Eight Behaviors for

Smarter Teams

Roger Schwarz

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Why can some teams come together, tackle challenging issues, and produce excellent results, while others can't? Why is it that when smart leaders try to function as a team, the team so often gets stuck? Why does the team as a whole seem less smart than the sum of the talents of its individual members?

One reason is that many team interactions don't reflect a Mutual Learning approach, which includes the mindset and eight behaviors I describe in this article. This mindset and set of behaviors helps teams make better decisions and stick to them, decreases the time needed to implement those decisions effectively, improves working relationships, and increases team member well-being.

You and other leaders can use the Mutual Learning approach to work together more effectively, whether in one-on-one, executive team, board, network, project team, committee, task force, or union-management team interactions.[1]

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Start with Your Mindset: Core Values and Assumptions

The behaviors described in this article are simply skills. Your ability to use the skills effectively depends on the mindset you start with. By mindset, I mean the values and assumptions you use to put the behaviors into action. Practicing the behaviors successfully requires that you have a Mutual Learning mindset, reflecting particular core values and assumptions. The core values of this Mutual Learning mindset are:

- Transparency
- Curiosity
- Informed choice
- Accountability
- Compassion

When you're **transparent**, you share all relevant information, including your thoughts, feelings, and strategies. When you're **curious**, you are genuinely interested in others' views and seek them out so that you and others can learn. When you value **informed choice**, you act in ways that maximize your own and others' abilities to make decisions based on relevant information. When you're **accountable**, you take responsibility for your actions and their short- and long-term consequences. You expect to be asked to explain your beliefs, actions, and decisions to your team and others. When you're **compassionate**, you understand others' concerns and connect and respond to others. You suspend judgment temporarily so that you can appreciate other people's situations. When you act with compassion, you infuse the other core values with your intent to understand, empathize with, and help others.

Your core values and your assumptions generate your behaviors. The assumptions of the Mutual Learning mindset are:

- I have some information; so do other people.
- Each of us may see things that others don't.

- I may be contributing to the problem.
- Differences are opportunities for learning.
- People may disagree with me and have pure motives.

With these assumptions, you're curious about what others know that you don't, you're open to exploring and learning from conflicts instead of trying to control and win them, and you're more generous in thinking about what may motivate others to act differently from you.

Many of us operate from the Mutual Learning core values and assumptions, and we practice the eight behaviors with relative ease when we work with people who share our views and with whom we have strong working relationships. Unfortunately, we often don't practice the behaviors when they are most needed—with people who hold views different from our own and with whom we want to improve our relationship. That's because when the stakes are high we often aren't transparent, curious or compassionate, and we are not making the Mutual Learning assumptions. Even if you practice the eight behaviors for smarter teams without fail, if you are doing so without the underlying Mutual Learning core values and assumptions, you are just enacting another superficial technique or method, another fad-of-the-month that won't help your team become more effective. However, when you practice the eight behaviors *with* the core values and assumptions, you apply a powerful, values-based approach for significantly increasing team effectiveness. You generate higher performance, build better relationships and create greater well-being for you and your team.

The Eight Behaviors for Smarter Teams

These are specific behaviors that improve how team members work together. They provide more guidance than relatively abstract notions such as "Treat everyone with respect" and "Be constructive." They are also less procedural than "Put your cell phones on vibrate" and "Start meetings on time, end on time." Below, I describe what each behavior means, how to apply it, and what results the behavior will help you achieve. By making the eight behaviors explicit, you and your team members are able to apply them consistently. To learn more about the eight behaviors and the mindset that makes them work, see *Smart Leaders, Smarter Teams: How You and Your Team Get Unstuck to Get Results* by

The **Eight Behaviors** for **Smarter Teams** are:

1 State views and ask genuine questions

2 Share all relevant information

3 Use specific examples and agree on what important words mean

4 Explain reasoning and intent

5 Focus on interests, not positions

6 Test assumptions and inferences

7 Jointly design next steps

8 Discuss undiscussable issues

Roger Schwarz (Jossey-Bass, 2013).[2]

ONE: State Views and Ask Genuine Questions

Stating your views and asking genuine questions means sharing your thinking, including your reasoning and intent, **and** inviting others to comment. For example, you might say, "I think it would be helpful if we initially limit the program to about 20 key customers so that we can see how it works and eliminate any problems before scaling up. What are your thoughts about starting with a small group?"

