

Top Gun Teamwork Certification Course

Online Content Video Notes - Facilitator's Guide



TOP GUN TEAMWORK (TGT) CERTIFICATION COURSE GOAL:

The TGT Course Goal is to certify a Top Gun Teamwork Facilitator who is able to confidently facilitate the EAGLE and F-4 methodologies with their teams.

CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:

- Completion of all TGT online training
- A complete review of *Debrief to Win* (DTW) in its entirety
- **Leading 7 EAGLE Planning Sessions and 7 F-4 Debrief Sessions**
 - o Documenting outcomes and learning from each of these sessions
 - o Submission of proof of completion to VMax Group for final certification determination
- Participation in the Live Coaching Calls and Slack Channel

ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS FOR A PRACTICING FACILITATOR:

- Slideshow projection capability
- Whiteboard (markers, eraser)
- Table/chairs
- Notebooks, pens

COURSE FLOW

MODULE 1 - INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

Lesson 1.0 - Introduction

Lesson 1.1 - Overall Course Objectives

Module 1 - Lesson 1 Quiz

MODULE 2 - THE FOUNDATIONS OF TOP GUN TEAMWORK

Lesson 1 - Background and Foundational Principles

Lesson 1.0 - Background and Foundational Objectives

Lesson 1.1 - Military & Aviation Origins of the Debrief Methodology

Lesson 1.2 - Foundational Principles and Supporting Evidence

Module 2 - Lesson 1 Quiz

Lesson 2 - Purpose and Mission

Lesson 2.0 - Purpose and Mission Objectives

Lesson 2.1 - Organizational and Team Purpose

Lesson 2.2 - Organizational and Team Mission

Lesson 2.3 - Typical Elements of a Mission

Lesson 2.4 - Mission Sets



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Lesson 2.5 - Team Purpose and Mission Statements

Lesson 2.6 - Purpose and Mission Summary

Module 2 - Lesson 2 Quiz

Lesson 3 - The Team LifeCycle

Lesson 3.0 - The Team Life Cycle's Objectives

Lesson 3.1 - What is the Team Life Cycle?

Lesson 3.2 - Mission Planning

Lesson 3.3 - Mission Briefing

Lesson 3.4 - Mission Execution

Lesson 3.5 - Debriefing

Lesson 3.6 - Return to Mission Planning

Lesson 3.7 - Summary of The Team Life Cycle

Module 2 - Lesson 3 Quiz

Lesson 4 - The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety

Lesson 4.0 - Brief Discussion on The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety

Module 2 - Lesson 4 Quiz

MODULE 3 - SKILLSET OF A TOP GUN TEAMWORK FACILITATOR

Lesson 1 - The E.A.G.L.E. Planning Model

Lesson 1.0 - E.A.G.L.E. Planning Model Objectives

Lesson 1.1 - What is E.A.G.L.E. Planning?

Lesson 1.2 - What does E.A.G.L.E. Stand For?

Lesson 1.3 - Summary of The E.A.G.L.E. Planning Model

Module 3 - Lesson 1 Quiz

Lesson 2 - The Core Values of the Debrief

Lesson 2.0 - Debrief Core Value Objectives

Lesson 2.1 - The Basics of the Debrief

Lesson 2.2 - What are the Debrief Core Values?

Lesson 2.3 - Each Debrief Core Value Explained

Lesson 2.4 - Exercising the Debrief Core Values

Lesson 2.5 - Summary of the Debrief Core Values

Module 3 - Lesson 2 Quiz

Lesson 3 - The F4 Debrief

Lesson 3.0 - Objectives of the F4 Debrief

Lesson 3.1 - The Essential Elements of the F4 Debrief

Lesson 3.2 - Facts

Lesson 3.3 - Focus

Lesson 3.4 - Framing

Lesson 3.5 - Way Forward

Lesson 3.6 - Summary of the F4 Debrief

Module 3 - Lesson 3 Quiz

MODULE 4 - CONCLUSIONS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Lesson 1.0 - Top Gun Teamwork Conclusions and Takeaways

Lesson 2.0 - Capstone Exercise

Lesson 3.0 - Top Gun Teamwork Wrap Up

Module 4 Quiz

MODULE 5 - BONUS MATERIALS

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FACILITATOR NOTES:

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MODULE 1 - INTRODUCTION TO TOP GUN TEAMWORK AND VMAX GROUP

By the end of this module, you will understand the overall course objectives, basic flow, and course completion requirements.

VIDEO NOTES

Welcome

Welcome to the VMax Group, Top Gun Teamwork, Facilitator Certification Course.

We are excited to share this course content with you and pass on lessons learned from our experience with elite military teams and how it will benefit you and the teams you support.

The content presented here is not something we *hope* works – we KNOW it works.

That's why we are excited that you are taking this all-important first step in helping teams you work with and teams you lead reach their full potential!

While this course is separated into several modules, the overall purpose of this course is to certify you as a Top Gun Teamwork Facilitator.

As a Facilitator, you should be able to skillfully deliver the Top Gun Teamwork Methodology to teams you consult with or teams you lead.

When you deploy this content to these teams, you will inspire leader accountability, increase organizational trust, and elevate overall performance.

These combined tenets are the CORE of Top Gun Teamwork.

Each module will have its own specific objectives, but collectively, they provide all of the tools you'll need to be an expert Top Gun Teamwork facilitator.

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Now, let's look at the background of the methodology and Vmax Group's foundational principles.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Background & Foundational Principles

In the F-15, there is a small switch on the side of the cockpit, safety guarded by a red switch cover and safety wired closed. On its red cover are the letters V-M-A-X. This switch is almost never used, but when or if a pilot decides to flip that switch, an extra surge of power is instantly given to the engines and the aircraft is capable of significantly increased power from its already powerful engines.

The point here is that the potential power of the engines is already there – it just hasn't been activated or energized yet. Similarly, VMax doesn't necessarily bring any additional power from outside the aircraft, it utilizes what is already residing within the engines themselves by removing limiting elements and releasing energizing ones.

Let's rephrase...VMax doesn't necessarily bring additional talent or passion from outside – we simply help utilize what is already present and provide insights into removing potentially stale paradigms and releasing the finest inherent abilities of people.

At VMax Group – we feel that you and those you work with have untapped potential and heretofore unrealized capabilities. This course will aid you, as a facilitator, in helping teams capture these somewhat hidden aspects of leadership, teamwork, and organizational excellence. But where did these enabling ideas originate? Great question...

Fighter squadrons are known for their extreme focus on both high performance and constant improvement. One of the ways that this occurs is via a medium called "The

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Debrief.” While many organizations utilize some form of lessons learned, hotwashes, after action reports, or something similar, the fighter pilot debrief is a formalized way to improve at both a rate and level unparalleled across organizational dynamics of any type we have encountered.

Currently, all VMax Group consultants are ex-military, mostly fighter pilots. But they aren't just any random set of fighter pilots. They are predominantly graduates of the US Air Force Weapons School, the Air Force's equivalent of the US Navy's Top Gun program.¹² Each of these schools are elite and annually, only about 1% of the best instructor pilots are selected to attend.

Not all who enter complete these programs as the curricula are demanding and exacting. However, those who do complete these schools return to their squadrons as the lead instructor pilot for the unit. They are inundated with the mantra – “humble, approachable, credible” – and they are the premier fighter pilots in the world.

Here at VMax, we realized that the same lessons we learned as fighter pilots in some of the most elite military organizations in the world might benefit other types of teams.

This is where you come in. By the end of this course, you will be able to transfer much of the lessons we learned over years of military aviation in peacetime and combat to the teams you work with or lead.

At Course Completion

Course completion here produces a “Top Gun Teamwork Facilitator.” This means that the certified facilitator is able to deploy the TGT Methodology to the teams they consult with or teams they lead in an actionable way. But this is only Level 1.

Currently, VMax Group is developing even more in-depth courses and potential certifications that will take the facilitator to an even greater depth of understanding of Top Gun Teamwork's principles.

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<https://www.nellis.af.mil/About/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/284156/united-states-air-force-weapons-school/>

² <https://www.navy.com/faces-fleet-ep-19-patch-wearers>

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Additionally, once you are a certified TGT Facilitator, your relationship with VMax Group is not over – actually, it is just beginning. VMax Group is dedicated to your continued success as both a facilitator and a leader.

New content and additional levels of the TGT methodology and philosophy are scheduled to be added to VMax's repertoire and you will be among the very first to know when a new program or level is available.

These enhanced tools and additional levels will take you, your clients, and your teams even higher.

We look forward to a rewarding and lasting relationship.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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MODULE 2 - THE FOUNDATIONS OF TOP GUN TEAMWORK

This module introduces the background of the Top Gun Teamwork debrief methodology and explains the foundational information needed when learning and practicing as a Top Gun Teamwork Facilitator.

Note: This module also serves as a launching point for the rest of the course, specifically in terms of understanding the origins of debriefing and the value it brings to any type of organization.

VIDEO NOTES

Objectives

This module looks into the background of the Top Gun Teamwork methodology and also explains VMax Group's Foundational Principles.

Understanding how this course originated and having an optimal understanding of the origins of this program will help as you apply its tenets, concepts, and benefits more effectively across your teams.

This module also serves as a solid launch platform for the rest of the course. As a facilitator, it is important that you understand the origins of debriefing and the value it can bring to the teams you work with or lead.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Origins

The formalized debrief seems to have originated in the military. When service members are sent on missions, they undergo a well-known cycle. They plan, they prepare, they pre-brief, they execute the mission, and then...They debrief...A lot.

Many academic sources utilize some variation of the following definition of a debrief - “debriefs are conversational sessions that revolve around the sharing and examining of information after a specific event has taken place.”^[1]

While this is a good definition, it originates predominantly from people who have heard about or studied debriefs. Here at VMax Group, we didn't just read about, or study debriefs, *we lived them*, and we define a debrief as “the process of constructively evaluating the quality of decisions and actions everyone on the team made from planning through execution, in relation to the objectives the team set out to achieve.” This definition is one we developed over decades of experience, and it is interwoven into TGT.

Top Gun Teamwork incorporates our shared experiences, especially debriefing. We have seen first-hand what debriefs accomplish and their value in peacetime and combat operations.

Many academic sources agree. The debrief forum provides organizations with the opportunity to accomplish several important items such as,

- Celebrating successes
- Troubleshooting challenges
- Building relationships
- Providing closure and
- Making better plans for the future

These are just a few of the reasons why organizations should debrief. But who really benefits from debriefing? Well, what we have seen is,

- Leaders become better leaders
- Followers receive clearer expectations
- Teams become more effective and efficient

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- Organizations experience increasingly positive results over time

Here at VMax, one of the most common questions we get is, “If this is so valuable and beneficial, why isn’t everyone doing it?” Our answer...Because many have never been exposed to this type of approach and often, their particular job environment just doesn’t necessarily demand it.

