Why"**: High-performing teams know the underlying intent or purpose behind everything they do—and everything their team members do.

4. **Give Feedback Like a Coach**: Top performers seek out performance-enhancing feedback and share it with others every day.

5. **Adapt Your Work Style**: Agile team members adapt their communication to others, and don't expect others to conform to them. These team members learn to turn their differences into an advantage.

6. **Get Focused**: Extraordinary teams know how to pare down their workload to achieve more by doing less.

7. **Get It Done**: Very little gets done well across organizations without a plan of clear ownership and accountability. The best teams have one for everything they do.

Why do we call them practices? Because that's what great teams do: they practice getting better. Championship sports teams practice their fundamentals every day. The practices in this book are for your work teams what layups are for a basketball team: practice them regularly, and your team will improve.

And no sugar coating here—you've got to stick with them! Over time, these practices will enable your teams to achieve high levels of performance across your organization. In the companies we work with, everything from employee engagement to financial performance gets better, and the company thrives.

For this reason, we encourage you to *apply* what you read as soon as possible. We've made it straightforward and easy for you to do. Many business leaders who commit to these practices tell us the rewards extend far beyond great teams and improved organizational performance—the benefits become personal. These seven practices change lives by creating healthier, more authentic relationships with everybody you care about: your colleagues, your friends, your spouse, your family, and perhaps most importantly, yourself.

WHY YOUR COMPANY IS DRIFTING TOWARD MEDIOCRITY

Time and again, we have seen the seven practices in this book skyrocket team performance in all business environments. Over the years, we've worked with teams in almost every kind of company to help unlock their true potential. Our primary focus, however, has been partnering with fast-scaling, entrepreneurial mid-market companies, typically with annual revenues between fifty million and several billion dollars.

When we onboard a new client, we typically find that individuals across the company are working hard, but team dynamics get in the way of results. Interestingly, these dynamics tend to be universal across most companies we work with. Trust is low. People are nice to each other but avoid giving each other truthful, authentic

feedback, or they criticize each other in a way that leads to defensiveness. As a group, teams generate good ideas but fail to execute. Projects get stalled (or disappear altogether).

Whether the issues stem from personality conflicts, poor communication, a lack of direction, or too much to do, team members with the best intentions simply don't know *how* to work together. The wheels spin faster and faster, and everyone works harder and harder, but as you can imagine, morale tanks when outcomes are marginal at best.

And that's just on your *own* team.

As you know, growing companies require people across teams, functions, departments, and recently acquired companies to learn to collaborate quickly. Cross-functional teams often form around a project or company goal, even though many of the individuals come from departments with competing priorities. These teams have the added challenge of being unaccustomed to working together. They have a limited amount of time to figure out how to work together, how to build trust, and how to make decisions. Cross-functional teams often disagree on what to do, are unsure of who does what by when, or gain little traction as projects stall for months. Communication is even more difficult post-acquisition when employees from an acquired company have to communicate with their new management team. As a result, hundreds of studies show that mergers and acquisitions fail to produce their expected value 50–80 percent of the time.

Usually, when we assess a company's culture, we see common areas of weakness.[1] Cross-functional collaboration and communication consistently receive the lowest scores, and interpersonal communication causes some of the greatest frustration. We find that an absence of clear direction and focus, weak or infrequent feedback,

low motivation, and a lack of ownership of goals and accountability hamper a company's productivity and employee satisfaction.

When CEOs are presented with these results, they often push back. "Things are still good," they insist. "After all, doesn't every company have problems when people work together?"

Just because something is pervasive doesn't mean you should put up with it. If company-wide dysfunctions aren't addressed, they become insurmountable when the hardships of scale, fast-changing industries, evolving social systems, or increasing demands add to daily pressures. Think about the large number of once-innovative companies that have morphed into bureaucratic, stagnant cultures where significant parts of the workforce feel undervalued and ineffective.

Are you willing to accept this kind of mediocrity?

Lower-performing teams and an unmotivated workforce are a direct reflection of a company's leadership culture and how well the people in the company work together. While you may have great benefits, perks, and even a great set of values, the real test of a company's culture is how well people lead and work together when things get tough.

For this reason, a strong leadership culture is something a scaling company can't afford to be without. The problem is that most companies don't know how to create one. Deloitte surveyed over seven thousand global executives, and while 82 percent felt a strong culture is a competitive advantage, only 19 percent believe they have the "right culture."[2] Do you want to see how your team stacks up and what you can do to be a better team by Friday? There is a short version of our assessment in Appendix C, or visit *betterteam book.com* to take our complete assessment to see how your organization or team is performing.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

Companies come to us because they've made the decision to reject mediocrity. You should, too. Even back in 1992, John Kotter and James Heskett found that companies with high-performance corporate cultures that adapt quickly to a changing world had a 756 percent increase in net profit over eleven years.[3] If the pandemic, distribution crises, and employee shortages indicate what's to come, the need for an adaptive leadership culture is far greater than it was decades ago. When your company and teams have the skills and tools that promote collaboration, you can achieve greatness, no matter what the outside world throws your way.

Your team won't develop those skills on their own. It doesn't matter if you hire the best and the brightest in your industry— becoming a high-performance team requires intentional effort. Management expert Peter Drucker says, "Only three things happen naturally in organizations: friction, confusion, and underperformance. Everything else requires leadership."[4] Sometimes the term "leadership" gets interpreted to mean "the person(s) in charge." But preventing the natural slide to underperformance Drucker warns about requires leadership from *everyone* on a team.

The first step is figuring out where you are. On a scale of 1 to 10, how high performing are your work teams? If a 1 is dismal and 10 is "we work so well together, Google is calling us to figure out what *we* are doing right," where are you?

Like many of our clients before they start working with us, you might choose a number somewhere between 4 and 7. Things are "pretty good," but you know there's room for improvement.

The gap between where you are now and a 10 represents your company's untapped potential. If people worked together so well that you could answer *emphatically*, "We are definitely a 10," what would be possible for you, your teams, and your company?

