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HOW DO YOU DEFINE A HIGH PERFORMING TEAM?

Martini: They are those where there is a strong

commitment by the group to successfully demonstrate a consistent standard of excellence, not just with the end result, but with the necessary steps along the way to achieving the team's goals.

It is all about the team — and not about various team members achieving their own individual goals for success. Egos are checked at the door, there is a focus on the end result and frequent communication and collaboration among team members to get the job done well. High-performing teams are dynamic, not static. Their skillsets and approaches evolve toward optimizing results across various performance levers.

Susler: Tina really captures it. I would simply add that a high-performing team, whether from the same or multiple disciplines, is a combination of people who work well together — cooperatively, creatively, effectively and efficiently. Two highlights of high-performing teams are members that learn from each other and are decisive.

Why are high-performing teams important?

Martini: As the legal profession and business world continue to evolve, and demand continues to remain flat or decline, particularly in the wake of COVID-19, it's critically important that professionals of all types look for ways to meaningfully differentiate themselves to effectively compete.

They are much better positioned to provide that something extra to help organizations succeed. It's because their working styles, commitment to success and team orientation create synergies that do not exist among other professionals. Furthermore, high-performing teams are often different from each other in terms skillset and mindset. They often bring a diversified approach and attitude to problem-solving that may not otherwise be present, which generally leads to better results.

Susler: They are critical to the success of any business as they are responsible for not only accomplishing tasks and meeting goals, but in enabling the business to excel. No one person can do anything completely alone. In my professional world, I am one of two in-house lawyers in a company with more than 30 different operating businesses located in three different countries.

I rely on multiple teams in each business comprised of colleagues across disciplines — sales, operations, accounting and finance, human resources,



HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS

Commitment to the overall goal is critical

By CHRISTINA L. MARTINI and DAVID G. SUSLER

safety and outside counsel. Together, we not only keep business flowing and reduce risk exposure, we create lasting relationships with customers and with each other. Without high-performing teams, work will grind to a halt and, quite frankly, work would be less enjoyable and fulfilling.

Lessons learned about creating and leading high performing teams?

Martini: I've had the good fortune of working with a few high-performing teams. I have learned the power of a high-performing team should not be underestimated, especially now given the market challenges we all face.

They also make a huge difference in terms of job satisfaction, since high performers like to be surrounded by others who are the same way. It is also important to reward your team members for a job well done and to be up to speed on current market conditions and compensation to ensure that people are treated fairly.

Finally, it is important to remember that teams are dynamic and fluid. Personnel changes, business growth and contraction, and changes in client demographics are among some of the issues that will impact high-performing teams moving forward and need to be watched closely.

Susler: Be a good teammate; even if you are the leader. It takes time to build a team.

Building a reputation as a good teammate also helps with personnel transitions on the team as you instantly have credibility with the new teammates, which eases the transitions. It is important for in-house lawyers when working with their non-lawyer colleagues on occasion to expressly remind them that we are on the same team. Words and actions together build high-performing teams.

Take the time to get to know your teammates as people; take a few minutes now and then to casually chat with them, whether it is stopping by when in the office or taking a couple of minutes at the beginning or end of a phone call or video meeting. Doing those things is simple and they go a tremendously long way toward building high-performing teams because they build trust and camaraderie and send the message that you are all on the same team. CL

Christina L. Martini is a practicing attorney, author and columnist. She is a partner with McDermott Will & Emery and focuses her practice on domestic and international trademark, copyright, domain name, internet, advertising and unfair competition law.

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To submit a question, e-mail questions.insideout@gmail.com