However, in our military aviation experiences, we didn’t really have a choice – you either get better or face dire consequences.

Let’s dive in a little deeper.

Military Connections

While much of the debriefing concepts originated within the military, the military aviation community has principally taken the lead on codifying, refining, and formalizing debrief methodologies. After every mission, military aviators painstakingly recreate a chronological timeline of who knew what and when, what they decided to do with that information at the time, and then how they executed their tactics, techniques, or procedures relative to that information.

This model is often summed up as Situation Awareness, Decision, and Execution. From the most junior wingmen to the most experienced instructor pilots, each member of the team is responsible for bringing their pieces of the puzzle to the debrief – it is here that these puzzle pieces are cataloged, analyzed, and configured.

Eventually, recommendations are made to ensure better performance the next time the same or a similar situation is faced.

Without good debriefs, mistakes, sometimes dangerous or fatal become repeated or even commonplace. Excellent debriefs stop this chain by identifying root causes, creating an environment of psychological safety, and taking performance to unprecedented levels.

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Support

As we considered the validity and applicability of the debrief to leadership situations, and organizational excellence, we had to ask ourselves, “Does this really pertain to ALL organizations?” We also wondered, “is there academic or popular press support behind our approach?” The answer to both questions was a resounding “yes.”

Author Timothy Clark, PhD discusses the 4 Stages of Psychological Safety in his best-selling book. These stages include “inclusion, learner, contributor, and challenger.”^[iv] The F4 Debrief section shows the applicability of the TGT methodology and its alignment with this critically acclaimed book.

In 2002, best-selling author and management consultant, Patrick Lencioni wrote a book titled, “The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team.” In this book, he highlights the failures of teams by assigning five major reasons, namely...

1. Absence of Trust
2. Fear of Conflict
3. Lack of Commitment
4. Avoidance of Accountability and
5. Inattention to Results.”^[v]

These dysfunctions are addressed in several modules of this course and our methodology addresses each of these summarily.

Leadership guru John Maxwell writes in his book “Leadershift” that leaders must “continually learn, unlearn, and relearn” while also “living in today but thinking about tomorrow.”^[vi] These concepts are also interwoven into several modules of this course and fall within the sphere-of-influence of the TGT Methodology.



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Well-known authors James Kouzes and Barry Posner shed even more light in their books “The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership”^[vii] and also in “The Leadership Challenge.”^[viii] Here, they claim leaders must...

- model the way
- inspire a shared vision
- challenge the process
- enable others to act and
- encourage the heart

These combined qualities align perfectly with VMax Group's foundational principles and provide additional support to some of the TGT methodology's greatest attributes, such as Emotional Intelligence.

In the book Emotional Intelligence 2.0 by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, the four emotional intelligence or EQ quadrants of “self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management” are defined and expanded upon. In the TGT methodology, EQ plays a major role in ensuring a successful approach to debriefing and more specifically to leader acumen, organizational excellence, and psychological safety.

Moving on to some broader principles like mission and purpose, Simon Sinek highlights some valuable tenets such as “the emergence of trust” in his book, Start with Why.^[ix] Here, the author clarifies the importance of everyone in the organization understanding truly WHY the organization exists and communicating to the lowest levels of the organization how each individual impacts the mission and purpose by their actions and contributions to the organizational culture.

We could go on and on about the parallels and support for our approach. Truth be known, as a group of fighter pilots, we were pleasantly surprised that what we had taken for granted as “our way of doing business” enjoyed an unimaginable level of support from experts, academics, and best-selling authors!

We don't THINK you will see results from adopting our approach...We KNOW you will!

Foundational Principles

Debriefing is more than just a medium, it is the framework whereby foundational principles are realized.

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One of the more insidious aspects of modern-day leadership is something we call, asymmetrical accountability. Asymmetric accountability is where leaders expect one level of performance, integrity, or actions from themselves and something altogether different from their subordinates. This is often a “do as I say and not as I do” *modus operandi*. While this is not a new issue, Top Gun Teamwork directly addresses this negative leadership trait along with several others.

Here at VMax Group, we believe that in every successful organization, each leader is accountable for their actions, answerable to their teams, and responsible for their results. Without great leadership, even good teams often fall short. However, stable, secure, and mature leaders don't just welcome feedback and constructive criticism...they actively and professionally seek it out.

When leaders are focused on being responsible, accountable, and always improving, the TGT methodology truly blossoms, and organizations thrive. We have learned, the best leaders are always trying to perfect both the art and science of leadership. Conversely, we have noticed the worst leaders seem to have it all figured out and bring “asymmetrical accountability” to their organizations, usually to their chagrin.

Top Gun Teamwork allows no room for this type of leadership. Instead, it addresses it with the intent of fixing asymmetrical accountability and simultaneously creating a more positive and impactful atmosphere. Unlike many certification courses, TGT doesn't just focus on the leader though...we also address the core of organizational culture.

When organizations holistically embrace the TGT methodology and leaders at every level deploy Top Gun Teamwork tenets, they create an atmosphere of psychological safety and most often, employee contentment, retention, and support skyrockets.

In our experience, organizations deploying TGT across their leaders, teams, and departments enjoy newfound levels of comprehensive success as well.

In the end, leaders are most often judged by tough metrics, both tangible and intangible. Success for leaders usually means personal improvement, organizational advances, and enhanced overall results.

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Therefore, VMax Group's Foundational Principles are "leadership focused, organization centric, and results oriented." You won't find anything in this course that contradicts these foundational principles.

Now, you may be asking yourself, "is this just a bunch of fighter pilot's ideas on how to make things better?" Let's dig into that...

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Purpose and Mission

The main objective of this lesson is to help the facilitator understand Purpose and Mission and the important role they play.

While each organization has its own culture, intentions, and focus – the mission – also known as the "what" and the purpose – also known as the "why" – collectively drives the organization and its applicable teams.

From top-to-bottom, successful teams understand WHAT they are doing and WHY they are doing it. When only the most senior executives, high-level managers, or team leaders understand their purpose and mission, subordinates can become disillusioned or easily distracted.

However, when the most junior team members are aware of the big picture "what" and the deeper "why" behind their team's existence, they often gain insights into how they fit into the larger organizational efforts and become more active participants and contributors to successful holistic operations.

Understanding why your teams exist and what they are doing in support of their purpose is a powerful and impactful portion of Top Gun Teamwork.

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FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Purpose

Here at VMax Group, we consider an organization's PURPOSE as the meaning and impact of the work that organization does. The most successful organizations we've worked with comprehensively understand the "WHY" regarding their existence and often embed their purpose into their mission statements or other relevant documents.³

In Top Gun Teamwork, our emphasis is, per the title – on Teams. Regardless of the existence of a PURPOSE statement or not, it is the responsibility of leaders to ensure everyone on the team understands their PURPOSE – or in essence, WHY they exist. A team that understands their PURPOSE helps steer themselves, and often a larger section of the organization, when obstacles or contingencies arise. For better clarification, let's look at a historical example of PURPOSE.

In 1990, Iraq invaded the tiny nation of Kuwait. To make a long story short, the United Nations, over the course of a few months, decided that a coalition should be gathered to liberate Kuwait. But why?

It was decided by the United Nations that one nation invading another sovereign nation was not only wrong, but it was also immoral, unethical, and completely unjustifiable. Historically, it was a violation of international norms to not honor nor recognize established borders.

In summary, the PURPOSE of DESERT STORM was...“the global community at large should provide direct assistance to maintain the integrity of international boundaries.”

³ Start with Why and Finding Your Why – both by Simon Sinek

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That's a big PURPOSE. Nevertheless, with this PURPOSE in mind, the coalition then had to figure out the PURPOSE of each Team within the coalition.

Moving from something like an organizational or coalition PURPOSE to a Team concept should not be much of a leap. Each individual team exists primarily to support the larger organization's PURPOSE.

In Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith's book, "The Wisdom of Teams," they mention that while most leaders recognize the value of teams and teamwork, there are often faulty assumptions which prevent leaders from taking full advantage of the teams' existence.⁴

One of those faulty assumptions is that the teams and their leaders already know their unique PURPOSE and how they fit into the larger organization's PURPOSE.

Truth be told, many teams are hard-working, well-intentioned entities that are doing pretty good work with what they have, but their vector is not squarely on target because their purpose remains somewhat clouded.

What we have experienced is that when they are exposed to the Top Gun Teamwork methodology, they suddenly experience an increase in performance, contentment, and ultimately retention of talent. Why?

Because they finally reach a higher level of understanding of their own team's WHY and how they are enabling and enhancing the even greater organizational WHY.⁵

Without a full understanding of the Team's WHY – they will most likely falter in their team's mission as well. So, let's take a look at MISSION.

⁴ Katzenbach, Jon R., and Douglas K. Smith. *The wisdom of teams: Creating the high-performance organization*. Harvard Business Review Press, 2015.

⁵ Vandergriff, Donald and Webber, Stephen. *Mission Command – The Who, What, Where, When, and Why – An Anthology*. 2017. Page 5 – Cohesion eliminates internal friction by creating common understanding of not only the battlefield, but the units' role on the battlefield.

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FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Mission

An organization's MISSION is the big picture of WHAT that organization does.

Back to the DESERT STORM scenario, the PURPOSE or the "WHY" of the coalition was internationally recognized boundaries declare a nation's sovereignty. Without a recognized boundary, the nation is not truly sovereign, and it is also vulnerable. That was the WHY behind the operation – the operation's PURPOSE if you will.

The MISSION, however, or the "WHAT" for the allied coalition was to liberate Kuwait.⁶ That was the Mission.

- The WHY? Boundaries are important
- The WHAT? Liberate Kuwait to demonstrate the importance of PURPOSE

Of special note, WHAT an organization does, what they accomplish is not just one Team – it is accomplished by the "team of teams" highlighted in retired General Stanley McChrystal's book.⁷ Bringing a service to a region, a product to an area, or combat capability to the battlefield are all examples of a Mission. Each individual Team can have their own mission, but the Team of Teams approach at the organizational level demands an enhanced understanding of the bigger WHAT regarding the organization.

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<https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/story/Article/1728715/desert-storm-a-look-back/>

⁷ McChrystal, Gen Stanley, et al. *Team of teams: New rules of engagement for a complex world*. Penguin, 2015. Page 202 - my inclusion was a rubber-stamp that slow the process, and sometimes caused us to miss fleeting opportunities.