This book will help get you to 10 fast. As your team's playbook, *Be a Better Team by Friday* shows you how to create a shared leadership framework across your entire company. With a common set of practices, your teams will become highly skilled at working with each other—and across departments. Among other benefits, this framework ensures that team members become competent in the following skills:

- How to optimize cross-functional communication with a shared, company-wide style of communicating
- How to integrate company cultures post-acquisition, so engagement stays high (and attrition stays low)
- How to build a greater sense of purpose, passion, and fun across the company
- How to grow motivation and excitement on the team
- How to give tough feedback and have difficult conversations
- How to coach and develop each other, so everybody gets better every day
- How to get more done with less work
- How to delegate and build ownership
- How to lead effective, engaging meetings that advance the action

If you feel your company has untapped potential, intelligence, creativity, and innovation, what percentage do you think is offline? Now, consider: What would happen if you could access even 10–20

percent more of your company's intelligence without hiring different people? That is the impact of these seven practices.

When applied, the practices in this book will cut through mediocrity and make you great. When teams and companies use these practices, personality conflicts dissolve. Trust builds. Communication improves among department teams and across functions. More focused work leads to faster results and greater productivity. Tensions ease, and team members start enjoying their work. Praise and appreciation replace criticism and blame.

When a ceo implements these practices company-wide, the culture changes. People describe the experience as "feeling like it did when we first started the company" or a "breath of fresh air." We also see a heightened sense of personal motivation. If the company has a lower employee Net Promoter Score (enps), which measures employee satisfaction, their score typically increases by thirty or forty points over the course of a year. If the company already has a high enps, the score continues to climb as long-standing communication problems, interpersonal tensions, and leadership issues fall away.

Most importantly, however, companies become adept at handling the immense pressures and stressors that growth brings. They also adapt quickly to the ever-changing world outside their door. As a result, bottom-line numbers often *wildly* surpass expectations.

In 2014, we began working with Four Hands, a global design and luxury goods manufacturing firm with factories in multiple countries. At the time, the company reported approximately $96 million in revenue.

Over five years, we taught the practices in this book to every executive, director, and manager in the company, who then introduced

the techniques to their teams. By 2019, the company had grown to $194 million in revenue while increasing its gross margin from 27.9 percent to 34.7 percent.

In 2019, the United States government introduced 25 percent tariffs on Chinese merchandise with very little warning. With much of its manufacturing coming from China, the company needed to shift its operational structure in weeks. Using our high-performing team practices, their creativity, and their grit, they did it. It required teams across departments and continents to problem solve together. They communicated transparently to customers and asked vendors to find ways to become more efficient. They expanded sourcing from other countries, triple-sourced products, allocated products more quickly, and figured out how to strengthen their Chinese business.

Nine months later, the company had the highest revenue quarter in its history.

Then, after they successfully managed those economic restrictions, COVID-19 struck their factories in China and fractured their global supply chain. At the same time, the company was undergoing an overhaul of its operations software and a massive office renovation.

Despite these challenges, the company quickly adapted. All cross-functional heads met to identify the key challenges they had to work on together, and applied our tools to improve their collaborative communication. They pinpointed core focus areas and moved into coordinated action. Then they adapted on the fly.

They did all this while transitioning most of the organization to work from home and quickly implementing advanced COVID-19 protocols and technologies in their warehouses and factories.

Once again, they had their most successful quarter in company history. By the end of 2020, this company broke sales, shipping, and manufacturing records and ended the year just shy of the $270M revenue mark. They ended 2021 at $455M in revenue.

We've written this book for those of you who want to thrive like this, too. Maybe your company is performing reasonably well, but breakthrough, wild success feels out of reach. Or perhaps you're not satisfied with where you are now, and a high-performance culture is something you think you can only dream of. Within the pages of this book, we will show you that you *do* have the power to move the needle to higher performance. But it does take a willingness to do things differently than you're used to.

You've probably read a lot of business books that do a good job of describing the problems you're experiencing. Page after page, you recognize what's going on in your company. These books also offer a variety of suggestions for solving your problems, but too often, the solutions are more theoretical than practical. They don't actually tell you what to *do*.

This is not one of those books. The practices in these pages are meant to be applied "on the court." You can start using the techniques right away, in today's meetings. Consider this your playbook—a "how to"—for becoming a high-performance team.

Read it, and you'll know *exactly* what to do.

THIS BOOK IS FOR THE PEOPLE YOU CARE ABOUT

You've probably been on a high-performance team in the past. For some, it might have been a work team. For others, it was a high school or college sports team. Perhaps it was a fraternity or sorority

project, a theater troupe, or a school club. Remember what it was like? People loved working together, they felt passionate, and there was an air of excitement whenever you got together. Maybe you experienced a sense of camaraderie so great it felt like family.

You want the teams you lead to feel like this, too. If you're anything like most of the managers we work with, you care a lot about the people on your teams. You want a sense of passion and excitement to show up in their work. You want them to go home to their families proud of their work and excited to come back the next day. You want to see the spark that happens when people love what they do.

Too often, that spark gets lost in the day-to-day tensions of a stressful work environment. Personality conflicts, lackluster meetings, and overwhelming to-do lists can wear down the most well-intentioned teams. Even if you *want* a high-performing team, you might not always know how to get it.

This book offers a set of clear practices that will inspire your teams to tap into their spark. The passion, excitement, pride, and energy that drive greatness will emerge. Work gets fun. Trust us; you'll love what happens.

The first step? Commit to the practices and begin. As Michael Jordan said: "If you try to shortcut the game, then the game will shortcut you. If you put forth the effort, good things will be bestowed upon you."[5]

HOW TO PARTICIPATE WITH THIS BOOK: BE A "LEARN-IT-ALL"

It would be easy to read *Be a Better Team by Friday* and compare it to books you've read in the past. You may think, "Oh, this is a

lot like what _____ says in their book." Or you might think, "I already know this." You might even spend the whole time deciding whether you agree with us or not.

So, we're going to ask you to try something here.

Instead of thinking *Do I like this or not*, or *Do I agree with this or not?*, ask yourself: *In what ways is my team already practicing this? In what ways are we not? How could we apply this?*

Satya Nadella, the CEO of Microsoft, says, "Ultimately, the 'learn-it-all' will always do better than the 'know-it-all.'"[6] Commit to being a "learn-it-all" to avoid the trap of average performance. Stay creative and adaptive as you apply what you learn.