For this behavior to be effective, your questions need to be genuine. A genuine question is one that stems from curiosity; you ask so that you may learn something you don't already know. In contrast, a rhetorical or leading question is one you ask to make your point of view known without explicitly stating it. For example, the question, "Do you really think that will work?" is not a genuine question because embedded in your question is your own view that you doubt it will work. However, you can easily convert it to a genuine question by first stating your views. You might say, "I'm not seeing how this will work because . . . . What are you seeing that leads you to think it will work?"

Stating your views and asking genuine questions leads to better performance. It changes a meeting from a series of unconnected monologues in which people try to persuade one another, to a focused conversation

that generates increased understanding. When you follow your statements with genuine questions, you increase the chance that the next speaker will address your questions. If each person in the team asks genuine questions, the conversation will flow more easily and people will be responding to each other. As a result, relevant information is presented, issues are addressed more thoroughly, and better decisions are made.

Stating views and asking genuine questions also leads to better working relationships. When you express your views, including explaining how you arrived at your conclusions, your information and your thinking process are transparent. This helps others understand what you think and enables them to make more informed choices. By asking genuine questions, you reveal your curiosity and learn what others are thinking. As you learn others' reasoning, you may reach agreement on an issue that you had previously disagreed about. When you don't agree, you quickly identify where your information or reasoning differ from others'. This awareness allows the team to resolve differences and generate better solutions.

Behavior 1 is especially helpful when you're concerned that expressing your views or asking questions may shut down conversation or be seen as confrontational. Suppose you are talking with your team and you are concerned that the team's plans don't respond to stakeholder needs. Rather than ease into the conversation by saying, "How do you think this new plan responds to other stakeholders' needs?" you could start by stating your view: "I'd like to talk about my concerns that the plan doesn't address some of our stakeholders' needs. Let me give you a couple of examples of what I mean and get your reactions." After sharing your view, ask a genuine question, such as, "What, if anything, do you see differently or think I've missed?" By posing this question, you increase the chance that others on the team will share different views, if they have them.

However, if you only share your view without inviting differing opinions, others will likely push only their own views as well. This creates a discussion in which participants spend their time trying to persuade each other, ultimately resulting in a stalemate or a decision with winners and losers—with losers who are not committed to following through with the decision. If you only ask questions, you don't help others

understand your reasoning and they may become suspicious. Privately, they may wonder, *Why is he asking me these questions? Where is he going in this conversation?* As a result, they may be unwilling to give you complete or accurate answers.

Stating views and asking genuine questions is the foundation on which the other seven behaviors are based, because all the other behaviors require that you state your views and ask genuine questions. What information do you share when you are expressing your views? The next four behaviors address that question.

Two: Share All Relevant Information

This is the practice of presenting all information that might affect how your team solves a problem or makes a decision. It ensures that all team members have a common pool of knowledge from which to make informed choices.

When your team members are responsible for making decisions yet learn after a decision is made that you withheld relevant information from them, they will feel deprived of having made an informed choice. As a result, they may fail to follow through on the decision, may implement the decision half-heartedly, or may even withdraw their support.

Sharing relevant information includes presenting details that don't support your preferred solution. Suppose that you're a member of a leadership team deciding how to restructure your organization and move into a new facility. You are the leader of one particular manufacturing process and want to continue in your role. Yet you also see that in the new facility, several manufacturing processes could easily be merged for greater efficiency, which could mean losing your role. In this situation, sharing all relevant information requires that you tell the team about the increased efficiency opportunities you see, even though doing so may hurt your chances of retaining your role.

In challenging situations, there is usually a significant gap between what you say and what you think and feel. The example on the following page shows how people withhold relevant information. The right column shows a conversation between Paula and Ted; the left column shows Paula's thoughts and feelings as she talks with Ted. Paula doesn't share

with Ted all the relevant thoughts and feelings she has. For example, she doesn't say that others had concerns or that she believes the directors did not get answers to some basic questions. At the end of the conversation, Paula thinks to herself, *I've got to get you to understand what you've done!* Yet by withholding her concerns, Paula contributed to Ted's lack of understanding and increased her own frustration.