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For example, in DESERT STORM, each individual Team had a specific role. The Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Allies had parts and portions of establishing logistics hubs, keeping sea lanes open, securing ports, establishing air superiority, and a host of other strategic lines-of-effort. These missions and subsets of missions created the overall WHAT regarding the tasks of the coalition, but these should all contributed to the WHY they were deployed there in the first place.

In essence, the WHAT or the MISSION is how we bring the PURPOSE to life at both the organizational and the team levels - Accomplishing the MISSION must happen every day to reach a successful outcome and fulfill the PURPOSE.

The reason DESERT STORM has been heralded as one of the most successful military operations in history is not because of the larger organizational PURPOSE or the coalition's MISSION, but how well each individual team performed under those umbrellas. (STAY CONSISTENT – PURPOSE, KEY TASKS, AND END STATE)

Each service, each unit, each squadron, each platoon had their own PURPOSE and their own MISSION within the grander effort. When each of these “teams” understood their essential tasks completely, success was somewhat assured in advance.

Despite Iraq's constant attempts to disturb each team in part and the coalition at large, the Teams knew their PURPOSE and carried out their MISSIONS in the face of major contingencies and numerous distractions. While not necessarily perfect in their execution, the ability of each Team to stay on target was truly exceptional.

The primary reasons they were able to stay on target is because they understood PURPOSE and they also understood their own respective KEY TASKS and how they contributed to the desired END STATE. When a team fully knows these three tenets – PURPOSE, KEY TASKS, and END STATE – they are well down the road to successful operations.⁸

⁸ Binnendijk, Hans. *Transforming America's military*. NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIV WASHINGTON DC CENTER FOR TECHNOLOGY AND NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY, 2002. Pg. 159 – Operation DESERT STORM awakened many to the fact that modern air forces, properly employed, can quickly and dramatically transform the operational situation in many theater conflicts by stripping the enemy of their air



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In Top Gun Teamwork, these lessons are equally important. Each team should primarily focus on the essential tasks required for mission accomplishment and mission success. They should also be ready to deal with forces often beyond their control while retaining their focus. Finally, they should stay on target to the maximum extent.

But how? How do Teams do all of this like a high-performance team? The key is often found in the elements of the Team Life Cycle and the Debrief. But we will cover that more later.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Elements of a Mission

Another way to look at the MISSION concept is by reviewing the typical elements of a mission. If what you are doing kind of follows this basic flow and you can describe WHAT it is that you are doing among these elements, it usually qualifies as either your ultimate MISSION or a subset of a larger MISSION.

Missions usually have some mix of the following elements:

- Preparation and planning
- Setting objectives, goals, or milestones
- A beginning – ongoing activities and then an ending
- There's also usually a need to refine, reconfigure, or reflect
- And then the determination as to whether the mission needs repeating

Of special note, each team within an organization can be accomplishing multiple missions in parallel, in series, or even sometimes in direct conflict with each other.

defenses, dismantling key elements of national infrastructure, and isolating, mobilizing, and attriting fielded forces.

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One of the more egregious historical examples of this is the deck crew on the Titanic. After the evening meal and concert, they were rearranging the deck chairs and tables for the next event AFTER the ship had collided with the iceberg. Why? It was their mission to do that.

But, if leadership had communicated effectively the PURPOSE of the voyage, which was safe passage of everyone from Point A to Point B, and then relayed to the deck crew the threat to achieving that PURPOSE, most likely, they would've communicated the need for a change in MISSION – e. g. prepare the lifeboats.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Mission Sets

We also want to highlight the importance of mission sets within missions.

Mission sets are parts or portions of specific efforts which contribute to the larger mission. Any team's mission sets should directly support and enable its mission while also contributing to the fulfillment of its purpose.

Here at VMax, we are heavily involved in keynote addresses, books and articles, and courseware such as this facilitator's course. The synergies between these mission sets are what allows us to accomplish our mission and fulfill our purpose.

Top Gun Teamwork, when enabled at the team level, requires diverse mission sets within the larger mission of the team. Top Gun Teamwork, as you'll see in the following modules, requires constant and consistent revisits to purpose, mission, and mission sets.

Therefore, ensuring that the team has a well-defined purpose and clear mission cannot be overemphasized.

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FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Team Purpose and Mission Statements

As a Top Gun Teamwork facilitator, you will be intimately involved in helping teams develop both PURPOSE and MISSION statements.

Therefore, you may be wondering, where should I start?

The best place to start is “what is the organization’s purpose?”

From here, the team should proceed toward developing a purpose statement for the team that nests nicely underneath the organization’s purpose. This is where engagement with both organizational and team leadership is essential.

These steps should not be rushed since understanding both the organizations and the team’s purpose is absolutely essential to ensuring a higher fidelity understanding of the team’s mission.

Both the team’s purpose and mission should fit together seamlessly into the larger organizational purpose and mission. They should be complimentary and synergistic.

The mission can also be refined periodically in order to better fulfill purpose. Setting some dates in the future for revisiting and refining is usually a beneficial activity. This refinement can take on many forms or techniques, but the most important tenet of the refinement is simply going through the process of refinement.

It may or may not need to be refined. Nevertheless, arriving at that conclusion, either way, is a great way to stay on target over time and ensure your teams are accomplishing their missions while fulfilling their purpose.

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To better highlight the delta between PURPOSE and MISSION, here is VMax Group's purpose and mission statements.

The first statement, "To teach and inspire Real Teamwork so that teams can Thrive in Disruption and Keep America's Economies Strong" is a good description of WHY we exist. This statement is our PURPOSE, and it explains the meaning and impact of our work in a broad, encompassing manner.

The second statement is more action related – "We teach, inspire and nurture teams on how to really 'team', making work more fulfilling and making teams much more effective." In this statement, we see WHAT the organization is doing.

As you can see, teaching, inspiring, and nurturing teams on how to "team" directly supports the PURPOSE – namely Real Teamwork. Taken together, these two sentences, VMax's Purpose and Mission tie together the WHY of the organization with the WHAT.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Purpose and Mission Summary

Without being too redundant, let's summarize...

Purpose for the most part, is fairly constant. In our experience very few organizations have a well-known purpose statement, but those who do have a purpose statement don't really change it all that often. This is pretty normal.

The reason that purpose is normally constant is because organizations are formed for good reasons and those reasons don't usually change rapidly. Additionally, when the mission supports the purpose, unless there's some massive tectonic movement in a

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market, that mission is normally done reiteratively so that the purpose might be achieved over-and-over again.

Therefore, the mission that an organization accomplishes is how they bring their purpose to life. When they perform this mission over and over in the same way, they then have the luxury of historical data to determine whether or not the accomplishment of their mission is actually achieving their purpose.

Another way that you can tell that something is a mission versus their purpose is that the mission set, and also its subsets, are often tweaked or refined to better fulfill their purpose overtime. Missions are looked at consistently in relation to how well they're performing. But the measure by which the missions are assessed should always tie back to purpose.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Team Life Cycle

This module will cover the Team Life Cycle utilized by the TGT methodology and will help you, the facilitator, understand its role and impact. The Team Life Cycle is something that we all take part in every day to some degree. Normally we probably just barely touch the phases. But as leaders and team members, when we go deeper into the cycle and understand the value in investing time and effort into each phase, our teams will not only succeed more often, but they will also succeed more often, more quickly.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

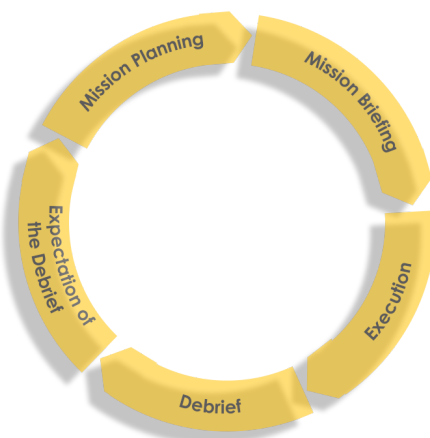
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Here are the phases of the Team Life Cycle. Starting at 12 o'clock, Mission Planning leads to the Mission Briefing. Following the Mission Briefing, we go to Execution. Once the mission is executed, we Debrief. Then, following the Debrief is the Expectation of the Debrief.



This cycle is not complicated, but it can be utilized to tackle tasks from simple through complex. The ultimate goal of this cycle is to execute well, practice accountability, learn continuously, and constantly improve.

Now, let's look at each phase of the Team Life Cycle individually...

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Mission Planning

While the next module will cover mission planning utilizing the proprietary E.A.G.L.E. planning method in more detail, here we will highlight the importance of this phase as a single phase of the Team Life Cycle. One of the main reasons this phase is so important is because the ability to debrief well, with heightened validity and enhanced precision, starts with comprehensive planning.

In military aviation, we often say that planning adheres to the 6 P's – Namely...



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Proper Preflight Planning Prevents Pathetic Performance.

The first thing to consider in planning is to nail down precisely: *What exactly is the mission?* Often, this is pretty obvious, but astute planners know to not get lulled into complacency nor assume too much. Remember, this will be debriefed extensively!

In this phase of the Team Life Cycle, asking clarifying questions to leadership about the mission is essential. Spending copious amounts of time planning, only to find out the mission description was not entirely accurate or incomplete is frustrating to all involved. Therefore, this step should not be glossed over nor completed too quickly. Here, a methodical approach will yield substantial dividends over time.

Once the mission is clearly and completely defined, it is time to research, prepare, and think over every conceivable aspect of the mission and most importantly – what does success look like? This is often referred to as the “desired end state.” Every good plan incorporates the mission objectives along with their associated desired outcomes – ultimately arriving at the desired end state – some sort of mission accomplishment.

This phase is vital since it serves as the initial steps to a successful endeavor, establishes the baseline for the debrief, and will be revisited cyclically.

Now, let's transition to the Mission Briefing.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Mission Briefing

The Mission Briefing is where team leaders really have an opportunity to get everyone synchronized and on the same sheet of music. This phase is also the time to ensure everyone knows the most essential elements of the mission.

First and foremost, the mission briefing should convey the mission and its objectives. This can either be the team's mission or the “mission of a particular mission set.”

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Jumping forward a bit, keep in mind that the mission briefing is something that will be referred back to in several elements of the debrief – so, the leader must impart the overall mission and its objectives along with the plan to reach success right here in this phase of the Team Life Cycle. Failure to do so will possibly inject confusion into the execution phase but will also usually degrade some of the potential of the debrief.

