

Being a standout team player

- Being an indispensable part of a team involves more than just a frame of mind. It also requires a specific set of skills. I'm Shade Zahrai, Director of Influenceo Global and Peak Performance Expert. [In this super practical course](#), I'll help you adjust your communication approach to get the best out of teammates, [enhance relationships and collaboration](#) to even turn conflict into opportunity, learn strategic techniques to help your team solve complex problems, and know how to leverage your strength to make the greatest contribution to your team. I've helped some of the world's top companies take their leadership and teams to the next level. Join me and get greater clarity, confidence, and the skills to position yourself as not just a valuable team player, but a role model for collaborative excellence.

Understanding You & Others

Self-awareness: Understand your engagement style

- [Ever wonder why you instantly click](#) with some people yet butt heads with others? Turns out there's a scientific reason that has to do with how our brain is wired. Brain behavior preferences influence things like our strengths, communication style and even what we find stressful. According to brain-based models, there are four engagement profiles or preferences. As we go through the video, take some notes on how these might relate to you. These will give you insight into your inherent strengths that can make you a better team player. Here they are. We have goal-driven, task-driven, vision-driven and people-driven engagement. Typically, we prefer one or two of these. This explains why we click with certain people because we share the same preferences. A goal-driven preference reflects an analytical approach, a focus on facts and figures, on identifying goals and prioritizing efficiency. You naturally analyze data and like to seek trends. Now, if you are usually early to meetings, like to follow an agenda, love your to-do lists and enjoy planning meticulously, you might be task driven. You'll find yourself more interested in what's happening in the present. Are processes being followed,

quality control and compliance. You like establishing order, maybe you're vision driven, where you enjoy driving change and taking risks, experimenting and thinking outside the box in your work. And you might catch yourself thinking about the future and about how things fit into the big picture. Or you might be just like me a people-driven relationship builder. You're team-oriented, communication focused and genuinely care about making sure everyone feels valued and respected. Thinking things like who's been impacted and how, before taking steps to solve it. So which of the four engagement styles feels most like you? Remember, we're talking about how you prefer to engage with your team, not your capabilities. Download the exercise file to dig in a little more. Then find ways to leverage your strengths with your team. Maybe volunteer for a new project where your preference sets you up for success or partner with someone whose strengths compliment yours. You can't necessarily change your brain but you can play to its strengths.

Other awareness: Engage effectively with your team

- People don't come with a user manual but wouldn't it be great if they did? Well, once you know how you prefer to engage with others, you can then start to figure out the rest of your team and how to engage with them based on their style. This is what's called social perceptiveness, the capacity to recognize what others expect in social situations. So let's look at how to do this to build trust, foster rapport and create a positive culture. First, we have to identify our teammates engagement styles. It's not a precise science but people often reveal their preferred style through how they communicate and engage with us. Think of it as the four Fs. If someone is goal-oriented, you'll often hear them speaking about facts, focused on what's next in achieving goals. Those who are task driven often focus on form. They're interested in action plans. They use to-do lists and they might be the only punctual one to team meetings. Those who are vision-driven often talk about the future. They might talk about what's possible or enjoy creative brainstorming about future projects and those who are people oriented tend to connect with feeling. They might spend extra time sharing a customer story or checking in with you about how your sick grandmother is doing. Once you have an idea about the

preferred style of your team members, engage in a way that's aligned with their preferences. For a goal-driven team member, avoid fluffy conversations. Share facts to substantiate ideas. Here is what we know or our objective is. When engaging with those who are task driven, share details and specifics. Give them the structure they crave. Here are the next steps, or here are our deadlines. Create an agenda and stick to it. For those who are vision driven, say things like, imagine if, here's how this fits in with the big picture. Give them the opportunity to engage in blue sky thinking to innovate and be creative. And for those who are people oriented, ask how does that feel to you? Have we considered everyone who's impacted? Check in with them. Give them the opportunity to openly share and to feel heard. Importantly, we need to make sure we're not categorizing or labeling people. We're simply using insights from research to help us better connect. Plus, we're helping to create environments where our team members feel heard, which builds trust and deepens relationships. Now, there will be times when you don't know the style of your team. Maybe you're invited to present a business update to the entire department. What do you do? Appeal to all styles. Share objectives, share next steps and deadlines. Share how it fits into the strategy and the big picture and share customer stories or employee verbatim feedback. This ensures that you're delivering a powerful message that's appealing to every possible style. If you can accurately perceive others' preferences, you'll be seen as more cooperative and people will want you on their teams. And if you can adjust your behavior and style to suit who you're speaking with, it will help you establish yourself as a top team player with influence. Go ahead and download the Exercise files to help you map out the styles to your team and learn some simple techniques to transform how you engage and connect. Next up, you'll learn how to preserve the one thing you never want to lose with your teammates.