As you begin reading, you may quickly realize with alarming clarity that you are part of a lower-performing team (perhaps you already know this). Don't panic. We've witnessed, again and again, that when lower-performing teams commit to all the practices in this book, they become high-performing teams. We've never seen it fail.

Maybe your team is already high-performing, but you have no idea how much better you can be until you actively engage with all seven of these practices.

Stick with it!

HOW THIS BOOK IS STRUCTURED

Be a Better Team by Friday is a playbook for you to refer to on an ongoing basis. Each chapter is a practice. In each chapter, you will find *disciplines of the practice*, which are the basic exercises to apply repeatedly to build your skills.

For some people, words like "practice" and "discipline" bring up resistance, not unlike the word "diet." You know sticking with

it consistently will give you the results you want, but you resist because it's difficult and uncomfortable.

If this describes you, keep in mind that the practices in this book aren't *hard* to apply. They just require a willingness on your team's part to think in new ways, try something different, and stick with it.

You'll notice that some words and phrases are in bold. Bolded and italicized words are intended to provide you with a shared language of high performance. When everyone on a team has a common language, it's easier to apply the practices as a team (or across teams). A complete list of those terms is in Appendix B.

Inside many of the disciplines, you will see questions to ask yourself and your teammates. These questions have been developed to facilitate better conversations. Asking great questions is more important to these practices than always having answers. We've provided questions to get you started, but you will also want to develop your own.

What do we recommend you do when you encounter one of these questions?

Pause.

Consider a situation where the question might be relevant to you and your team. Reflect on your answers to each question. Ask yourself:

> *How would I personally answer the question?*
> *How would my team members answer the question?*

The insights you gain by asking yourself and others these questions are the starting point for applying the practices in your day-to-day work.

At the end of each chapter, you'll find structures for application to help you use the practices immediately. If you follow these recommended steps, you can be sure you are applying the practice in full.

MAKE THE CHOICE—AND THEN KEEP MAKING IT

Committing to being a learn-it-all is not a one-time thing. The truth is, you'll need to choose to embrace these practices every day. Over time, the practices will become an organic part of how your team communicates with one another—but you need to start by putting in the work.

If a particular practice sounds awkward or impossible, surrender your skepticism and just try it. We've found, again and again, that leaders are constantly surprised by the conversations these practices empower them and their teams to have. When they start working with us, their reactions are sometimes, "I'd *never* be able to say that," or, "My team would never be open to that." By the end, their communication skills are their superpower.

You're reading this book because you want your team to reach its full potential. The only way to do that is by trying things you've never tried before. Trust the process. Allow your team to surprise you. You might even surprise yourself.

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CHOOSE YOUR MINDSET

"The most common way people give up their power
is by thinking they don't have any."
—ALICE WALKER, writer

Being a great leader is not easy. In any job, at any organi-
zation, you will face challenges that at times seem insur-
mountable. You can't escape that fact even when you're on
a team or in a company with a strong vision.

When you are a great leader, though, you move through hardship
and accomplish goals despite the challenges. You choose to create
a positive outcome, even when things get tough. You inspire others
to be great, too.

How?

The first step to being a great leader is to *choose* to be great.

The next step is to empower your team to lead, too. Being a great leader does not mean you're a lone hero making all the decisions. Instead, it requires finding better ways to work together on your team when facing significant obstacles. Great leaders *work together* with their colleagues and direct reports to accomplish what they set out to do.

Gone are the days when "leadership" was assigned to a few people at the top of an org chart. In fast-changing times and fast-changing organizations, anyone with accountability to the company has a role in leading. To become more adaptive, agile, and effective in times of change, every individual on your team needs to *choose* greatness to *achieve* it despite all odds.

Everyone on high-performance teams chooses to excel. High-performance leadership **mindsets** enable high-performance collaboration. Team members choose an empowered way of thinking. As a result, they act in ways that move toward their goals while empowering others to accomplish theirs.

But before you can choose your way of thinking, you first must realize that *the way you think is a choice.*

YOUR MINDSET IS YOUR CHOICE

Imagine you're wearing orange-tinted glasses. If you were to look around the room, the room would look orange. Now, if you take the glasses off and put on a pair of green-tinted glasses, the room would appear green.

Your **mindset** is like those orange lenses, a filter through which you see the world. It is your way of thinking that leads to your way

of acting. If you're thinking angry thoughts, you will act very differently than if you are thinking happy ones.

You might not even realize that the way you think *is* a mindset. It's like wearing the orange glasses but forgetting you have them on. You just think the world is orange. It's easy to forget that your way of thinking is only a mindset (orange!)—and that you can *choose* to change it.

Your mindset is the answer to the question: "How am I thinking about this right now?"

Two people in the same situation might have completely different mindsets and choose dramatically different responses. Someone frustrated with a meeting where nothing seems to get done might get visibly agitated and tell a colleague what a waste of time it is to attend the meeting. Another person decides to make the meeting better, captures action items, creates and circulates an agenda, keeps time, and makes a list of any off-topic agenda items.

The difference between these two people is their mindset about the exact same situation. The mindset of the first person leads him to be a spectator "in the spectator stands" watching and talking about the "game," but nothing changes—the meeting is still poor. The mindset of the second person gets her out of "the spectator stands" onto the "field of play," and it changes the game—the meeting gets better.

Likewise, to be a great leader, you have to choose the mindset of great leadership. To be a great team, everyone on the team has to choose the mindset of great teams. For this reason, we start this book with a piece of high-performance psychology: to *Be a Better Team by Friday*, you first have to *choose* to do it together.

As soon as you choose to do it, you're already better.

CHOOSE EMPOWERED MINDSETS

We live in a time that requires us all to adapt our ways of working together. Since March 2020, things have been in flux, and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. We're not going to be able to do things the way we have in the past. As a society, we are all learning to adapt to fast-changing social, environmental, and health situations. And that's not going to slow down any time soon.

Your teams must choose to respond to changes with a mindset that's ready to adapt. To do this, you have to shift from a fixed mindset rooted in "how things have been done" to a growth mindset that asks, "How do we need to grow as a team to adapt?"

In *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck describes a "fixed" mindset versus a "growth" mindset. A person with a fixed mindset is more likely to give up when they experience a challenge. A person with a growth mindset faces the same challenge and learns everything they can to overcome it.