More on this later, but the Mission Briefing is also a vital part of the debrief where members of the team will be afforded an opportunity to provide constructive criticism of the briefing as in..."based on the briefing, we thought we were supposed to *fill in the blank* but in execution, we learned that wasn't going to work" – or something similar.

Normally, the Mission Briefing is constructed somewhat chronologically with emphasis on the most prominent portions as desired. This emphasis should derive from the relative importance of major elements of the mission and the finer details of the leader's plan for successful execution of the plan.

The mission briefing should begin to close out with what constitutes success for that particular mission or mission set. At the end of the mission briefing, it is vitally important that the briefer leaves time for some questions and explanations – this will lead to more open dialogue as we will see later in the debrief core values module.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Mission Execution

In the Execution phase of the Team Life Cycle, the plan, as approved and briefed by leadership is to be carried out. Here is where "doing gets done."

In Execution, each individual is responsible for their particular tasks. In accordance with the plan and per the brief. The main point here is that from the most senior to the most junior, individuals are responsible for their own performance and their portion of the overall plan - the brief should have conveyed that.

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At the Team level, Execution is similar and equally important. Many tasks and responsibilities are shared. Once again, per the plan and the brief, the role of the Team members is to execute the briefed plan to the best of their abilities and lead their respective teams toward accomplishment of the objectives.

The Execution phase reaches its utmost importance when leaders realize that this phase is the culmination of not only the planning and briefing, but it is also where lessons learned from previous cycles are applied, deployed, and eventually assessed as to their effectiveness and worthiness.

Soon after the execution phase, the debrief begins. Let's talk about that a bit here.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Debriefing

The debrief has a pivotal role in the Team Life Cycle as it refers back to the mission planning, the mission briefing, and the execution.

The debrief covers all of these.

When leaders refer back to their role as the mission briefer and also accept their role in communicating the plan and conveying what success looks like, they are well on their way to understanding their role and the role of the debrief in the Team Life Cycle.

Leaders should focus on what went well and what went poorly and why. Finding the root cause will be discussed in detail in a later module, but here it is important to understand the premier significance of the debrief in this cycle.

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The final portion of the debrief should always include a look forward – namely, who is accountable for what the next time this mission, mission set, or something similar is attempted. When leaders assign appropriate accountability measures to themselves and their team members, they usually delegate some authority for certain mission aspects to the appropriate individuals. These individuals, with the trust and empowerment of leadership, can ensure success by their refined and adjusted actions the very next day. Astute leaders will pay close attention to the culture and attitude they bring to the debrief. A positive and encouraging debrief will go a long way toward ensuring successful phases of the Team Life Cycle as early as the very next iteration.⁹

In doing this, leaders enable a much higher level of success much earlier than most processes. Here is where Top Gun Teamwork makes the most difference and also the most quickly. Team leaders and team members should expect some specific areas to focus on and improve upon by the end of the debrief – that should be their expectation. Speaking of expectations.

In a single word, the main expectation of the debrief is accountability.

There is not a very good reason to have a debrief if we aren't going to hold folks accountable for their role in the success or failure of the mission.

When a team does not achieve mission success or accomplish their desired objectives nor reach their desired end state – a single person or multiple people are predominantly responsible for that lack of achievement.

Therefore, everyone involved in the debrief should have an expectation that their performance will be assessed in terms of the planning, the briefing, and the execution of all of the above. Accountability is illuminated in the debrief.

The final expectation of the debrief is action.

⁹ Ackermann, Fran, and Colin Eden. *Making strategy: Mapping out strategic success*. Sage, 2011. Pg. 51 – There is evidence that in an environment where support or specific encouragement is lacking, leaders do not pay enough attention to “feedback properties” intuitively.

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Leaders often want to hold someone accountable, potentially even themselves, but holding someone truly accountable must include some form of action. Even when things go well, it is incumbent upon leaders to reinforce positive lessons learned and reiterate the need for repeated or at least repeatable actions.

Conversely, when the team fails, the leader is responsible for helping develop an action plan to avoid the same or similar failures in the future.

At the end of a debrief, everyone should be positively aware of what should be done either the same or differently the next time – and that takes us to the last step in the Team Life Cycle: a return to Mission Planning.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Return to Mission Planning

As you return to mission planning, the elements are the same, but each should be refined and potentially altered to increase the probability of success. One beneficial place to start is by asking the question,

Is this an opportunity to update, refine, or redefine the mission?

Here also is an opportunity to reference the debrief and research the deeper reasons for success or root causes of failure and apply actionable fixes for each one, both individually and as a team. You should also ponder the parts of the previous mission that went well along with those that went poorly.

It is beneficial to ask yourself and your team the following questions:

- What should we mimic or what should we change?
- Why did our plan work or why did it not?
- Is it time to change our metrics, plan, or desired end state?



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- What are the missing elements to reach a more successful outcome more effectively and efficiently?

Finally, as you return to mission planning, redefine, for your team, what success may look like this time, especially if it varies from the first or previous iterations. Once again, as a noted leadership expert relays, "Today it's increasingly less about what you know and much more about how fast you learn." Debriefing well and meeting the expectations of the debrief should enhance the next iteration of mission planning.

Those who incorporate the Team Life Cycle and other elements of Top Gun Teamwork into their return to Mission Planning will see more results more quickly than their counterparts or their competition.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Summary of Team Life Cycle

The Team Life Cycle is vital to the TGT methodology and understanding its role and impact within our approach is essential.

When teams apply the principles of the Team Life Cycle and invest time and effort to refining their individual and team roles within the cycle, they will not only succeed more often, but they will succeed more often more quickly!

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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The Four Stages of Psychological Safety

What exactly is psychological safety?¹⁰

The key concepts behind psychological safety include...

- Feeling included
- Feeling it is safe to learn
- Feeling it is safe to contribute
- Feeling it is safe to challenge the status quo

When someone feels all of these, they are in a “psychological safe zone” and they feel valued and part of the team. Let’s look at each of the stages in a little more detail.

Inclusion is the first stage of psychological safety, and it can be summed up as informal admittance into a team. Often, “the need to be accepted precedes the need to be heard.” Inclusion means that the team member is invited or accepted into an unspoken, or often-ill-defined circle of a team, even without existing inputs. They are present and allowed to be there openly.

The second stage is the *Learner*. Learner safety “indicates that you feel safe to engage in the discovery process, ask questions, experiment, and even make mistakes.” One of the quickest ways to destroy learner safety is by belittling, demeaning, or harshly correcting team members. Conversely, the learner stage is bolstered when apprentices, interns, or understudies are allowed to engage in open discussion, ask probing or inquisitive questions, or even wonder informally if there may be a better way. Team members planted well in this stage are active versus passive learners.

The third stage is the *Contributor stage*. The key concept here is that “as the individual demonstrates competence, the organization normally grants more autonomy to contribute.” In this stage, the team member is “invited to participate as an active and full-fledged member of the team.” When team members gain competency in their required skills and tasks, they are usually granted “contributor status” as long as they adhere to social norms and don’t disrupt team dynamics.

¹⁰ Clark, Timothy R. *The 4 stages of psychological safety: Defining the path to inclusion and innovation*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2020.

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The final stage of psychological safety is that of *Challenger*. In this stage, the team member is able to openly challenge the status quo without retribution, reprisal, or the risk of damaging their personal reputation. These are “change agents” and they speak truth to power along with creative and innovative ideas. In this stage, high levels of respect, autonomy, and surprising permissions exist.

The TGT methodology, advances our organizations into more and more stages of psychological safety, eventually landing squarely in all four stages. Back to Dr. Timothy Clark, he states “developing EQ is critical to debriefing well, it is also THE most important factor in creating psychological safety.”

When leaders are secure in their position, roles, and responsibilities along with their own vulnerabilities, they will WANT all 4 stages of psychological safety present in their organization and across their departments and associated teams.

Creating an environment of psychological safety is not a sudden thing, it takes a lot of time, maturity, and effort. Conversely, destroying this safe environment can be sudden and often cataclysmic. Leaders should be on guard and empower their mid-level managers and leaders with the tools to both create and guard psychological safety across the organization.

Hopefully you can easily see how VMax Group's Top Gun Teamwork yields unprecedented levels of psychological safety – an unparalleled benefit for leaders, followers, organizations, and teams.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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MODULE 3 - SKILLSET OF A TOP GUN TEAMWORK FACILITATOR

By the end of this module, you will understand the skills that are necessary to practice as a Top Gun Teamwork Facilitator. Specifically, you will learn how to teach and practice planning methods and an in depth debrief process.

VIDEO NOTES

The E.A.G.L.E. Planning Model

This model is a 5-step approach to planning that helps guide us consistently towards achieving success daily. It is an all-encompassing way to plan effectively, efficiently, and engage multiple team members simultaneously. Utilizing this model also enhances team unity over time while also empowering team members and organizational leaders in their pursuit of unprecedented excellence.

As a TGT Facilitator, this module is essential to understanding the importance of proper mission planning via a time-tested and combat proven process. In the now famous words of Dwight D. Eisenhower, “plans are worthless, but planning is everything.”

At the culmination of this module, you should be able to understand, explain, and ultimately facilitate the E.A.G.L.E. planning model and its revolutionary approach to your teams.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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The E.A.G.L.E. planning model consists of 5 steps. These steps, when followed in order, create powerful synergies across organizations and within individual teams. Additionally, the premier impact of the E.A.G.L.E. approach is especially realized when

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all 5 steps are employed in concert with each of the neighboring steps and then repeated with constant improvement at the forefront of thought.

In short, the E.A.G.L.E. planning model is pivotal within the TGT Methodology. When considering the Team Life Cycle and the F4 debrief – the E.A.G.L.E. planning model serves as one of the premier linkages holding the Top Gun Teamwork Methodology together.

As we progress through these 5 steps of the E.A.G.L.E. planning model and then transition to the debrief, you will see the seamlessness of the cycles, steps, and debrief more holistically, versus by bits and pieces.

It may seem like a lot, and it is, but as it comes together and becomes a way of life, it has a way of accelerating positive change so quickly you'll want to employ it versus just learn about it.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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E - Expectations

The first step of the E.A.G.L.E. planning process is Setting Expectations. If you remember from Jimmy's Birthday Party exercise, Commander's Intent is a great tool here in that it outlines purpose, key tasks, and end state for the entire campaign, regardless of scope. Here again, we can set interim milestones or objectives along the way to better ensure clear and consistent expectations as well.