Cultivate Trusted Relationships

Engage fully with your teammates

- How would you feel if you and I were having a conversation at work and I kept glancing at my phone? Would you feel somewhat undervalued, that you're not my priority? There are many little things that we unconsciously do that undermine important relationships. Listening intently and making teammates feel heard is perhaps the most important skill to strengthening relationships, trust and synergy. Here's a simple framework to help you maintain quality engagement with your teammates. All you have to do is show the LOVE. L is for lean in and listen. Stop everything, including any background thoughts and be fully present. Lean in slightly and listen intently. Leaning forward slightly indicates interest, while leaning back, dominance. So give off the right non-verbal cues. And if you're virtual, then simulate eye contact by looking at the camera when you're speaking. Make sure you're well lit and use a microphone. Making it easy to see you and hear you matters. O is for open posture. Keep arms and palms exposed and resting comfortably on the desk or table, or relaxed at the side of the body, if you're standing. Crossed arms and legs could communicate defensiveness, disinterest, or even superiority, so keep it open. In the right context, of course. V is for validate. Two ways to validate and reinforce that you're fully present are, clarification; ask follow-up questions to clarify or seek more information. What does that mean to you? Or tell me more about how you came up with that idea. And reflection; paraphrase what you understood in your own words. What I'm hearing is, what I understand is that, or if I understand you correctly. Highlight key points and then get the other person to confirm that you've understood them. E is for elevate. How do you want your teammates to feel around you? Encouraged, enthusiastic, optimistic? A study published in Psychological Science concluded that without trying or being aware of it, each of us gives out a vibe called Trait Affective Presence, which influences others' moods. Not only that, there's the phenomena of Emotional Contagion. So if you are optimistic, your team can catch that state. It's not about faking it, but recognizing that we can consciously elevate our vibe through shifting our attitude and behavior. Here's a real example. Marilyn Monroe was once strolling in downtown New York City with a friend who expressed astonishment at her ability to maintain anonymity in public. Marilyn replied, that's because I'm walking as Norma Jean. If I walked as Marilyn, everyone would notice me. Her friend, disbelieving, encouraged her to show her

what she meant. Instantly, Norma Jean transformed herself into Marilyn Monroe, the movie star. She radiated a certain energy and within minutes she was surrounded by fans. It's important to be aware of and regulate how you consistently show up to your team because this impacts how they respond, feel and perform. Even if you're a quiet introvert, your vibe exerts influence. So how do we do this in practice? Maintain healthy levels of courage and enthusiasm. Use encouraging language and call out small wins and strengths. So remember to use the LOVE framework to better engage with your teammates. Lean in and listen, open posture, validate and elevate. Coming up, we'll explore how to manage the number one catalyst to friction in working relationships.

Manage expectations and foster trust

- In any relationship, at work or otherwise, usually the catalyst to friction is unfulfilled expectations. So no matter how much potential you bring to the table, if expectations within your team aren't managed, you'll likely lose their trust, and trust can take a long time to rebuild once lost. There are two types of trust in teams, integrity-based trust: I trust your motives and competency-based trust, I trust your skills. You need both. For example, if you're given a deadline of five days, and you deliver the work in three, you're a superstar demonstrating both integrity-based and competence-based trust because you delivered within the agreed timeframe. But if you tell your team you can get it done in two days and it takes three, sure, the time it took is still three days, but you violated integrity-based trust. You didn't manage expectations and eroded your trustworthiness. So here are three rules to maintaining your trustworthiness. Commit and deliver. If you commit to it, do it. If you know in advance you won't be able to do something, manage expectations early. Tell the person there's going to be a delay or try to seek assistance. And if you don't know how to do it, seek support. Put it in writing. Have you ever delivered work to your team leader only to get, "This isn't what I asked for," yet, you're certain that that's what was requested in your last meeting? Unfortunately, there's no way to prove it. The same applies when you casually tell a team member that the report will be delayed by a day, but they forget the conversation ever happened and now think