Same situation, different mindset.

We know feedback is essential to growth. Everyone receives difficult feedback from time to time that's hard to hear. If someone has a fixed mindset, they'll hear this type of feedback as an indictment of their character or behavior. They might respond with all the reasons it's not true or not their fault. They go home and spend the evening arguing with the feedback in their head (or out loud with their spouse). "She doesn't know what she's talking about," they complain while secretly thinking, "I guess I'm just not good at my job, and now I have proof."

Professional athletes, elite performers, and those trained to choose a growth mindset receive the same feedback but respond

differently. At first, it might sting—difficult feedback is hard for anyone to take. But instead of defending themselves, they think:

Okay, that's disappointing to hear. Maybe I don't agree with all of it.
But what can I learn from this?
How can I use it to improve?

They're continuously willing to take feedback into account, and their performance improves—often significantly—as a result.

Basically, they grow.

A growth mindset is an example of an **empowered mindset**. People with an empowered mindset think in such a way that it leads them to take powerful actions. People with empowered mindsets move toward what they want, even in the face of adversity. Great leaders practice coming back to an empowered mindset again and again and again. This empowered mindset sets the stage to accelerate peak-team performance.

A fixed mindset is an example of a **disempowered mindset**. Disempowered mindsets lead to disempowered actions. Someone with a disempowered mindset will feel helpless to change a situation.

We worked with a team that discovered that a client planning to invest a large sum toward new product development was backing out. The news was devastating, and everyone on the team naturally felt deeply disappointed. It was a tough afternoon. But the team had the marks of high performance. They turned the situation around in one day, helping each other shift to see new options. They asked each other questions like:

"What other options do we have?"

"Knowing what we know now, what could we do differently?"

"What happened has happened. Now, what's next?"

The team reached out to their network, and soon their director was on the phone with three new potential investors. They had to do some significant redesigns, but eventually found a funding partner that made a *larger* investment than what they had lined up in the first place. Their empowered mindsets inspired them to act in ways that produced phenomenal results despite a tremendous setback.

What might that same situation have looked like on a lower-performing team? Finger-pointing, complaining, and "it wasn't my fault." Maybe they would blame the investors—or each other. They see the situation as a series of problems and figure, "There's no way out of this. Why try?" They give up.

And if even *one person* on your team has a disempowered mindset, your entire team's ability to collaborate will be compromised. A study on group behavior found that one "bad apple" on the team can bring team productivity down 30 to 40 percent. In other words, negativity is contagious.[7]

OVERCOME THE NEGATIVITY BIAS

Humans are hardwired to complain. Perhaps you have noticed that it's easier to focus on what's wrong than on what's going well. This is due to a phenomenon called the **negativity bias**. In their book, *The Power of Bad*, John Tierney and Roy F. Baumeister define this bias as the "universal tendency for negative events and emotions to affect us more strongly than positive ones."[8] While we might think we are being objective, our brains are often *biased* toward seeing the negative.

Imagine you have a day where things are going your way. All day long, people compliment you on your work, your ideas, and even on how good you look. You lead a great meeting and make tremendous

strides on a project you've been working on for months. But right before the end of the day, you have a last-minute conversation with your boss, who shares that a client is unhappy with your work from a few weeks ago. That night after work, what do you go home thinking about? For most people, that last piece of bad news overshadows the day's positive events.

The tendency to focus on what's wrong is programmed into the more primal regions of our brains. It's a survival strategy. There's a tiny part of your brain called the amygdala dedicated to ensuring you're safe from harm. The amygdala is on the lookout for anything that could go wrong. Our primitive ancestors survived because they could stay vigilant enough to avoid physical threats in dangerous environments. If we keep our eyes out for tigers, we can get out of the way before they eat us.

Most corporate employees are not surrounded by tigers, but our brains are still at work, on the lookout for danger. There are advantages to seeing potential threats in the workplace, but not at the expense of slanting our bias toward the negative. A bias is not an accurate perception, which is why it's called a bias! This negativity bias tells us that things are much worse than they are.

When a team leader has too much negativity bias, the team that works for them will, too. One executive we worked with consistently complained about his company's problems, and everything he feared would go wrong in the future. The situation sounded so dire that we asked him, "Do you think your company will fail?" He looked a bit shocked and said, "Oh, not at all. In fact, this was the best year in the history of the company."

Unfortunately, he brought this negativity bias into his team meetings. Because he spent so much time and energy pointing out

everything that was wrong and *could* go wrong, his team thought things were terrible. Their meetings were unfocused and fueled by stress. They were operating under an immense sense of unnecessary pressure. They made reactive decisions to avoid bad things happening instead of proactively working toward a shared vision.

We suggested he focus time during every meeting to discuss what he saw was going well. This small shift away from the negativity bias led to immediate improvement of team morale. With more focus on their accomplishments, the stress and worry were reduced. As a result, decisions they made focused more on working toward their goals and less on "fighting the fires" of constant dread and concern. It's incredible how such a simple switch can produce immediate results.

YOUR MINDSET—AND THESE PRACTICES— WILL GET YOU THROUGH

Escaping the trap of the negativity bias requires choosing a different mindset about the situation. The most important aspect of a mindset is that *a mindset is something you choose*. While circumstances might be out of your control, how you think about your situation is always a choice.

Of course, choosing an empowered mindset doesn't mean your challenges go away. Negativity bias will still creep up, too, because you're human. The difference is that when you have the self-awareness to Choose Your Mindset, you can get out of your own way faster.

When COVID-19 hit, one company we worked with saw their entire industry shut down overnight. They had only a few months

of cash left, and prospective investors started doubting whether their product had viability during a pandemic. It almost seemed inevitable: they could have easily folded, and few would have questioned that choice.

But they didn't. They chose to reinvent themselves and their product—fast. Within ninety days, they secured a new, top-tier lead investor, and six months later they had designs for a new product in a new industry. The executive team was determined to find a solution, even when the odds were against them. Talk about an empowered mindset! Had *anyone* on this team succumbed to their negativity bias with a disempowered mindset—complaining, pointing fingers, giving up—they could not have orchestrated such a speedy turnaround.