Everyone on the team should be involved in all of the steps, but this one tends to be leadership heavy. In the "E" of E.A.G.L.E., the team must take the Team's Purpose and Mission and then plan against a mission or mission set in a way that is measurable, achievable, and occurs within the given time constraints. On something as simple as a meeting, it is implausible to set the expectation of "this should be the best meeting

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ever.” Instead, saying, “in the next 15 minutes, we should determine the way forward on Project X and ensure every team member is aware of their responsibilities and key tasks.” See the difference – measurable, achievable, time constrained.

Each iteration of Setting Expectations should capture and address the relevant mission objectives for the team as well, while also ensuring the focus remains on mission or mission set accomplishment – plus success and winning. Whether the mission is a meeting, a project, or a program, this step in the E.A.G.L.E. planning process must refer back to the pertinent purpose, essential or key tasks, and desired end state in order to ensure the plan is solid from the outset.

It is noteworthy here to remember that at some point, we will debrief how well or how poorly we did this step – so that serves as additional motivation to get this step absolutely correct and nailed down with as much clarity as possible.

A - Adopt Lessons from the Past

The “A” in the E.A.G.L.E. planning process stands for adopting lessons from the past, both bad and good.

In our combat and peacetime experience, we have learned that those who do not learn from the past are usually doomed to repeat previous failures. Conversely, those who find winning formulas, document them, and simply refine them as appropriate for a new situation tend to succeed more often and more quickly.

Capturing the lessons from previous missions or mission sets in a concise, easily digestible format is well worth your team's time. We recommend a single page of easily shareable information that is accessible to all. A shared drive, a colorful binder, or even a handwritten journal in a conference room all work. Asking why the team failed is just as important as capturing why they succeeded. Sharing positive lessons and collectively building on the successes of the past is greatly beneficial and a cornerstone of TGT.

Over time, capturing and subsequently adopting the appropriate lessons from the past basically buys the team more time for additional efforts, increases opportunities for success, and potentially and most importantly, optimizes resources while minimizing wasted time and effort. Finally, in this step, it is important to address the following and document the answers:

- Why did we succeed?

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- What did we do that enabled that success?
- Why did we fail?
- What was the root cause or causes of failure or success?

If these questions have been answered and recorded from earlier experiences, then you and your team are developing a repository of success. You are ritualizing the sharing of information, and will eventually be better postured for adopting the lessons from the past and applying them.

G - Generate from the Target Backwards

If you remember from Jimmy's Birthday Party exercise, starting from the target or objective and working backwards is the most efficient way to plan effectively. Why? Because taking the desired end state and working backwards forces focus on the main thing, the mission objective or objectives, and keeps the focus there. Another area of emphasis here is diversity of thought and the inclusion of complementary skills. Everyone on the team has a voice here and creative friction is not only encouraged, it is absolutely essential to high quality planning in this stage. Respectfully and professionally get everyone talking, working together, and engaged.

Teams that start at the target and slowly work backwards, usually notice things that "start-to-finish" planners miss. There are plenty of examples to prove this point, but one way of looking at this concept is that by mentally placing the team at a successful outcome you are already posturing them for heightened probability of success. This is akin to strategic foresight or strategic projection – both valid approaches to higher levels of both planning and mission accomplishment.

This pseudo-visualization changes the perspective of the team. In essence, the team experiences the "win" before the execution has even begun – they know what success looks like because they've already been to the target, well.

As this stage of the planning process develops, key tasks should be assigned in a manner of "who does what and when." By doing this, the plan begins to really become both comprehensive and cohesive. All key tasks should be assigned in this stage and as a reminder, individual performance and team performance will be debriefed by referencing this phase.

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It is also not too early to start thinking about some contingencies and how those may impact the march toward the target or desired end state.

L - Laying out Contingencies

In combat operations, we have a saying that “no plan survives initial contact with the enemy.” Something will almost always happen that degrades or potentially even derails our ideal plan.

A contingency is anything that departs from this so-called “ideal plan.” This could be delays, resource constraints, weather, natural disasters, pandemics, or a host of other calamities – the list is truly endless. A note of caution, leaders should not get too crazy here and include wildly improbable events – we don’t have all the time in the world to plan for everything, so focus this phase on the most likely negative forces.

Within this phase, some brainstorming, creativity, and innovation may be in order. Not all contingencies lend themselves to a cookie-cutter solution, so bringing in some out-of-the-box thinking via a variety of options is usually beneficial. These solutions should be designed to mitigate the potential negative impacts of the contingencies while simultaneously keeping the team on track.

Astute leaders should also try to resist the trend to plan for “best case” – that’s too easy and too easily disrupted. This phase is the time to play devil’s advocate, bring some respectful resistance to the planning process, and maybe even try to predict what is out there that could damage the team’s potential for success.

Proper contingency planning is also not one level deep. It is multiple levels deep and like so many safety incidents, these are caused by a chain of events, not just a single item. Leaders should emphasize the most important items as well and focus the team’s contingency planning on those key tasks with both the most importance and the highest likelihood of disruption – something the enemy loves to do, disrupt.

E - Evaluate from the Enemy’s Perspective

In this step of the E.A.G.L.E. planning process, introspective thought is required.

Utilizing a concept known in the military as Red Teaming is beneficial in this phase. This concept forces the team to actively, versus passively, identify potential flaws in any area of the plan. When all members are encouraged to look for flaws, a mental shift happens

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where team members begin to feel accountable, proactively, for finding the vulnerable gaps and seams that might defeat the plan.

Another aspect of Red Teaming is the revisit of creative friction from Step 3. This is a good thing. So many people, after developing what they perceive is a bulletproof plan, don't really appreciate others picking apart their plan. In short, they become somewhat emotionally attached to their solution from their perspective. Top Gun Teamwork does not recommend picking apart the plan - Top Gun Teamwork requires you to pick apart the plan! If some members of the team were not there for the initial planning stages, they could very well be the most valuable asset to this step since they are not emotionally attached to the plan nor necessarily biased in their perspective.

Leaders should seek inputs from multiple members of the team on the plan's weak spots, blind spots, and vulnerabilities. One way to approach this is by asking the questions, where are we buying risk, is it acceptable, and are there ways to mitigate particular risks in any reasonable way? Another way is by technically "forcing" everyone to find at least one gap or flaw in the plan. This is where the previous step may be even further refined by laying out additional contingencies or even refinements to previously considered contingencies.

Remember, the enemy in this sense means anything that is trying to disrupt the plan. You and your team's task in this phase is to put yourself in the role of a "disruptor" and then determine how you can address or mitigate those disruptions.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Summary of the E.A.G.L.E. Planning Model

While much of this course focuses on debriefing, we have found the E.A.G.L.E. planning process to be of paramount value because debriefing should focus on all of the

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aspects of the Team Life Cycle and the debrief informs the next iteration of the cycle starting at the Mission Planning phase utilizing the E.A.G.L.E. method.

The best way we've seen to apply the outcomes of the debrief happens in this phase and while we will talk *debrief* later, the E.A.G.L.E. planning methodology is where we incorporate the debrief lessons learned – hence its intrinsic value.

The E.A.G.L.E. planning methodology is not a “one and done” idea – it is a “cycle within a cycle” and the result of its application is macro-evolutionary to both teams and leadership. As teams apply the E.A.G.L.E. planning methodology as foundational to the Mission Planning phase of the Team Life Cycle – results improve, and leader accountability is enhanced.

E.A.G.L.E. planning is not necessarily just for large projects or heavy efforts. Every aspect of business can benefit from the E.A.G.L.E. planning methodology, to include even small missions or relatively minor mission subsets.

At the end of the E.A.G.L.E. planning process, we should go into the next event, confident in our ability to win with higher probability and enhanced levels of successful execution.

Utilizing the E.A.G.L.E. process, you will find your teams succeeding more often and every aspect of the team's operations will experience increased efficiencies, elevated performance, and enhanced effectiveness.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Core Values of the Debrief

In this module, you will learn to both understand and lead impactful debriefs where the Debrief Core Values are employed. Top Gun Teamwork is built upon these Debrief Core

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Values in practically every regard, but in the debrief, they take on an elevated status and importance.

Leaders who both appreciate and then employ these Debrief Core Values will, over time, enable a culture of respectful accountability and psychological safety at multiple levels.

Top Gun Teamwork is considerably more effective when leaders are mature, secure, and professional. The more they abide within the intent of these Debrief Core Values, the more they and their teams will benefit from TGT's methodology and the culture it subsequently creates.¹¹ So hang on as we dive deeper into the Debrief Core Values and their role in Top Gun Teamwork.

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FACILITATOR NOTES:

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What are the Debrief Core Values?

Most commonly, core values are an organization's foundational principles. They include values, cross-organizational priorities, and guiding beliefs.¹² While not every organization has written down or codified their specific core values, each organization actually has, at a minimum, assumed core values.¹³ Meaning, the members of the

¹¹ Why do we debrief? To learn, coach, grow, improve, and build trust. To make tomorrow better than today.

¹² "The core values of an organization are those values we hold which form the foundation on which we perform work and conduct ourselves." <https://www.nps.gov/training/uc/whcv.htm>

Principle according to which a person or institution is responsible for a set of duties and can be required to give an account of their fulfillment to an authority that is in a position to issue rewards or punishment. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/accountability>

¹³

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organization have figured out what is important, regardless of the visibility of overt core values or leadership's emphasis thereon.¹⁴

In Top Gun Teamwork, we speak specifically to Debrief Core Values because we believe in their role as foundational to the methodology's success. Each and every debrief should share these core values. The impact of these values are actualized via consistent application by leadership and facilitators. Each iteration of the debrief that adheres to the Debrief Core Values, will help establish trust, elevate accountability and increase performance over time.

One of the challenges a facilitator of Top Gun Teamwork faces is their role in helping establish a pro-core value environment. One way to do this is by performing a "debrief of the debrief" with common references to the Debrief Core Values.

When leaders and their teams are shown how well their debrief stacks up against the Debrief Core Values, their eyes are usually opened a bit and their next iteration improves exponentially. No team is perfect, but they will get closer and closer to perfection by activating the TGT methodology. Consistently employing the core values in their operations will eventually shift their culture in a positive manner also.

Here is our list of Debrief Core Values. The order of these is not of paramount importance, but here, they are divided somewhat by inward-facing first, hybrid of inward and outward next, and culminating in outward-facing. Regardless of how the terms are arranged, a well-executed debrief will retain some elements of all Debrief Core Values.