The point of this example is not that Paula should share her thoughts and feelings exactly as they appear in the left column. To be effective, Paula would

Withholding Relevant Information

Paula's Thoughts and Feelings	The Conversation
I thought the presentation was a disaster and so did three others I spoke with.	*Paula:* How do you think your presentation to the directors went yesterday?
Do you really believe it went OK, or are you just trying to put a good face on it? Nit-picky! You couldn't answer some basic cost questions.	*Ted:* I think it went OK, although there were some rough spots. Some of the directors can really get nit-picky.
I don't understand why you didn't emphasize why we wanted to do the project. The directors won't approve a project like this if they can't get answers to some basic questions.	*Paula:* We've got some really important reasons for doing it. Do you think they will OK the project now, or do we need to give them more answers?
I don't want to wait while this project dies on the vine. Besides, my reputation is at stake here too.	*Ted:* I think we're in OK shape. A couple of them came up to me after the meeting and said they appreciated the presentation. I think we should just wait and see.
I hope the directors don't think I'm responsible for your not having the answers to those questions. Why didn't you use the information I gave you? I've got to get you to understand what you've done!	*Paula:* Maybe, but I think we might want to give the members some more information.

need to shift her core values so that she is more transparent, more curious, and more accountable. Then she could share the relevant information she has (and also apply the other behaviors). She might begin by saying, "Ted, I am really concerned about the presentation you did yesterday. I'd like to give you some specific examples about what concerned me and get your reactions. How does that sound?"

THREE: Use Specific Examples and Agree on What Important Words Mean

When you state your views, it's essential to use specific examples and agree on what important words mean. When you give specific examples, you name people, places, things, events, and report what people said and did. This enables others to independently determine whether they agree with your information and reasoning.

For example, if you make the general statement, "I think some of us aren't following through on our project commitments," other team members don't have enough information to determine whether they agree with you. You haven't stated who "some of us" are or described what behaviors you have seen that led you to believe that others aren't "following through." As a result, the people you are referring to may incorrectly infer that you are not talking about them, and the people you *are not* talking about may incorrectly infer that you are talking about them and as a result feel resentful or unfairly judged.

In contrast, if you say, "Jay and Lily, I didn't receive your sections of the project report. Did you complete and email them to everyone on the team?" Jay and Lily can report whether they completed their assignment. If Jay and Lily agree that they did not complete the project report, then they and the team can talk about what led this to happen, its impact on the team, and what people will do differently in the future.

You may be concerned that by identifying specific people on the team, they or others may feel that you're putting them on the spot. This is another example of how the eight behaviors involve changing how you think. Instead of thinking that when you identify people you are putting them on the spot, you could view this step as being transparent,

accountable, curious, and compassionate—that is, reflecting Mutual Learning core values. With this new mindset you give people an opportunity to address your concerns, including whether they view the situation the same way as you do.

Using specific examples also helps you agree on what important words mean. Often, team members can use the same word in different ways and still assume that they agree when they really don't, or vice versa. For example, suppose your team agrees to treat each member with respect, which initially seems pretty straightforward and helpful. Now consider the following situation: You are in a meeting with several team members and people from other parts of your organization. During the meeting, Alan doesn't say much. Afterwards, he comes to you and says, "Out of respect, I didn't want to say anything to you in front of the other divisions, but I don't think your proposal will work." You respond, "I think it would have been more respectful to tell me in the meeting that my proposal had problems. Now, if you're right, I may have to call another meeting and take more of my own time and the team's time. To me, one sign of respect is that you're willing to tell me when you see a problem and assume I am more interested in serving the organization well than in trying to look good. How are you thinking about respect in this situation?"

One way to determine whether all team members are using a word or phrase to mean the same thing is to state your view and ask a genuine question (Behavior 1). You can say, "You used the word respect. If we are in situation X, and I'm acting with *respect* toward you, I would do Y. Does your definition of respect differ from mine, and if it does, how so?"