On lower-performing teams, the weeds of disempowered mindsets—particularly at the executive level—make it difficult to regain equilibrium in a crisis. Even if a company is financially stable and experiencing a reasonable degree of success, high yields in a strong market often mask inefficiency and lead to an infectious, company-wide complacency. When tough times arise (and they will), the fragile infrastructure becomes exposed, and things fall apart.

On high-performing teams, everyone on the team challenges their negativity biases. These team members rarely complain or judge each other poorly. They deal with the tough stuff by taking a moment to absorb the upset and moving quickly into finding solutions. They are direct with each other and ask for what they need. They coach and challenge each other to be better. Team members think positively about their teammates, which reinforces a different set of behaviors and outcomes. Because they see the strengths in the people they work with, they act in a way that empowers each other.

Now, to be clear, simply *deciding* to have an empowered mindset won't get you to a place where you can achieve all these things. You'll need to embrace every practice in this book to build the trust, communication skills, work style, and motivation needed to tackle problems in such a proactive and collaborative way.

But you can't do any of it without first choosing an empowered mindset.

You can even notice while you read this book: Are you in an empowered mindset right now? Or are you reading this with a negativity bias?

The choice is yours!

(Of course, we encourage you to choose to read with an empowered mindset.)

CHOOSE IN EVERY MOMENT

Keep in mind that your mindset is ever-changing. On average, you think at least six thousand thoughts a day.[9] The way you think is always in flux. It's natural and normal to slip into the negativity bias from time to time.

Great leaders don't think, "Oh, I learned about mindsets before. I always have an empowered mindset." Instead, they practice self-awareness and choose their mindset in every moment.

In the book *The Mental Game of Baseball* by H. A. Dorfman, sports psychologist Michael Maloney notes, "The difference between two athletes is 20% physical and 80% mental."[10] A golfer notices and chooses her mindset every single step on the golf course and makes constant adjustments to stay empowered to win. She will even have mindset coaches to help her do it, using music and physical cues

and often following highly structured preparation rituals to get in the right mindset before the game. When Olympic athletes have headphones in before the race, they prepare and maintain a certain mindset. Baseball Hall of Famers Hank Aaron and Wade Boggs would practice visualizing hitting the ball to get into an empowered state before stepping up to the plate. Boxer Muhammad Ali famously repeated, "I am the greatest," and became it.

For the highest performers, a mindset is not one and done. Many leaders do not realize that, just like with great athletes, moment-to-moment mindset awareness and choice are equally essential in work as in sports. To be great at work, you Choose Your Mindset in every moment.

Most importantly, in any circumstance, you remember that you *always* have a choice to change the way you think.

WE *ALL* NEED TO GET OUT OF OUR OWN WAY

Your mindset is the foundation that your entire leadership operating system relies on. So, before we get to the rest of the practices, here is a set of tools to help you and your team stay aware of your mindset at all times—so you can change it when you need to.

Many executives make the mistake of thinking that once they learn how to choose an empowered mindset, they'll never be in a disempowered mindset again. It doesn't work that way. Even the best performers will fall into victim mode sometimes. We're basically in a disempowered mindset whenever we feel frustrated, and we need to do the work of pulling ourselves out of it. But the longer you do this, the quicker you'll be able to recognize your mindset and change your lens.

As a leader, it's important to be aware of this common oversight. Many executives believe that choosing your mindset is a task *everyone else* on their team needs to do, not them. Nobody is excused from putting in this work, including you!

Life and work are difficult, and it's normal to feel disempowered sometimes. But what distinguishes the high-performing teams from their lower-performing counterparts is that every member—at every level—supports each other, again and again, to return to empowered mindsets regardless of the circumstances.

The practice of choosing an empowered mindset is a simple one, but it requires tremendous effort. For this reason, we recommend that teams commit to the discipline as a group for shared accountability. The following three steps will help your team shift from a disempowered mindset to an empowered one:

1. Realize you are in a disempowered mindset.
2. Choose an empowered mindset.
3. Coach each other to choose empowered mindsets.

1. Realize You Are In a Disempowered Mindset

The first step in choosing an empowered mindset is recognizing you are in a disempowered mindset in the first place. Another term for this is **self-awareness**. Often, when you are stuck in a disempowered mindset, you don't realize it.

Imagine you're sitting on a stopped highway complaining about traffic. You say to yourself, "There are too many cars on the road. This city is growing too fast." You have a whole conversation about it in your head. Meanwhile, your spouse is sitting beside you,

perfectly content, thinking about what to order for dinner at the restaurant you're going to.

The traffic is not irritating *everyone*. How you're *thinking* about the traffic is irritating you. The orange-colored glasses you're wearing are usually unconscious at first. You don't realize in the moment that how you are thinking is a choice. You think that's just the way things are. (Idiot drivers, lousy roads, etc.) The choice, however, is as simple as asking yourself:
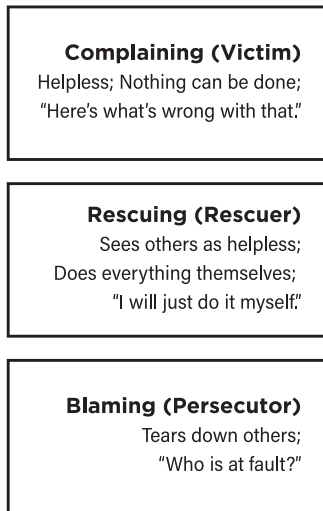
"How could I think differently about this situation?"

Knowing that you *can* choose a different way of thinking is critical. But you have to want to. Sometimes, venting might feel good. Maybe you'd rather feel the pleasure of complaining than do the hard work of choosing a different mindset. But how good does complaining *really* feel in the long run? It's important to realize that, while you can complain all you want if it helps you blow off steam, you still have a choice. If you wanted to think differently, you could.

Choosing a different mindset is always up to you. It's the one thing that no one and no situation can take away from you: the way you think is entirely up to you. It's what Holocaust survivor and psychologist Viktor Frankl points to in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*: "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."[11]

When your disempowered mindset *is* unconscious, though, you need the people around you to point it out. When someone you work with skillfully points out your mindset, you can choose a different way of thinking. That's why high-performing teammates help each other grow in self-awareness like great coaches. They can help you see your blind spots—if you're willing to let them.