When any of these are left out of the debrief, optimal results cannot normally be achieved. There is nothing magical nor mystical about these terms. They may even be considered obvious or common sense – yet, prior to Top Gun Teamwork sessions, we

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<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/core-values-are-what-you-believe-1918079#:~:text=Core%20values%20are%20traits%20or,stand%20for%20in%20the%20world>. "Core values are traits or qualities that are not just worthwhile, they represent an individual's or an organization's highest priorities, deeply held beliefs, and core, fundamental driving forces. They are the heart of what your organization and its employees stand for in the world." Why do we debrief? To learn, coach, grow, improve, and build trust.

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rarely see consistent application of these core values. In truth, people are often too busy executing to stop and think about how they are truly operating.

The TGT Debrief Core Values are invaluable guideposts for how to run an effective debrief as part of the larger Team Life Cycle. When leaders and facilitators apply these core values in the debrief, it benefits the entire cycle and as they become second nature, the entire Team Life Cycle improves, to include Mission Planning.

Failing to apply these core values does more than just slow down improvement and decrease accountability. Failing to apply them actually creates a negative culture and over time allows toxic leadership and gives asymmetric accountability fertile ground in which to degrade both the entire organization and its associated teams.

One of the primary reasons Top Gun Teamwork's methodology works is because the more teams apply the Debrief Core Values, the more they succeed, and everyone likes to be on both a winning and functional team. Now, let's dive more deeply into each Debrief Core Value.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Vulnerability

In the context of the debrief, vulnerability means everyone is open to the same level of performance standard and expectations. Whether a leader or not, in TGT's version of vulnerability, all members of the debrief are just as open to criticism as the next person – no favorites, no exemptions. The core of vulnerability is the ability to admit mistakes and weaknesses while also exposing oneself to a potential state of loss or harm.

For Top Gun Teamwork to be truly effective, trust must be built and sustained. Vulnerability in the debrief is essential to building and subsequently sustaining

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substantial levels of trust. When vulnerability is present in the debrief, every person has an equal opportunity for both giving and receiving either praise or criticism.

When a leader makes the decision to employ a certain plan and it was unsuccessful, vulnerability means they shoulder the responsibility for the failure and utilize everyone's perspectives, opinions, and ideas within the room to ensure it is not repeated in the future. That's vulnerability – and it is immensely powerful.

Additionally, without fear of being chastised or shunned, when a junior member of the team admits to making a wrong decision or forgetting a key task or being distracted at a critical moment, they admit to it freely and openly, ready to hear everyone's perspectives, opinions, and ideas on how to deter it from happening again.

The converse is just as important. Shirking responsibility, blaming others for your failures, holding others to a different level of performance than yourself, and other similar experiences are counter to vulnerability and erode faith, trust, and confidence.

Top Gun Teamwork's version of vulnerability is not easy. It may cost some pride points and demand a little more humility than you're accustomed to on a normal basis.

Humility

Humility, defined, is "freedom from pride or arrogance; the quality of state of being humble." It is also similar to vulnerability in that humility enables equality. Role, rank, nor status serve as discriminators. Leaders have no rank, no position, no title – they are equivalent to everyone in the room. It doesn't matter how nice their office is, what floor it is on, what kind of car they drive, or what kind of house they live in – they are simply a team member in a debrief and humility is not optional – it is required.

The debrief is about accountability, responsibility, and continuous improvement. Everyone can be more accountable for success, more responsible for their actions, and can improve their performance, thus everyone can bring humility to the debrief and still benefit. It is necessary if we're going to learn to do so both from and through failure or success.

Regardless of root cause analysis or the placing of blame, humility wins the day because with it in action, everyone benefits in improving personal or team performance or usually both.



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In the fighter pilot world, we often say, “leave your pride and ego at the door.” While maybe not the version Hollywood wants you to think about when you think of fighter pilots, the best ones we’ve worked with are usually “humble, approachable, and credible” with humility potentially being the most important and noticeable.

When leaders take the extra effort to bring humility to the debrief, the team gets better much more quickly because they all are interested more in winning together than saving face or minimizing any negative impressions of themselves.

Top Gun Teamwork emphasizes both vulnerability and humility together, because with them both, the team is set up for unprecedented levels of ownership of both successes and failures.

Ownership

When leaders are vulnerable and exercise humility, the next logical step is to take ownership of their actions, reactions, and all of the pertinent results. Per ex-Navy SEAL Jocko Willink, “Leaders must own everything in their world. There is no one else to blame.” In the Top Gun Teamwork methodology, we believe that accountability is taking absolute ownership of the outcomes the team achieves.

The primary way we practice accountability is by debriefing appropriately with all of the Debrief Core Values in motion. From wild successes thru dismal failures, taking ownership of both ends of the spectrum is essential.

In the end, leaders are assessed on their ability to produce something – namely, results. One of the most important, redeeming qualities of Top Gun Leadership is its ability, when applied correctly, to enhance organizational culture and improve results in every segment with which it has been applied. Like we said earlier, we don’t hope it works – we KNOW it works.

When leaders set the example and take ownership of their actions, both positive and negative, the most junior members of the team usually take note. We have seen senior executives of large organizations adjust their vulnerability upward, adopt elevated levels of humility, and then assume a larger role in ownership.

Invariably, when this happens, organizational culture improves, and more positive results follow accordingly. We have also seen leaders enhance their lives both

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personally and professionally utilizing just the first three Debrief Core Values – yet, when they incorporate all 6, the results are truly spectacular.

EQ

Emotional Intelligence, often referred to as EQ, is an all-encompassing and critical Top Gun Teamwork Debrief Core Value. According to Dr. Timothy Clark, “developing emotional intelligence is critical to debriefing well.”

As leaders begin considering where and how to adopt Top Gun Teamwork, they must come to grips with some hard facts about themselves as well as their interactions with others. EQ does a good job at addressing this by separating its aspects into four major pillars.¹⁵

- Self Awareness
- Self Management
- Social Awareness and
- Relationship Management

Let's look at each one.

Self Awareness is your ability to Actually perceive your own emotions in the moment and understand your tendencies across situations.

Self management is what happens when you act - or do not act. It is dependent on your self-awareness and is the second major part of personal competence.

Social awareness is your ability to accurately pick up on emotions in other people and understand what is really going on with them.

Relationship management is your ability to use your awareness of your own emotions And those of others to manage interactions successfully.

¹⁵ Bradberry, Travis, and Jean Greaves. *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*. TalentSmart, 2009.

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As you can see, the 4 pillars of EQ are separated into inward-facing, or personal competencies and outward-facing, or social competencies. As a Debrief Core Value, the main focus is on self awareness, but all of them play a major role in getting the most out of the Team Life Cycle and the TGT methodology.

Leaders who exhibit high levels of both personal and social competence are able to reach deeper into the dynamics of their team and truly motivate all of their team members by realizing how they operate and what makes them “tick.”

For leaders who lack in the EQ department, hope is not lost as EQ can be elevated using a number of different strategies. Without going into all of them here, the book Emotional Intelligence 2.0 is well worth your time in addressing any shortfalls in your own personal EQ journey.

Top Gun Teamwork and more specifically the Debrief Core Values, emphasizes the self awareness pillar of Emotional Intelligence. Strategies for improving that pillar include:

- Quit treating your feelings as good or bad
- Observing the ripple effect of your emotions
- Leaning into your discomfort and
- Feeling your emotions physically

As we dive into the last two Debrief Core Values, you should easily be able to plug your own personal EQ into the equation and see how it will help you and the teams you lead debrief more effectively.

Collaboration

Collaboration as a Debrief Core Value serves many functions. When leaders are vulnerable, humble, accountable and emotionally intelligent, they are postured for unprecedented success. Collaboration defined, is the action of working with someone to produce or create something.

Per Top Gun Teamwork, every single person in the debrief brings a unique and valuable perspective. What they saw and when they observed it is THEIR facts.

Misinterpretations, misidentification, and mistakes are all part of reasons to collaborate. When everyone brings their facts to the table, everyone eventually benefits because the puzzle called reality is never truly complete until everyone there has placed their piece in the right spot – that’s the essence of collaboration.

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In this core value, it is important for everyone in the debrief to realize that each person has their own version of the facts. No one should be telling the other person what they saw or perceived, that's for that person to contribute. Anything less actually lessens collaboration – the opposite of why this is a core value.

Like a trial with multiple eyewitnesses, the truth is derived from multiple diverse and unique perspectives, than from group think or coercion. Allowing vulnerability to prosper and humility to be present affords a richer atmosphere for collaboration, but only if the team members are self-aware.

In the presence of vulnerability and humility – there is risk. Add to this risk some ownership and emotional factors and you can see there is even more chance for people to feel targeted or even attacked. That feeling is one every leader must strive to avoid and the best way to do that is by exhibiting empathy in the debrief.

Empathy

Debriefs can be rough, especially after a failed or significantly degraded mission. They can be emotionally draining, physically demanding, and mentally exhausting. But leaders can make great strides in maximizing retention and learning simply by employing emotional intelligence and some empathy.

Leaders and facilitators should be aware of the potentially passionate aspects of the debrief and lead the debrief with empathy at the center of their thoughts. Empathy defined, is putting yourself in someone else's position and feeling what they must be feeling. One of the best ways to do this is to remember what it feels like to be part of a failure and remember what ultimately made you or your team continue to falter or wonderfully recover. Normally, this includes treating others better than you would like to be treated – regardless of depth or level of mission failure. A humorous anecdote may help:

While it is more prevalent in some fighter squadrons versus others, one thing that some emphasize is the presence of "The Wedge Theory." This theory is pretty simple. No matter how low you or the team feels, how poor you or the team's performance was, or how awful of a personal or collective experience you've had lately – somehow, someway, someone else or some other team in the organization will find a way to "wedge" themselves below you. While a somewhat humorous concept, in reality, this is

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where empathy plays a major role. Leaders and facilitators can also make sure they phrase questions in the debrief that offer an “out” to the team members.

From the youngest team member and least experienced, to the most sage and wise member, empathy can be demonstrated in multiple ways. For example, a leader expressing empathy could simply say to an underperforming, but fairly new hire, “based on your experience level and the amount of information you had available to you at the time, you are making brilliant decisions.” This provides support while still allowing room for growth and opportunities for instruction.

Conversely, asking accusatory, leading, or derogatory questions in both content and tone are averse to the Debrief Core Value of empathy. Instead of asking something like “now why on earth would you do that” it is better to ask a question like “at this point, with the information you had, what decision did you make?”

Then, thank them for their contribution!