FOUR: Explain Reasoning and Intent

Think about the last time your formal leader's boss asked you to come to his or her office and didn't explain why. You probably wondered what the meeting was about and then thought up some possible explanations for why he or she wanted to talk with you. As human beings, we are hardwired to seek meaning in events. If people don't tell us what they are thinking, we make up our own stories, and

often those stories are wrong.

Explaining your reasoning and intent is another part of effectively stating your view. When you share your reasoning and intent, you reduce the chance that others will make up stories about why you are doing what you're doing. Let's assume that your team works relatively well together, but you think they can do even better. If you say to your team, "I'd like to introduce a set of behaviors that I think will make us more effective," team members may quickly start to think that you are dissatisfied with the team's performance or that they are dysfunctional. You reduce the chance of misinterpretation if you also say, "I want to be clear about why I'm suggesting this. I don't think we're dysfunctional. I think we perform well and that we can be more efficient and generate even better ideas with more support. I'm happy to give you examples of what I mean."

Reasoning and intent are similar but different. Your intent is your purpose for doing something. Your reasoning is the logical process you use to reach conclusions based on information, values, and assumptions. For example, your intent may be to get commitment to a decision. Your reasoning may be that you value different views and you know people have different opinions on this topic; you assume that if everyone participates, the decision will be better and people will be more committed to it.

When you share your reasoning and intent, you make your private thoughts public. This helps people understand what led you to make the comments you made, ask the questions you asked, or take the actions you took. When you share your reasoning and intent, others can ask you questions and explain how their views differ from yours. And you can do the same with them. This is exactly the conversation that teams must have in order to understand members' differing views and to move forward as one.

If you are trying to control the conversation so that your point of view will triumph, then fully explaining your reasoning will be risky: others might identify flaws in your reasoning, thus reducing the chance that you will prevail. But if you genuinely want to learn, explaining your reasoning and intent provides opportunities to learn where others have different views and where you may have missed something that others see.

FIVE: Focus on Interests, Not Positions

Chances are you have been in a team meeting where people try unsuccessfully to get buy-in to their solutions. The first person shares his solution and people tell him why it won't work. Then the second person speaks and her idea is shot down. When it's your turn, the same thing happens. The team either reaches an impasse, agrees on a compromise that pleases no one, or the formal leader takes the decision away from the team.

Why does this happen?

First, people are natural problem-solvers. Give team members a problem, and they will quickly generate solutions for it. Often they come to a meeting with solutions already in hand, or they quickly propose them.

Second, when people have strong feelings about the topic, they often think of the meeting as a contest where their view—which they see as the correct one—should prevail. That leads them to try to convince others that their solution is the right one. But that doesn't explain why one person's solution is often unacceptable to others on the team.

To understand this, we need to understand how we arrive at our preferred solutions. Basically, we generate a solution that meets *our* needs, because those are the needs we know about. When our solutions don't take into account other stakeholders' needs, the other stakeholders reject the solutions.

Positions are like solutions that people identify to address an issue. Interests are the underlying needs that people use to generate their solutions or positions.[3] To illustrate with a very simple example, if you and I are sitting in a conference room, and I want the window open and you want it closed, those are our positions.[4] If I asked you, "What leads you to want the window closed?" you might say that the wind is blowing your papers around and you want the papers together. If you asked what leads me to want the window open, I might say that I'm warm and I want to be cooler. These are our interests. My solution to open the window and your solution to shut it are simply ways for each of us to meet our interests. The problem here is that the window can't be open and closed at the same time. But if we focus on our interests, we can find a solution that meets both of our interests.

The difficulty with solving problems by focusing first on positions is that people's positions are often in conflict, even when their underlying interests are compatible. This happens because people tend to offer positions that meet their own interests but do not take into account other people's interests. In the conference room example, you would probably reject my solution, and I would probably reject yours, because neither solution meets the other's interests. Often leaders unknowingly encourage team members to focus on positions when they say to their team members, "Don't come to the team with a problem unless you have a solution." It's presumptuous to expect that a solution will work for others until their interests are known.