The work of psychiatrist Stephen Karpman, MD, provides the most useful model we've found to help teams work with their mindsets. He called his model the "drama triangle."[12] Regarding interpersonal dysfunction, people usually exhibit one of three disempowered behaviors: complaining, rescuing, and blaming. (Note: In Karpman's work, he refers to these three as specific roles people play: the "victim," the "rescuer," and the "persecutor." We find it helpful to speak about the particular behaviors someone exhibits versus the role someone plays.)

DISEMPOWERED MINDSETS

Complaining (Victim)
Helpless; Nothing can be done;
"Here's what's wrong with that."

Rescuing (Rescuer)
Sees others as helpless;
Does everything themselves;
"I will just do it myself."

Blaming (Persecutor)
Tears down others;
"Who is at fault?"

If an individual or team is stuck in a **complaining mindset**, they whine a lot. They see themselves as victims of their situation. They think they're powerless to do anything about it, so they talk (a lot) about their problems. They campaign aggressively to justify their points of view, trying to convince others that the situation is

hopeless and there's "nothing we can do about it." They say things like, "The problem with that is...", "Yeah but...", and "That can't work because..."

A person stuck in a complaining mindset doesn't cope well with conflict. He wants to be saved or rescued from his problems. When he complains, he's grasping onto someone or something to make himself feel better. He hopes his teammates will validate his point by saying something like, "I see what you mean. That *is* terrible." Sometimes if a person isn't available, he looks to be rescued by things like TV, food, alcohol, or shopping to make himself feel better. As you can imagine, a complaining mindset can be extremely toxic to a team.

If an individual or team is stuck in the **rescuer mindset**, she tries to fix everyone else's problems. A person in this mindset is seen as a helper, and usually doesn't realize this is a disempowered mindset. It *seems* at first like a good thing to be a rescuer. But by doing everything for everybody else, she doesn't empower others to be resourceful (and takes on the burden of a lot of extra work). She can't stand to see others suffer, so she "rescues" them from the discomfort of challenge or failure. She usually thinks her own way of doing something is the "right" way. She often says, "If I don't do it, it won't get done," or, "I'll just do it." She's swamped because she's rescuing everybody else. Rescuers often have people come to them repeatedly with their difficulties, unloading complaints—and problems—on the rescuer. Sometimes a person with a rescuing mindset even quietly resents those they help, thinking, "Why do I have to do everything?"

If an individual or team is stuck in the **blaming mindset**, they continually find fault in others. A person with a blaming mindset

harshly judges others' ideas, talents, or contributions. When he receives feedback, he says things like, "I would have done that but…" and makes excuses about why it's not his fault. He continually accuses others of being wrong by making all-encompassing statements like, "They *always (or never)*…" or, "If I worked with smarter or more competent people, I could…" Those with a blaming mindset tear down other people and work hard to get the rest of the team to agree. At their worst, people with habitually blaming mindsets can be intimidating or bullying.

Here is an example of these three mindsets in action:

Johnny, a mid-level developer, has been working on a project with Sharon, the Chief Product Officer. This is the first time he has worked with an executive in the company, and it's not going as well as he hoped. One day, Sharon lets Johnny know she will replace him on the project if he doesn't pick up the pace. She also suggests he take an additional training course if he wants to advance at the company.

Johnny leaves the meeting crushed. He finds his teammate, Steve, in the hallway and tells him what happened, ending with, "You know, I'm sick of this company. The leadership here is awful. This place used to be great, but it's not like it was two years ago."

His teammate nods and says, "Sharon, has no idea what she's talking about. All she does is make more demands. I see it all the time. You don't need more training. You're one of the best we've got. You're right; I remember back when it was more creative around here. It's too process-driven now. I miss the old days, but what can you do?"

They spend a few more minutes discussing the problems and then return to work. Johnny feels a bit better until he meets with Sharon the next time.

In this case, Johnny has a complaining mindset. He complains to Steve, who immediately takes a rescuer mindset—rescuing Johnny from feeling bad by agreeing with him. They are *both* in a blaming mindset when they blame the company's leadership for the deterioration of the culture. Nothing gets done to change anything, but they do feel a little better for a while.

Until Johnny realizes he's stuck in a disempowered mindset, he'll continue to feel powerless at his job. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy: he believes he's powerless, so he acts in a way that reflects this belief. He stays stuck. But what will it take for him to get out of his disempowered mindset? First, the self-awareness that he is in a disempowered mindset. Then, the knowledge of what a different, more empowered mindset would look like. And finally, he must choose the empowered mindset.
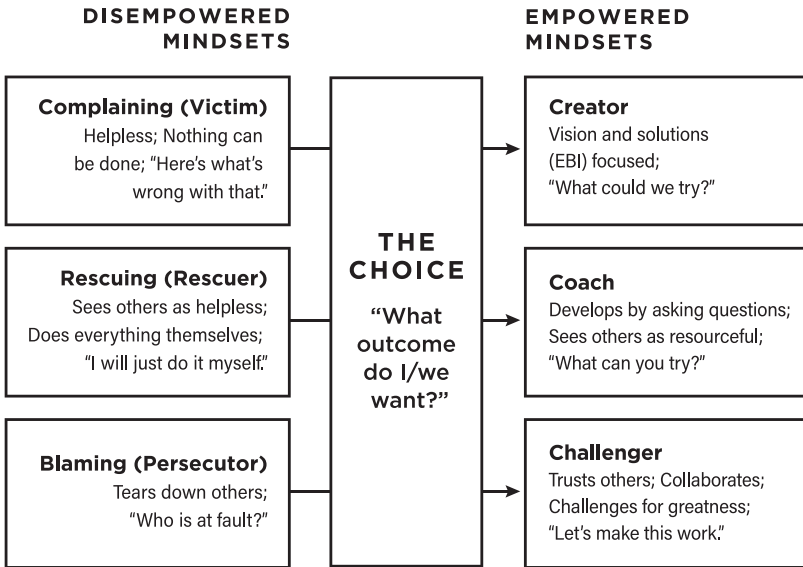
You can use the language of disempowered mindsets to help you identify when you're stuck. As long as the thoughts in your mind are complaining about something or someone, thinking about everyone else's problems, or making negative judgments about people, you can be sure you are in a disempowered mindset. Usually, we don't realize when we're stuck in a mindset. By adopting a shared language around disempowered mindsets, team members can more easily help one another by pointing out when we have slipped into one.