you're unreliable. The solution, document accountabilities, and email expectations. There are three important questions you need to get agreement on: what, when, and who. What specifically needs to be done? When is the deadline? Who is responsible? Set boundaries. What if you are at full-capacity, and your team delegates you an additional urgent task to complete? Don't accept if there's going to be an issue with delivering on time without first communicating with the team. Here's a simple two-step approach to respond. First, positive-first response. Sure, I can take that on. Followed by: request a solution. Can you help me reprioritize what's on my list so I work on what's most urgent? Why is this so effective? A 2021 study published in "Harvard Business Review" found that managers either didn't know or couldn't remember 60% of the work their teams do. So it's plausible that the rest of the team won't know the extent of your workload either. Once you take them through your list, they might realize everything on it is urgent and delegate it to someone else or offer their help. There is a self-assessment in the exercise files to help you rate your trustworthiness at work with suggestions for improvement. Remember, managing expectations is crucial in teams. Be a person of integrity that can be relied upon.

Foster psychological safety

- Google conducted a major internal study [to identify the key dynamics of successful teams.](#) After two years, 200 interviews and the mapping of over 250 attributes, what do you think came out as the most important? Psychological safety, which simply means that members of a team feel that they can speak freely without being rejected, judged, or criticized. People often hold back from expressing concerns and opinions if there is a risk of being perceived negatively so they self censor and maintain an inauthentic image to fit in with the team. The good news is that you can encourage psychological safety within your team with these five practices. Admit errors, so demonstrate vulnerability and directness. Show others that it's okay if you make an error. This gives others permission to do the same. Reducing fear of judgment. Become curious about mistakes. What can we learn? What will we do differently going forward? This fosters a growth mindset culture that helps people feel more involved, accountable, and willing to

grow. Throw a concern party. Take a page out of Google Venture's playbook by encouraging your team to take 10 minutes to individually write down their greatest anxieties about performance, about business uncertainty, anything. Then get them to spend two minutes ranking their anxieties in order of severity. And finally, each one shares their list, inviting opportunities for team support, empathy and solutions. Ask for help. We can't all be experts at everything and sometimes it makes sense to actively seek teammates for their help, skills or views. Asking for help creates permission for others to do the same. Fostering greater collaboration, which leads to better use of talent. Validate through expressions. We respond to people's expressions. Knowing this, when a teammate is speaking and they can see your expression, be present and demonstrate engagement. Validate, nod, smile, look like you're actively listening, it will make a huge difference to how comfortable you make them feel especially those who struggle with speaking up. We all have a role to play in creating psychological safety. It's not just the leader or the manager who creates the culture. In the exercise files, you'll find a checklist with suggestions for how to help foster greater psychological safety in your team. Building on psychological safety, next, we'll dive into practices to enhance your team's collaboration.

Become a Team Culture Creator

Capitalize on collaboration for team building

- Collaboration is at the heart of teamwork. And when done right, the team adds up to much more than the sum of its parts. Here are three powerful practices to help you enhance your team's collaboration. Continually clarify context. Changes are constant and it's vital to continually clarify the team's purpose in the context of the big picture. Without it, the team fragments. What's our organization's purpose? How does our department contribute? How does our team contribute? And finally, if applicable, how does this project contribute? The art of consultation. What if your team could achieve that magic balance of allowing the clash of diverse ideas that leverages the collective while maintaining unity and psychological safety? Everyone's opinion is regarded as