If instead we focus on interests, we could identify them and then ask the question, "How can we solve this problem in a way that meets these interests?" With a little thought and creativity, we might decide to open the top part of the window so that your papers were not being blown by the wind and I still got the benefit of cool air. Or we could switch places so that I was closer to the open window and you were away from it. When we focus on interests, we are being transparent by explaining the reasoning and intent underlying our preferences, and we are being curious by learning about others' interests.

These are the key steps for focusing on interests:

1. **Identify interests.** Ask team members to complete this or a similar sentence as many times as possible: "No matter what the specifics of the solution are, we need to do this in a way that . . . ." If people keep identifying positions, ask them, "What is it about your solution that's important to you?" This helps identify their underlying interests.

2. **Clarify and agree on interests.** Make sure each team member understands what an expressed interest means (apply Behavior 3, "Agree on what important words mean") and that they consider it an interest that should be taken into account in the solution. This doesn't mean that the interest is one that each team member shares; it means only that they consider it relevant.

3. **Generate potential solutions that meet the interests.** If you can't find a solution that meets all the interests the team members have decided

should be taken into account, consider whether the proposed solutions have a common unnecessary assumption embedded in them. For example, if the proposed solutions assume that the work has to be performed in-house, try relaxing that assumption and see if the team can generate other solutions that will meet all the interests. If this does not help, then the team can prioritize or weight the different interests to find a solution that addresses the most important interests.

4. **Select a solution and implement it.** Using this approach does not guarantee that the team will reach a decision that meets all of everyone's interests. It does, however, increase the chance that you will find a solution that everyone can support.

SIX: Test Assumptions and Inferences

Remember I said that we are all hardwired to seek meaning in events? That includes you. For example, if your boss says, "You're doing a great job, but the project has been slowing your team down. I'm going to give the new project to Brenda's team," your mind immediately jumps into action. You may wonder, *What does he really mean when he says that? Why is he saying that?* Then you attempt to answer your own questions by telling yourself a story. You might tell yourself your boss is concerned about your team's performance and isn't telling you the truth. Or you may think he is afraid to confront Brenda with the fact that she keeps generating inaccurate cost projections that slow down the project. You're probably not even aware you're asking and answering these questions in your mind. However, your response to the situation will be based on the story you tell yourself. If this story is a negative one, you will likely respond in a negative way. For example, you might react defensively the next time your boss asks you about your team's performance.

When you draw a conclusion about things you don't know based on things you do know, you are making an inference. When you simply take something for granted, without any information, you are making an assumption. We naturally make inferences and assumptions all the time. You have to make inferences to get through the day. Also, you

can't test out every inference you make; if you did, you would drive people crazy and you wouldn't get anything accomplished. Still, the problem is that when you make inferences, you don't know whether your inferences are correct. And if you act on your inferences as if they were true when they are false, then you create problems for yourself and others. The only way you can determine if your inference is accurate is to test it with the person about whom you have made the inference. That's what this behavior encourages you to do.

To test your inference, you first need to be aware that you're making one. Then identify what the other person(s) said or did that led you to make your inference. Now you're ready to test it. "I think you said that you were going to give the project to Brenda's team instead of my team. Did I understand you correctly?" If your boss says yes, you continue, "I'm thinking that you're concerned about my team's ability to succeed with the project. Am I mistaken?"

When you apply this "test assumptions and inferences" behavior, you practice transparency and accountability with your thinking and reveal a curiosity about what others think. Demonstrating the Mutual Learning core values of transparency, accountability, and curiosity can encourage others to do the same.

SEVEN: Jointly Design Next Steps

When you jointly design next steps, you make decisions about what to do next by involving others rather than deciding unilaterally. Joint design is yet another way to be transparent, curious, and enable others to make informed choices. Applying this behavior increases the likelihood that people will be committed to the next steps of your project. In practice, it involves applying the first behavior, "State views and ask genuine questions," to specific situations. Decide with others what topics to discuss, when and how to discuss them, and when to switch topics, as well as how to resolve certain kinds of disagreements.