In essence, it is the same question, but one allows the team member to be more honest and forthright without an accusatory tone. This is empathy in practice, and it is a major Top Gun Teamwork Debrief Core Value.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Exercising Debrief Core Values

Leaders who desire to improve upon their current leadership acumen, performance, and results all need to do at least one thing – change how they are currently operating.

Leaders that feel that things will somehow magically change on their own while continuing their current behaviors are simply not being very realistic. They must change first and then lead their team members in becoming change agents as well. Top Gun

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Teamwork, when applied correctly, leads to these required types of changes in leaders and individual team members.

Some of the most important changes to be made cross the threshold from self to others. The way leaders and team members treat each other, their application of the Debrief Core Values, their focus on constant self and team improvement are all part of Top Gun Teamwork's methodology – and it works! Here at VMax, we even provide a form for teams to assess how well they are applying the Debrief Core Values.

Neither inwardly focused change nor outwardly focused change is necessarily easy. Often, team members may feel blamed or shamed because they let down the team or underperformed versus their own expectations. Additionally, failure is often an emotional ordeal that can paralyze a team and invite feelings of negativity. While this is normal, it is a well-known fact that a team that is down, usually stays down.

Top Gun Teamwork challenges this oft-repeated cycle with another option. Utilizing the TGT methodology, the Team Life Cycle, the E.A.G.L.E. Planning method, and the Debrief Core Values changes the team dynamics into a force for positive change. Top Gun Teamwork is an enabler for a team to change inwardly and outwardly and we look forward to hearing the positive reports from you and your teams after enacting the TGT methodology across your teams.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Debrief Core Values Summary

In this module, you learned about the impactful debriefs achievable when the Debrief Core Values are employed. Top Gun Teamwork is built upon these values holistically, but they gain even greater prominence in the execution of the debrief.

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We have seen leaders from across the business, military, and government sectors employ these core values to great effect and shift team and organizational culture in a very short time period utilizing the TGT methodology and more specifically the Debrief Core Values.

The more leaders include the Debrief Core Values across the Team Life Cycle, the more positive shift in culture and enhanced results they should expect.

So, with these impactful Debrief Core Values in mind, let's light the afterburners and accelerate into the F4 Debrief where they will be applied in a targeted fashion.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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The F4 Debrief

Creating an atmosphere of accountable leadership along with an environment of psychological safety takes time.¹⁶

Rushing the following elements of this module out to an organization is not the answer – instead, a slow, deliberate, focused process will allow leadership to transition ongoing processes to the TGT methodology with higher levels of acceptance and also allow time for successes to come to fruition and serve as leverage for more holistic change.

¹⁶ DTW Short Course and DTW OSC Workbook

“Organizations can improve individual and team performance by approximately 20% to 25% by using properly conducted debriefs.”

Tannenbaum, Scott I., and Christopher P. Cerasoli. “Do Team and Individual Debriefs Enhance Performance? A Meta-Analysis.” *Human Factors*, vol. 55, no. 1, 2013, pp. 231–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018720812448394>.

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While multiple ways to arrive at accountable leadership and psychological safety may exist, the premier way to arrive at this desired goal is by instituting VMax Group's foundational principles along with its Top Gun Teamwork methodology.

In this module, the facilitator will be equipped to explain and explore the 4 steps of the F4 debrief and more specifically how they apply to the overall TGT methodology.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Essential Elements

Prior to the debrief, there are some essential elements that must be remembered, codified, and acknowledged. A clearly articulated Mission with Objectives and a Plan – sets the foundation for a comprehensive and beneficial debrief experience.

So, let's review...

First, what is the Mission? Every organization, regardless of field or market, has at least an overarching Mission to accomplish along with several individual sub-missions. When these overarching and individual Missions are fully understood, leaders have an increased probability of determining the root cause of either successes or failures. Alternatively, debriefing, in the absence of a clearly defined mission, can often be an exercise in futility since no one knows what “success looks like” due to lack of understanding of the Mission.

Next, what are the Objectives of the given Mission? Once again, Mission Objectives state clearly the desired conditions to be attained. Whether spoken as goals, targets, or milestones, these objectives further narrow the Mission scope to a bounded and codified desired end state. When the Mission is clear and Objectives are well-defined, the debrief is richer, more focused, and often more succinct.

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Finally, what was the plan in the first place? A solid plan, concentrated on achieving the desired objectives and completing the assigned Mission is invaluable. No plan is perfect and the debrief, over time, is designed to help refine both ongoing and future plans.

These three elements, Mission, Objectives, and Plan should be easily communicated and visualized, in some way, every single debrief.

Secure leaders are not weary nor afraid of the debrief, instead they actually look toward the debrief with anticipation because they know that eventually solutions will be discovered, and a better way forward will be established.

The upcoming section covers each of the 4 steps of the debrief – Facts, Focus, Framing, and The Way Forward. Correctly completing each of these 4 steps, in order, will ultimately result in heightened organizational performance, more accountable leadership, and elevated levels of psychological safety. Put more simply, learning how to put these steps in motion allows teams to have meaningful conversations about tough subjects in a way that builds trust, buy-in, and performance. This is the special sauce that teams typically lack...until now!

The first step of the F4 debrief is Facts. Getting this step right is essential to launching your organization on its optimal Top Gun Teamwork trajectory.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Facts

The first stage of the F4 debrief is Facts. This step is not only the most time-consuming, but also the most important. You may be wondering why the Facts section is so important. In summary, it establishes the events from the perspective of each of the attendees and creates the “ground truth” necessary for the remaining steps of the debrief. This step also requires maturity. Leaders often jump to conclusions based on

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experience or inside knowledge. In this stage of the debrief this would be erroneous. Instead, leaders should establish rich collaboration and should also be intentional in their methodical collection of facts. Every debrief should be infused with curiosity and inquisitive interest.

Being factually correct, based on the inputs of each individual attendee, not only creates a solid foundation for the next 3 steps, but it also creates the basis for accountable leadership by “leveling the playing field” of the attendees. It performs this by establishing the necessity of each person to provide their inputs, thus bringing accountability to each person equally, even if they have limited facts to provide per the situation being addressed.

Often, the Facts step consumes about 50% of the total debrief time. Why is this step so time consuming? The main reason is because members of the debrief are FORCED to remember, recall, or recreate factual aspects based on their perspective and situational awareness AT THAT TIME. When members remove themselves from the NOW and return to what they knew and when they knew it, they create what we call “creative vulnerability” – something absolutely essential to both accountable leadership and psychological safety.

But this just scratches the surface of the F4 Facts step.

One of the best ways to collect Facts is via the use of a timeline.

People often remember and recall the factual elements of a situation by remembering what happened first or last and then cataloging events going forward or backward from there. Sometimes people also remember a significant event and what led up to that event or maybe even what happened immediately after. Regardless of where they begin, they usually end up with some sort of chronological element as a milestone in their memory.

Facilitators can use a variety of means to capture these Facts. Calendars, timelines, schedules, and a host of other techniques may be utilized, but eventually, each member will contribute as much or as little as they know to establish who knew what and when did they know it. It is better to include something here that may only be marginally pertinent than to totally discard it as it could be a factor. Nevertheless, targeting the factual data most applicable will create efficiencies in the process.

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Additionally, leaders should strive to ensure that only relevant facts or salient information is captured in this step. There should be a LOT of Facts gathered, so time is of the essence. While there will be temptations to discuss a wide variety of topics, or large array of material, remember the emphasis here is on Facts regarding the issue at hand. This is once again where mission, objectives, and plan play a significant part.

When in doubt as to include or not include, utilize the mission, objectives, and plan to accentuate what is “need to know” versus “nice to know.”

Another way of thinking about the Fact-gathering stage is by remembering the most influential aspects of Facts – the Who, What, and When factors.

In this portion of the debrief, the Who is easy – it is only YOU! While many people may be involved in a project or debrief, their facts are theirs. There will be a time to address those, but the Fact-gathering stage is about YOUR recollection, YOUR situational awareness, YOUR perspectives. While others will invariably have their own pieces of the puzzle, fact-gathering focuses on YOU.

Now that the Who is established, the What must be addressed. What are the salient facts regarding this particular instance of Mission, Objectives, and Plan? What is the precise info? This is a great time to go back to the Mission Planning and the Mission Briefing as well. This can help you remember What you did and how or if it deviated from the plan.

Finally, when did YOU know it? Thinking about the timeline of the mission and its associated plan often helps with the When aspect of Facts gathering.

Bounding the Fact-gathering stage by who, what, and when will help create an accurate perception amongst all pertinent participants.

Approaching the Fact-gathering stage in this way allows open, honest, and candid recreation of the situation or circumstance and will alleviate most of the desire to jump forward or skip steps. Each fact offered must then be documented and gathered in the most comprehensive way possible.

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As stated previously, creating accountable leadership and an environment of psychological safety takes time. During this period, certain approaches tend to benefit the metamorphosis and bring these principles to fruition much more quickly.

Namely, in the fact-gathering stage of the debrief, it is paramount for the leader to control their tone, temper, and emotions to create a setting conducive for sharing facts. Since facts are just that, facts, leaders should treat this information with decency and respect. They should also remember the objective of this stage: accurate re-creation of who knew what and when along with what was done with the info at the time. And all of this should be done in a “judgment free” zone and tone.

While this stage is often pretty surprising or unpredictable, leaders who gather information and then only ask questions to CLARIFY fair the best. Meaning, they tend to get more open, honest, and unblemished information. When leaders are positive and steer away from any preconceived notions and premature judgements, they and their organizations will eventually thrive.

Conversely, those who ask other types of questions such as accusatory, degrading, or insinuating, tend to receive reduced clarity and decreased candor over time while also slowing the transition to accountable leadership and delaying the achievement of psychological safety.

Finally, leaders should show genuine appreciation and gratitude when members are open and honest – especially when it may cast that particular member in a less-than-optimal light.

Doing this, without repercussions or unquestionable non-verbal cues, almost always yields a more favorable, and quite frankly enjoyable, debrief experience and associated outcomes. A simple “thank you” during the fact-gathering stage goes a long way.

In summary, the success of the fact-gathering stage is predicated on ensuring the mission, objectives, and plan are acknowledged and performance of each member and team is cataloged appropriately.

Leaders should not rush this step of the F4 debrief as it is usually about 50% of the total debrief time and it sets the foundation for the remaining three steps.

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At the end of the fact-gathering stage, everyone should know who knew what and when. This timeline or chronology should then be agreed upon prior to transitioning to Step 2 of the F4 debrief, establishing the FOCUS of the debrief.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Focus

After gathering the facts, the second “F” of the F4 debrief is Focus. This step helps us limit the conversation to only the things that matter to us today. Time is one of life’s greatest common denominators and focus helps us adhere to this tenet.