2. Choose the Empowered Mindset

The good news is, for each disempowered mindset, there is a counter empowered mindset to choose from. In his book *The Power of TED* (*The Empowerment Dynamic)*, David Emerald identifies three empowerment mindsets to choose whenever you get stuck in a

disempowered mindset. He calls these the *creator*, the *coach*, and the *challenger*.[13]

Here is a map of these mindsets to support your application of this practice:

DISEMPOWERED MINDSETS	THE CHOICE	EMPOWERED MINDSETS
Complaining (Victim) Helpless; Nothing can be done; "Here's what's wrong with that."		**Creator** Vision and solutions (EBI) focused; "What could we try?"
Rescuing (Rescuer) Sees others as helpless; Does everything themselves; "I will just do it myself."	"What outcome do I/we want?"	**Coach** Develops by asking questions; Sees others as resourceful; "What can you try?"
Blaming (Persecutor) Tears down others; "Who is at fault?"		**Challenger** Trusts others; Collaborates; Challenges for greatness; "Let's make this work."

We show you exactly how to do all the action items mentioned in our breakdown of empowered mindsets below. Each tool in the chapters ahead teaches you how to listen, ask for help, give feedback, and adjust your work style so you can experience similar—and pretty immediate—transformations in your team.

From Complaining ➜ Creator

In her book of essays, *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now*, Maya Angelou recounts a piece of advice that her grandmother gave her as a small child: "What you're supposed to do when you don't

like a thing is change it. If you can't change it, change the way you think about it. Don't complain."[14]

Her grandmother's wisdom is at the heart of this discipline.

The complaining mindset keeps you stuck talking about what's wrong without doing anything about it, but a **creator mindset** asks:

"What is the specific outcome I/we want?"

"What could we try to get there?"

High-performing individuals or teams choosing an empowered mindset understand that difficult stuff happens all the time. Instead of complaining, you move quickly into action to make something better happen. You focus on the outcome you want versus getting stuck talking in circles about how bad things are.

One team manager we worked with frequently came to his coaching sessions with a cloud over his head. Week after week, he reported nothing but complaints. "Everything I try doesn't work. The problem is the executive team, and my boss specifically." Then he would give us a lot of reasons why he was never going to make any progress at his company.

At one session, we asked him to review the empowered mindsets model. "Looking at this, which mindset are you coming from?" He looked at the model for a long time and grew a bit sheepish as self-awareness dawned on him. "I guess I've been in the complaining mindset, haven't I?"

We asked, "What do you want in this situation?"

He told us he really wanted a relationship with his boss like he had at his old company. He wanted a sense of partnership and mentorship. He missed that and found it challenging to work with his current boss. We asked him for one suggestion on how he might build that kind of relationship with his boss. He thought for a moment

and said, "You know, I've never actually asked for what I want from her. Maybe I could start by asking for a bit more guidance."

He did just that, asking her, specifically, for more mentorship. Over the next six months, he set up a bi-weekly meeting with her, coming to each session with specific questions. As time went on, trust between them grew. Not only had she become a mentor, but their collaboration improved. She began to come to him with questions as well. Because he continued to take actions from a creator mindset, his relationship with his boss improved significantly.

From Rescuing ➜ Coach

Where the rescuing mindset tells you to fix everyone else's problems, the **coach mindset** has you thinking about ways to support others to fix their own problems. Instead of jumping in and doing everything *for* them, you prioritize developing others' capacity to find solutions for themselves. An individual or team that chooses a coach mindset assumes that everyone is growing every day. They see challenges as opportunities for growth. Instead of rescuing, trying to fix the problem by giving advice, or doing it themselves, they coach each other by asking questions like:

"What do you think are some potential solutions?"

"What have you tried?"

"What could you try?"

"What will you do differently?"

One manager we worked with had a phenomenal capacity for doing a significant amount of work—60 to 80 hours a week. But she was near burnout. After learning about the rescuer mindset, she had an epiphany. She realized she was doing other people's work for them. She wanted to be helpful by not overloading them with work.

She tried to rescue people from having too much to do but ended up overly stressed herself without any time for a personal life.

As this manager became more aware of her mindset, she began delegating projects to her team and developing their capacity to complete them. She spent a lot of time early on training them and then became more hands-off, serving as their coach and mentor. When they came to her with problems, she asked them how they would solve the issue instead of fixing it herself.

To her surprise, over time, her teammates started asking for extra work; they loved having more responsibility! Some weeks she delegated up to 80 percent of the work she had been doing, freeing her up to think more strategically about the team's next six months and easing the stress she had taken on. She also used some of the spare time to take a regular yoga class she had always put off because she's been "too busy."

From Blaming ➔ Challenger

Where the blaming mindset makes everyone else wrong, the **challenger mindset** figures out how to work together to address the challenge. A challenger stands shoulder to shoulder with you, demanding you to bring all the greatness you have forward. Individuals and teams who choose a challenger mindset believe every obstacle can be overcome. It's not always easy, but they challenge each other to be better and solve problems. Instead of blaming, they believe in others' capabilities and help each other achieve. They see greatness and potential in others and celebrate their success.

We often hear examples of great bosses being tough but supportive. We hear things like, "The best boss I ever had wasn't always easy to work with, but she always saw that I had more potential

than I saw in myself. She challenged me to be great, and I grew more working with her than in my whole career." That's what a challenger mindset brings.

The challenger mindset asks questions like:

"What would you do if you could not fail?"

"What do you need to be great?"

"What specific actions will you take?"

One manager we worked with liked to say, "You can't fix stupid." He believed he worked with incompetent people, which he mentioned a lot. In meetings, he'd blame his team's mediocre results on their lack of effort. When we asked what he was doing about it, he said, "I've given up trying. My team members are too lazy to want to do anything."

When we first introduced him to the disempowered mindset, he had a hard time seeing himself as a blamer. But when we asked, "If your job is, first and foremost, to make sure your team excels, how are you getting in the way of your team's performance? In what ways are you not living up to your end of the bargain?" This was tough for him to hear, but eventually, he admitted he saw his team's lack of effort as a personal failure. He was up for trying something different. He also admitted something else: he felt uncomfortable pushing his team harder. He didn't want to deal with their complaints. Ultimately, he thought it would get worse if he pushed too hard.