Want to know what it feels like when you're not involved in jointly designing next steps? Think about a meeting you attended where the outcome was really important to you, yet the person calling the meeting

set the agenda, decided who talked and for how long, and determined what information attendees could share and what information was not relevant. If your views differed from that person's views, you probably quickly realized that you wouldn't influence the outcome because you couldn't influence the process. You probably felt that decisions weren't as good as they could have been because everyone didn't get to share their relevant information. As a result, you and others felt little commitment to follow through with the decisions. Now that you remember your own experience, imagine how others react when you unilaterally control a meeting or conversation.

Jointly designing a series of next steps can create much more effective meetings. For example, when developing the agenda for a meeting, write a draft of the agenda, explain your reasoning for the topics you included, and then ask others if they want to add items relevant to the purpose of the meeting. Then at the beginning of the meeting ask, "What changes, if any, do you think we need to make to the agenda?" This ensures that participants believe that the meeting will cover all the relevant topics.

In the meeting, when deciding how to discuss a particular agenda item, you might say, "For this next item, I suggest we first agree on the problem, then identify criteria for solving it, and then generate possible solutions before evaluating them. Does anyone have any questions or concerns about doing it this way?"

Before moving to the next agenda item, you might check in with your team members to make sure that everyone else is ready to go forward. Instead of simply announcing the next topic, you might say, "I think we're ready to move to the next item. Is there anything else on this item before we move on?"

If, during the meeting, you think that Roy is off track in the conversation, rather than unilaterally controlling the conversation by stating, "Let's get back on track" or "That's not what we're talking about today," try being more curious with Roy. Consider saying something like, "I don't see how your point about outsourcing is related to the topic of accomplishing this initiative. Am I missing something? Can you help me understand how you see them related?"

When Roy responds, you and other team members might learn about a connection between the two topics that you had not previously seen. For example, Roy might say that outsourcing will free up internal resources so that the team can accomplish the initiative in less time. If there is a connection, the team can decide whether it makes more sense to explore Roy's idea now or later. If it turns out that Roy's comment is not related, you can ask him to place it on a future agenda.

When the interaction is jointly designed, people have a larger common pool of information that can help them make better decisions, and they are more likely to commit to any decision made. The same holds true when you disagree with others.

Usually, when team members find themselves disagreeing, each member tries to convince the others that his or her own position is correct. The disagreement escalates as each person offers evidence to support his or her position and no one offers information that might weaken his or her own position. In the end, the "losers" still believe they are right.

Consider a situation in which you and your team members disagree about whether proposed changes to your customer service will lead to increased or decreased costs. Together, you and the team could develop a test to figure out how the proposed changes could potentially increase or decrease costs and by how much. Jointly designing the test includes agreeing on what data to collect and what process to use in collecting the data. Team members would decide together who to speak with, what questions to ask, what sources to use, and what statistical data to consider relevant. Whatever test method you use, it is critical that the team members involved agree to it and agree about how to use the information gathered.

As with all the other behaviors for smarter teams, to practice this seventh behavior effectively, you need to change your mindset. You need to shift from thinking that you are right and those who disagree are wrong, and instead assume that each of you may be missing something that the other sees. By jointly designing how you resolve disagreements, your team members make more informed choices, and they are more likely to commit to the outcome because they helped design the test and agreed to abide by its results.

This seventh behavior doesn't mean that teams must make decisions by consensus, or use any other particular decision-making rule. Leaders and teams can practice jointly designing next steps—and all the other behaviors—using a range of decision-making rules.

EIGHT: Discuss Undiscussable Issues

Think about the last time you were walking to a meeting while complaining to a fellow team member about how the meeting was going to be a waste of time. You might have complained that one team member is never prepared, or that one member dominates the conversation, or that everyone in the meeting acts as if they will meet the project deadline, when privately everyone knows they won't. In the meeting, the situation unfolded just as you predicted, but no one said anything about the problem, including you. Walking back to your office with your teammate, you may have again expressed frustration that the meeting wasn't a good use of time.

Is this a recent memory for you? If so, you're facing an undiscussable issue. Undiscussable issues are topics relevant to the team's work that team members don't address *in the team*, the one place where they can be resolved. Instead, undiscussable issues are usually discussed in other places, such as one-on-one with people you trust and who agree with you.