equally valid with the understanding that optimal decisions are achieved only through building on the collective knowledge. This requires the frank participation of everyone involved. Here are three key principles to implement consultation, non personalization of ideas. Get your team to make a pact that whatever is contributed by an individual belongs to the group. Each member can add to the idea, suggest alternatives and scrutinize without people taking it personally. So rather than I disagree with you, you would say I disagree with the idea because of X. Provide evidence that argues the counterpoint. Consider it candor. Share ideas, questions, and opinions freely yet in a non-threatening and inclusive way that fosters curiosity and trust. The purpose is to seek the truth. For example have we considered the possibility that... United agreement, even if a team member is convinced that a decision isn't the best choice it's better to preserve team unity by supporting the group's decision? Because unity is what leads a team to continually improve and correct their decisions. Of course, common sense has to prevail and it doesn't mean the group proceed with any dangerous decision that lacks integrity. This isn't about creating group think. Consultation takes practice and the payoff can be immeasurable. Through the trust built, people are empowered to solve problems that require deep collaboration. Paying it forward. Collaborative teams operate with an unspoken rule that they have each other's backs. This idea of paying it forward is called generalized reciprocity. The help giver receives a burst of oxytocin. The help receiver experiences a burst of oxytocin and others in the team who witness it also receive their own burst of oxytocin, making them more likely to help too. It's the virtuous cycle of cooperation. Consider how you can incorporate paying it forward into your team dynamics. In the exercise files, you'll find a summary of these three powerful practices, together with space for you to capture your commitments. Next up, we're exploring how to deal with the inevitability of disagreements in teams.

Confidently navigate conflict and offer feedback

- The more diverse the team, the more variation in perspectives, and inevitably the more potential for conflict. Here are three practical ways to navigate high-friction situations to minimize misunderstandings and protect the integrity of your relationships.

Communicating assertively. How do we speak up and call out someone's behavior in a respectful way? Maintain composure. The best way to begin deescalating friction is not to react. Take a moment to collect your thoughts. Make it about you. In the moment, if we act on emotion, we might say, "You are frustrating me," or, "You're so unreasonable," which is a personal attack. Instead, we recommend using I-statements, like, "I'm frustrated because this is important to me." Meet face-to-face. When virtual, people tend to use more power strategies, and there can be misunderstandings. Try to solve conflicts and disagreements face-to-face where possible. Share your interests rather than only your position. Instead of, "You can't log off early today," which is a position and may not be taken very well, appeal to interests. Share why. "It would be really helpful if you could stay until close of business today because my son is sick and I have to pick him up early from school." People respond far more positively when they understand your interests. Curiosity. When the stakes are high, it is too easy to misunderstand someone or become emotionally triggered by someone's words or behavior. To avoid a defensive reaction, be curious and use one of these four phrases. "That's interesting." "Can you tell me more about that?" "What makes you say that?" "What made you do that?" "What made you think that?" Here, you're being curious and seeking additional information to avoid incorrect assumptions. These prompts, which are more about the principle than the words themselves, can help to deescalate high-pressure situations and are a valuable addition to your conflict management toolkit. Offering feedback. Here's a simple five-step brain-friendly approach to giving feedback. Prime with, "Yes." Ask a short question to prime the receiver. "Do you have five minutes to discuss how the last meeting went?" Or, "I have some ideas for how to improve the report. Can I share them now?" Authentic praise. Validate something about the person or their approach. "You've really stepped up over the last two weeks," or, "Thanks for the extra effort you've invested lately." Provide the data point. Specifically mention evidence of what happened. Be specific and factual. "You said you'd provide the report by 11:00 AM and I didn't receive it until 3:00 PM." Impact statement. Share how the data point impacted you or the team to provide a sense of meaning and remind them of how their work matters. "Because I didn't receive the report, I couldn't submit it on time, which has delayed the

project's completion." Check in and end with a collaborative question. "Were you aware of the impact? What's your take on this?" You might also want to check in on the person. "You are usually such an upbeat part of the team. This is uncharacteristic of you. Is everything okay?" Or, "How can the team support you?" This sparks real talk, a genuine and meaningful conversation. You'll find a summary of these important principles in the exercise files, along with space for you to make your own commitments. Next up, we'll dive into how you can identify and leverage your strengths to optimize your position as a valuable team player.