The first thing we asked him to do was to identify what his team members did well. Then we asked him to identify what specific areas of performance he wanted to see improve. He met with each individual and gave specific feedback about what they did well and where they needed to step up. He told them he believed they could do it, even though it would be hard. He asked, "What do you need

from me to do this well?" He also identified specifically what he could hold each of them accountable for—and let them know he'd support them along the way.

What this manager learned shaped his thinking. By having one-on-one conversations with each person on his team, he began to rebuild the trust he'd lost over months of blaming them for their lack of effort. He saw new ways to support each team member, challenging them to get better results. As outcomes started to improve, he realized the team had much more competence and capability than he had previously acknowledged. It took a shift in **mindset** from blaming to challenging to see it. It had been easier for him to blame everyone for their laziness rather than push for greatness. This shift required his willingness to take on the role of challenger, pushing his teammates in a way that supported their growth.

3. Coach Each Other to Choose Empowered Mindsets

Even on high-performing teams, every single person will get stuck in disempowered mindsets from time to time. We are all human beings, and we are all dealing with immense challenges. It's normal (and sometimes necessary) to get upset by things. But high-performing teams are different from other teams because they help each other choose empowering mindsets. They coach each other to return to an empowered mindset, especially in the face of adversity.

Let's revisit the story of Johnny (the guy complaining about Sharon to his coworker, Steve) and his complaining mindset from earlier in this chapter. The day after complaining to Steve, Johnny goes to his manager, Isabel, with the exact same complaint. "Sharon doesn't know what she wants and has no idea how hard I'm working. I don't see how I can win with her."

Isabel has an option here. Immediately, she thinks, "I really don't need Sharon deflating my team members. We don't have time for this. I'll talk to her tomorrow and take care of it." But she catches herself: if she fixes Johnny's problem for him, that's a rescuer mindset. She wants to empower her team, not rescue them.

Instead, she asks if he's up for some coaching around the situation, which he agrees to. She practices deep listening and makes sure she understands Johnny's full perspective. Then she shows Johnny the chart of the disempowered and empowered mindsets, asking, "Which mindset are you in right now?"

Johnny doesn't love admitting it, but he can see he's been in the complaining mindset. Isabel asks him, "What are some outcomes you might want in this situation?"

"I want to deliver a great product, and I want Sharon to recognize I can do it."

Isabel continues, "What are some options you might try to get there?"

Johnny thinks about it briefly. "Well, Sharon suggested I take an additional training course. But what good would that do? She's just going to find more problems with my work."

At this point, Isabel challenges Johnny, "It sounds like you don't think there's anything you can do. But you're talented and have the capability to do great work. If you *could* prove this to Sharon, what might be some ways you can get her to see this?"

Johnny thought about it. He acknowledged additional training could be useful. He added that he didn't always communicate with Sharon about the work he was doing. It was going to be a stretch for him, but he agreed to schedule a weekly meeting with Sharon for the next four weeks to get her input on his work. Instead of giving

up and complaining about it, he chose to take action that, while challenging, could get him on track.

By the time the project was done, Johnny and Sharon had developed such a great working relationship that Sharon began requesting him as the developer on her future projects. She knew she could trust him to get the work done thoughtfully and on time, and that he'd step up to problem solve if they ran into hurdles along the way. Johnny was promoted to senior developer shortly after he and Sharon began their third project together. He also took on a leadership role in his department, training junior developers to work better with executives (using many of the tools in this book). *And* Johnny shared with us that Sharon became one of the most important mentors in his life.

Here is a simple structure for coaching someone like Isabel did for Johnny. You can use this structure to support your colleagues to help them shift from disempowered to empowered mindsets:

> Here is a simple structure for coaching someone like Isabel did for Johnny. You can use this structure to support your colleagues to help them shift from disempowered to empowered mindsets.
>
> *Step 1,* ask questions:
>
> 1. Ask them to explain their frustration to you.
> 2. Practice deep listening. Make sure they acknowledge you understand their situation exactly. (We cover deep listening in the next chapter.)
> 3. Ask: Are you up for some coaching on this?
> 4. Show them the Empowerment Mindsets grid.

5. Ask: Which mindset would you say you are in right now?

6. Ask: What is the best-case outcome you want in this situation?

7. Ask: What are some specific actions that could help you move toward that outcome?

8. Ask: What, exactly, will you do?

Step 2: Practice deep listening, is critical here. It may be hard to resist jumping in and offering your solution to a problem right away, but rescuing is not coaching. Instead, encourage your colleagues to return to empowerment mindsets and find solutions for themselves. You might be surprised at how people are more resourceful at finding answers for themselves than you could ever be, even if you think you know best.

THE ONE QUESTION TO REMEMBER

At the heart of this practice of choosing your mindset is an understanding that your mindset is always your choice, no matter the circumstance. Sure, it's hard to do, and it requires admitting that you can take responsibility for your situation. When you choose a new mindset, though, you see new solutions. When you make this choice, you have the power to change your circumstances.

This choice always comes down to one simple question:

"In this situation, what is the outcome I/you/we want, and what can I/you/we do about it?"

Start there.

CHOOSE YOUR MINDSET

STRUCTURE FOR APPLICATION

1. Practice, as a team, pointing out your tendency to move into a negativity bias. Ask, "What is also going well that we can focus on?"

2. Teach the matrix of disempowered versus empowered mindsets to all team members and get permission from each team member to coach each other.

3. Throughout the week, practice identifying any time your thoughts go into complaining about something, thinking about fixing someone else's problem, or blaming someone. Ask yourself, "Am I in a disempowered mindset right now?"

4. Any time you or someone on your team is in a disempowered mindset:

   - *See* the choice you/they have by identifying which mindset you/they are in.
   - Ask, "Do I/you want to choose a different mindset?"
   - Help yourself/them choose a different mindset by asking, "What outcome do I/you want in this situation?"
   - Ask, "What are some options for moving forward in that direction?"

For more insight on how your organization scores in terms of leadership and company culture, you can find our fullCompany Assessment tool at **www.betterteambook.com**