People usually don't raise undiscussable issues in the team because they're concerned that doing so will make some team members feel embarrassed or defensive. They try to save face for these team members as well as for themselves. In short, they see raising undiscussable issues as not being very compassionate. Another reason people don't like to raise undiscussable issues in the team is that they think it will generate conflict, and they don't like conflict.

Unfortunately, many people overestimate the risk of raising an undiscussable issue and underestimate the risk of not raising it. Specifically, they overlook the negative systemic—and often cruel—consequences they create by not raising undiscussable issues in the team.

Consider three team members—Heather, Carlos, and Stan—who are concerned about how the poor performance of two other team members—Lynn and Jim—affects the ability of the rest of the team to excel. If Heather, Carlos, and Stan don't raise this issue directly with Lynn and Jim, they will likely continue to talk about Lynn and Jim behind their backs. Lynn and Jim won't know what the others' concerns are, and so will be unable to make an informed choice about whether to change their behavior. Because Lynn's and Jim's behavior remains unchanged, Heather, Carlos, and Stan will continue to privately complain about them while simultaneously withholding the very information that could change the situation. Heather, Carlos, and Stan will probably be unaware that they, too, may be contributing to the problem by not telling Jim and Lynn their concerns. They will also miss the opportunity to learn whether there are valid reasons Jim and Lynn behave as they do. Over time, the team's working relationships and its performance are likely to suffer. Avoiding the issue is clearly not compassionate behavior.

Why is it important for Heather, Carlos and Stan to raise the issue in the team? Why isn't it enough just to talk with Lynn alone? Or Jim alone? Because if you only raise the issue one-on-one with Lynn (or Jim), you unilaterally assume that your view about her behavior is accurate and that all the team members want Lynn's behavior to change, too. If you and Lynn arrive at a solution, and Lynn changes her behavior, other members will wonder what has happened, and you will have created another undiscussable issue on top of the original one. However, if you raise the issue in the team, you may find that your assumptions were in error; other team members may not see fault with Lynn. Instead they may believe her behavior results, in part, from other team members not following through on their tasks.

While undiscussable issues that involve the team need to be addressed in the team, you can start one-on-one. You might approach Lynn, saying that you have concerns about how her work is affecting you and the team in general. You can do the same with Jim. You can state with each of them that you didn't want to raise this issue initially in the team because you didn't want them to feel defensive. Instead, you want to jointly develop with them a way to raise the issue in the team that meets their needs and yours.

Although discussing undiscussable issues is emotionally more difficult to practice than the other eight behaviors, mechanically speaking there is nothing new in this behavior. To discuss undiscussable issues, you use all the previous behaviors. You state your views and ask genuine questions, share relevant information and give specific examples, test assumptions and inferences, jointly design next steps, and so on. Perhaps the most important element of discussing undiscussable issues is to approach them with the Mutual Learning core value of compassion and avoid making premature negative judgments about how others acted or why they acted that way.

Putting the Eight Behaviors into Use

Putting these eight behaviors into regular practice is often harder than it sounds. Because most people consider these behaviors just common sense, they mistakenly assume they should be easy. They are common sense, but they are not common practice—particularly when a challenge occurs, when you and your team are facing an important issue and have different views on the matter. That's why making the eight behaviors for smarter teams common practice requires a Mutual Learning mindset.

You can practice these eight behaviors, even if other people do not, in team and one-on-one interactions. Yet the impact on your team's results is most powerful when everyone understands the Mutual Learning mindset and the eight behaviors, agrees on their meanings, and commits to them.

When you introduce the eight behaviors for smarter teams to others, it is important that you do so in a manner consistent with the Mutual Learning core values. Explain how you believe the eight behaviors can help the team be more effective. Give specific examples of times when you and others might have applied one of the behaviors to reach a better decision. Invite others to share their views, including questions and concerns they have about the behaviors. Above all, people need to make an informed choice about adopting the eight behaviors.

People often ask me whether they can use a subset of the eight behaviors for smarter teams and still get the same results. Each of the eight behaviors helps the team in a different way, and together they support each other; omitting one of the behaviors reduces your ability to use the power of the set. Still, it is more effective to use some of the behaviors than none.