Additionally, focus is important because no organization nor team has enough time to cover every single aspect of every single mission every single time. Therefore, focus is the debrief step where leadership and facilitators create efficiencies.

The ability to zoom in on relevant facts is a mix of art and science. The art aspect of focusing would take the angle that the most relevant facts are those that most significantly impacted the mission and plan the most. This is difficult to quantify but is still a good place to start.

The science aspect would list the plan chronologically and align pertinent facts accordingly. Focusing on precisely where the facts deviated from the plan is another way to approach this scientifically.

Regardless of an art or science approach, the focus should be derived from the specific objectives for the mission or tasks. Whether the team over-performed or under-performed, the focus should zoom in on performance relative to the objectives.

A great technique here to avoid distractions and provide focus for the debrief is to formulate “why” questions. These are statements that start with “why” but always end



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with a question mark. Such as, “why did we sell less than we set out to this week?” or maybe even “why did we sell more than we set out to this week?” This approach to focus forces the team to dig deeper into performance and ascertain root causes for success and failure equally. Doing this per objective is essential to the F4 debrief and actualization of Top Gun Teamwork.

The focus step should also serve as the main step where individual performance and team performance is assessed versus the objectives. For example, if a team member or a certain team over-performed expectations, asking a subset “why” question here helps the team celebrate success and emulate exceptional behaviors or actions.

Similarly, if someone or a team under-performed, asking the “why” sub-question will help get to the root cause or reason for suboptimal outcomes versus the objectives. In Top Gun Teamwork, we encourage leaders and facilitators to ask subset questions to the upper level with discretion. Digging too deeply can belabor and prolong a debrief beyond the optimal return on time investment, so we recommend rarely going beyond a single level of sub-questions unless it is an obvious and rare opportunity.

Focus should be the fastest step of the F4 debrief. After a few debriefs, leaders and facilitators should get even faster at recognizing the pertinent aspects of performance versus objectives and which mission aspect require further investigation. We utilize a team approach, per the collaboration Debrief Core Value, to make sure everyone agrees on the focus of the remainder of the debrief.

Rapid transition to framing, step 3 of the F4 debrief should occur upon reaching a consensus in the Focus step.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Framing

Once the relevant facts have been gathered and focused, it is now time to frame the debrief, knowing that the next and final phase of the debrief will be to resolve a way forward for a higher probability of success tomorrow.

In essence, for proper Framing to occur, root cause analysis must occur first.

A note of caution here is warranted – Root cause analysis or RCA, in the absence of the Debrief Core Values tends to be sterile and blame focused. Nevertheless, when RCA is done with the Debrief Core Values, it becomes a powerful tool for finding the true reason for either success or failure and simultaneously creates an environment of unprecedented psychological safety.

Once the relevant facts have been gathered and focused, it is now time to do some root cause analysis so we can appropriately frame the debrief. Remember, this is the last step before the final phase of the debrief where we will resolve a way forward for a higher probability of success tomorrow.

In our experience, the very last thing that happened immediately prior to a success or failure is almost never the root cause. Why? Because successes and failures are almost always a chain of events that led to the outcome and somewhere along this chain, usually way back at the beginning – is the true root cause. It is this chain that RCA uncovers.

The best piece of advice we can give leaders and facilitators on root cause analysis can be summed up in one phrase: dig deeper.

If your team over-performed, there has to be a good reason. If they under-performed, there has to be a good reason. Proper root cause analysis traces the actions and behaviors back to where they originated. Just like in E.A.G.L.E. planning, working from the target backwards, in RCA, working from the outcome backwards is beneficial. But going only one or two levels deep is often a trap. Dig deeper!

A technique we support is the “5 Whys.” This technique forces you to ask at least five deeper and deeper, “WHY” questions about the outcome and its root cause.

Let's look at some scenarios to show how this can occur:

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SCENARIO 1 – I-85 and I-65S Interchange

Think about the “5 Whys” - What was the first Why?

How were the other “Whys” developed?

What was the true Root Cause?

How could negative lessons learned occur by ending this phase too soon?

SCENARIO 2 – Turned the Wrong Way

Think about the “5 Whys” - What was the first Why?

If the questioning had stopped earlier – who all could've been blamed for failure?

What was the true Root Cause?

How can biases affect RCA?

SCENARIO TAKEAWAYS

- Try to open your mind to a multitude of possible root causes
- Challenge yourself to go at least “one more level deeper” each debrief
- Beware of potential bias or even strong personalities
- Posture the ultimate reason(s) for success or failure for positive Framing

Those who are best at framing figure out ways to avoid the “blame and shame” trap. Utilizing the Debrief Core Values is one recommendation to avoid this trap, but another technique is by forcing everyone to be positive and forward thinking.¹⁷ We have found that no matter the results of a disastrous mission, there are always ways to remain positive and focused on making mission success the next iteration the focus rather than just berating or degrading a team or team member.

Framing, like focusing, is both a mix of art and science. There is no magical formula, but when you do find the root cause – the final “why” if you will – do NOT forget to exercise

¹⁷ <https://thedecisionlab.com/biases/framing-effect>

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the Debrief Core Values as discussed earlier. It is often difficult and time-consuming to create heightened psychological safety, but it is easy to destroy it. So, exercise caution in the framing so you don't do more harm than good.

Here at VMax, one of the best instructors and framers we've ever met was a guy named Kenneth "Mach" Tatum. Oftentimes, after hours and hours of negativity from young flight leads or nascent instructors, Mach had a way of simplifying the entire mission with a positively framed twist. In his southern drawl, Mach would say something like, "y'all know we were two decisions away from victory today, right?" If you recall, VMax Group's CEO has a great story about this in his workshop as part of his 4-ship upgrade ride.

In a split second, he re-framed the entire debrief from a negative experience and time-consuming labor of love to a memorable and positive outcome. That is framing by a master teacher, instructor, and coach. The unheralded story here is how leaders become great framers. The best way we've seen is by exercising the Debrief Core Value of ownership. When leaders own the success and failures of their team and their team members, they raise the standard of performance on themselves, and the teams invariably follow.

The best leaders find ways to walk out of the room confident in tomorrow's outcome because everyone learned how to win today, even in the face of challenges, starting with themselves. But that's just a military example, right? Nope.

We have found the same to be true in business, non-profits, and government organizations. It is relatively easy to play the "blame and shame" game or even point fingers during root cause analysis, yet the master, the true professionals, find a way to frame for success and develop an even more advantageous outlook as a way forward.

Which takes us to step 4 of the F4 debrief – the way forward.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Way Forward

If you've arrived at this point, it has already been a beneficial process. Nevertheless, the whole purpose of the preceding steps has been to arrive at a point where ideas and recommendations on how to perform better tomorrow are more apparent.

If root cause analysis was done correctly and framed appropriately, the team should already know by employing vulnerability, humility, ownership, emotional intelligence, collaboration, and empathy the reasons for success or failure in a respectful and profitable fashion. Team leaders have already taken steps toward increased personal accountability and the team knows that they succeed or fail as a team, even if only one person on the team was the ultimate root cause for failure or success.

The way forward includes documented statements on what we should change in order to deter failure and ensure a higher probability of success tomorrow. The way forward also includes what we should emulate. Here we document our winning approaches and what we desire to further institutionalize formulas for success.

The way forward also includes respectful dissent. In this stage, leaders make their money and shoulder the burden because often, tough calls must be made. Documenting those tough calls and why they were made is invaluable. Scale the documentation to show the F4 debrief holistically and capture the solution and positivity expressed objectively.

The way forward should take about the same time as the focus section, about 10% of the total time allotted for the debrief. But if it takes longer or requires a short revisit to capture all of the positive lessons learned, do it. At the end of this phase, do not neglect capturing the lessons learned in an easily digestible format that is accessible to all members. A shared drive, shared file, notebook, or even a flip chart may be useful. Take pictures of the white board, share it with the team, the techniques are endless, but one thing is non-negotiable, it MUST be done! The next iteration of E.A.G.L.E. planning will rely on what you capture here at the end of the F4 debrief.

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The F4 Debrief Summary

The F4 debrief is the capstone of Top Gun Teamwork. Per two notable researchers in the field, organizations or teams that debrief consistently increase performance by 20-25 percent, regardless of market sector or business type. This research statistic is impressive, and it includes just any type of debrief.

In our experience, when teams adopt and successfully implement Top Gun Teamwork and especially the F4 debrief, we believe 20-25 percent is on the extreme low end. We've seen tangible and intangible results we feel are well in excess of those numbers. Regardless of statistics, the results of creating an environment of psychological safety are difficult to measure, but as Top Gun Teamwork gets even more proliferated, we are highly confident in the improvements your team will achieve because we've seen them and lived them!

The objective of this module was to enable a TGT facilitator to fully explain and then explore the 4 steps of the debrief within the TGT methodology. This is a lot of info, but if you take the debrief one step at a time, with the debrief core values as a foundation, you will see impressive results in a very short amount of time.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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MODULE 4 - CONCLUSIONS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

VIDEO NOTES

Conclusions & Takeaways

The purpose of this course was to certify you as a Top Gun Teamwork Facilitator. As a TGT Facilitator, you should be able to skillfully deliver the Top Gun Teamwork Methodology to teams you consult with or teams you lead.

You are about to embark on one of the most rewarding journeys of your personal and professional life – guaranteed! You will be pivotal in inspiring a heightened level of leader accountability, elevated cross-team trust, and unprecedented performance.

Before we launch into the Certification Test, there are just a few more things that will enhance your role as a Top Gun Teamwork facilitator. Hang on, because these final sections will help you in your approach and effectiveness.

FACILITATOR NOTES:

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Capstone Exercises

See the following pages for work-pages to fill out for the Capstone Exercises:

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FACILITATOR NOTES

What is your Team's Purpose?

What is your Team's Mission?

What is the Mission Objective(s)?

What is the Mission Subset Objective(s)?

E.A.G.L.E. Planning Model

Set Expectations –

Adopt Lesson from the Past –

Generate from the Target Backwards –

Lay Out Contingencies –

Evaluate from the Enemy's Perspective –

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Debrief

Facts –

Focus –

Framing –

The Way Forward –

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Team Life Cycle

Return to Mission Planning

Notes for the next Mission Briefing

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Wrap Up from Cujo

This concludes all instructional modules of VMax Group's Top Gun Teamwork, Facilitator Certification Course.

Now, before you proceed to the final quiz, please watch this congratulatory video from VMax Group's CEO and Founder, Robert "Cujo" Teschner.