Play to your strengths

- A decade ago, when someone would ask, what are your strengths? I'd reply with all the things I was good at doing. So with a background in law, I'd share, I'm great at multitasking. I have a really analytical approach and I'm exceptionally detail-oriented. But then I came across the work of Marcus Buckingham, one of the world's most prominent researchers on strength in leadership, and my view fundamentally changed. According to Buckingham, a strength is not something that you're simply good at. A real strength is an activity that strengthens you internally, that you look forward to doing. It leaves you feeling energized rather than depleted. A Gallup study found that focusing on strengths can lead to an almost 20% increase in performance and 73% lower attrition. We're simply happier, more confident, and more self-aware, not to mention more productive, when focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses. So here's what I invite you to do right now. You might like to pause the video. First, download the exercise files and find the document titled Strenergy Matrix. In the space provided, list all the things you believe are your strengths. Then work through each of them on your list and ask yourself two questions. How energized do I feel when I think about this strength? This determines whether it strengthens you internally and where it falls on the horizontal axis, and how good am I at it? This relates to your proficiency and where it falls on the vertical axis. Finally, plot your strengths. Based on where your strength fall in the matrix, ask yourself these questions. Bottom left. How can I avoid these tasks? Top left. How can I do less of these things? Bottom right. How can I pursue this as a passion or hobby

outside of work? Top right. How can I do more of these things? When you can contribute your strengths, everyone wins. It's also important to encourage others to contribute their strengths to the team too. The best teams know each other's strengths, how to get the best out of one another, and how to energize each other so that everyone performs harmoniously. This is how you can become a team culture creator.

Expand Your Strategic Mindset

Hone your strategy skills

- High performing teams need team members who are able to think strategically in order to be proactive, adaptable, and innovative, and this helps you stand out as a key contributor. Here are five surprisingly easy ways you can reconfigure your thinking to be more strategic. Ask strategic questions, for example how are we differentiating ourselves to competitors? Where will our growth come from in the next five years? How could we respond to the threat presented by potentially disruptive competitors? Ask why. Develop a habit of often asking yourself why am I doing this? This reminds you of the big picture, and aligns your decision making with the team and company goals. Consider alternatives using inversion. If you're solving a problem think about the worst case scenario really. For example you explore all the potential risks and concerns, including if this was to fail what could have caused the failure? If we ran out of resources, what would we do? By considering weaknesses in advance you're better able to prepare for and mitigate them before they arise. Identifying gaps, address these four priority areas. Vision, how does this fit in with the big picture. Goal, what are the facts and what's the immediate objective? People, who is impacted, and how have we engaged them and how do they feel about this. Task, what needs to be done to make this happen? Conduct a post-mortem. In the world of management, a post-mortem is a post-implementation review. Once you finished a project reflect on what went well and what didn't. What could be better next time? What were the gaps? What do you wish you knew when you started? You can even take this a step further and do this with your

team. Doing these regularly helps to build a habit of strategic thinking and the more you do it, the better you get.

Develop your solution-orientation

- How you show up when you're with your team matters more than you realize. Solution orientation is a critical skill that encourages everyone in the team to work together towards finding solutions rather than just pointing out problems. Here are three tips to cultivate your solution orientation. Language reframing. This is a technique that involves changing the way that we talk about a problem to make it more amenable to solutions. For example, reframe problem to opportunity. Let's say your company is facing financial difficulties. Rather than saying, "We are in financial trouble and don't know what to do," you could say, "We see this as an opportunity to reevaluate our business model and find new ways to increase revenue and cut costs, improving our financial health in the long run." This way, you're more open-minded to creative solutions and can emerge from the situation even stronger than before. Another example is reframing failure to learning experience. Let's say you perform poorly in a client pitch. Rather than saying, "I can't believe this happened. I failed," reframe to, "I see this as a learning experience. I'll prepare better and get feedback so I do better with the next pitch." This way, you're more proactive, rather than feeling defeated. These simple shifts in language can have a profound effect on how we approach the problem, encouraging us to think more positively and creatively. Collective curiosity. A true solution orientation requires you to ask curious questions to the root of the issue and to think more creatively. By asking how questions, teams can begin to explore different approaches and creative solutions. For example, if a team is struggling with sticking to budget, they might ask questions like, how can we reduce costs without sacrificing quality? Or how can we use existing resources more efficiently? Offer solutions. Rather than just complaining about a problem or a task, brainstorm at least three potential solutions along with pros and cons. This not only helps you develop a skill called cognitive flexibility, it also helps the team move forward faster and makes it easier to identify what solution's going to work best. By incorporating solution orientation into your day-to-day thinking, you can

become an invaluable asset to any team. Not only will you be able to identify problems and offer solutions, but you'll also encourage the team to work together towards finding the best solution. This can help create a more collaborative environment that leads to better results. You'll find reflection questions and a summary in the exercise files, along with space to make your own commitments.