If you decide to use these behaviors for smarter teams, don't assume your team members will continue to respond to you in the same way that they always have. Behavior is interactive and systemic; if you have acted in ways that are inconsistent with these eight behaviors, you may have contributed to others reacting ineffectively and attributed their ineffective behavior solely to them, without recognizing that you also played a part. If this has happened, your information about the team is flawed. For example, if you think that team members are defensive, you may have unwittingly acted in ways that contributed to their defensiveness—perhaps by making assumptions about them without testing the assumptions, or by stating your views without asking genuine questions.

If you and your team use these eight behaviors together, you'll make better decisions, you'll increase team members' commitment to implementing those decisions, you'll get better performance faster, working relationships will improve and team member well-being will increase.

Examples of the **Eight Behaviors** for **Smarter Teams**

Eight Behaviors	Example
1 *State views and ask genuine questions*	"I think we should start the project with a small number of key customers so that we can identify the problems and fix them before we scale up the program. What concerns, if any, do you have with starting small?"
2 *Share all relevant information*	"Although I think we should delay the project until January because it will balance our workload, Maureen says that our costs will increase by 4 percent if we wait."
3 *Use specific examples and agree on what important words mean*	"Let me give you an example of what I mean by taking initiative. Yesterday in the team meeting, when I asked if the project figures had been updated since last week, you said no. I think if you had taken initiative, you would be updating them regularly without my asking."
	"When I say consensus, I mean that everyone on this team can say they will support and implement the decision, given their roles and responsibilities."
4 *Explain reasoning and intent*	"The reason I am asking is . . . " "Here's how I reached my decision: . . ." "Here's what led me to do this: . . ."
5 *Focus on interests, not positions*	To identify interests: "No matter what the specifics of the solution are, the solution needs to be one that . . ."
	To craft a solution: "Given the interests we've agreed on, what are some potential solutions that meet these interests?"
	When someone is focused on a position: "What is it about that solution that's important to you? I'm asking because if we can identify this, we can help meet your needs."
6 *Test assumptions and inferences*	"I think you said that you were taking away the project from my team. Did I understand you correctly?" [If the answer is yes, continue] "I'm thinking that you're concerned about my team's performance on this. Am I mistaken?"
7 *Jointly design next steps*	To jointly design the purpose of a meeting: "My understanding is that the purpose of this meeting is to agree on criteria for selection, but not to select candidates. Does anyone have a different understanding of the purpose?"
	To jointly design the process: "For this next item, I suggest we first agree on the problem, then identify criteria for solving it, and then generate possible solutions before evaluating them. Does anyone have any questions or concerns about doing it this way?"
	To move to the next agenda item: "I think we're ready to move to the next item. Is anyone not ready to move on?"
	When you think someone is off the topic: "I don't see how your point about outsourcing is related to the topic of our planning process. Can you help me understand how you think they are related? Or if it isn't related, can we decide whether and when to address outsourcing?"
8 *Discuss undiscussable issues*	"I want to raise what might be a difficult issue and get your reactions. I'm not trying to put anyone on the spot, but instead trying for us to work better as a team. Here is what I've seen and what I think the issue is. [State your relevant information]. How do others see this?"

Endnotes

1. The Mutual Learning approach draws from Chris Argyris and Don Schön's Model II work, as well as the work of Bob Putnam, Diana Smith and Phil McArthur at Action Design, who originally used the term Mutual Learning in this context.

2. I have also discussed these behaviors in my book *The Skilled Facilitator: A Comprehensive Resource for Consultants, Facilitators, Managers, Trainers and Coaches* (Jossey-Bass, 2002). In general these behaviors, which I previously referred to as Ground Rules for Effective Teams, build on the work of Chris Argyris and Don Schön

3. This behavior is from Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton's book Getting to Yes (Penguin, 1991). The idea was developed originally by Mary Parker Follett in the early 1900s.

4. I have adapted this story from one that originally appeared in Mary Parker Follett's 1925 paper "Constructive Conflict" and was published in *Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett*, edited by Henry C. Metcalf and L. Urwick (HarperCollins, 1941). The story also appears in Fisher, Ury, and Patton's book Getting To Yes.