Leading and Working in Teams: Strategies for Encouraging High-Performing Teams

1. Recognize that some teams must come together quickly, especially in times of crisis or uncertainty. To be effective, team members must engage in a learning process to get up to speed on what everyone brings to the team, what challenges the team is facing, and to be clear on the goals they are trying to accomplish. To build trusting relationships that are needed, everyone should ask and answer questions to learn more and hold off on making assumptions during this learning process and the continuing work.

2. Realize that everyone on the team at some point will likely have the opportunity to lead others and have an active role in ensuring the success of the team and organization.

3. Team leaders must create a safe space for people to take small inter-personal risks such as asking questions, offering ideas and suggestions, and acknowledging failures and mistakes, which leads to valuable learning for everyone. To do this, practice the following:

   a. Display humility and acknowledge a need for input, ideas, answers, and the possibility for mistakes. Frame the work as a learning challenge, which reveals all the answers have not been found and sets the stage for everyone to offer input, spur the growth of creativity and innovation, and learn from mistakes and failures.

   b. Ask questions, which can change the dialogue and allow people to share their concerns and offer ideas.

   c. Once such a safe space has been created, provide compelling goals for members that are clear, meaningful, and allow for individuals and the team in entirety to stretch to achieve excellence and high standards.

   d. Acknowledge that failures may arise, and when they do, the team should learn from such failures by evaluating and analyzing the circumstances surrounding the failure and then determining the path forward together.