

# INTRODUCTION

This book is for everyone concerned about effective team performance. Four previous editions of *Team Building* have been well received by managers, team leaders, and team consultants. In fact, over 100,000 copies have been sold in several languages over the almost three decades since our father, William G. “Bill” Dyer, wrote the first edition, making it one of the most widely read books on the subject. Bill was the consummate social scientist, trained in sociology at the University of Wisconsin after World War II. He had grown up in a family of seven children (one was his half-brother Jack Gibb, another prominent social scientist) in a rather poor section of Portland, Oregon. Bill’s father ran a small grocery store attached to their home, and it was there that Bill learned the importance of hard work and teamwork as he worked in the family store. From these experiences, he also recognized that education was the key to his future.

After finishing his doctorate at the University of Wisconsin, Bill and his wife, Bonnie, moved on to Iowa State University and shortly after that to Brigham Young University. His early research studies in the 1950s were on family dynamics and role conflict within families. In the late 1950s, he was introduced by his brother Jack Gibb into the world of T-groups (the T stood for “training”), which at the time were largely sponsored by National Training Laboratories. The assumption underlying the T-group was that individuals—and particularly organizational leaders—were impaired by the authoritarian assumptions they

held about those they worked with and needed to change their assumptions about people and ways of doing work.

Organizations were largely seen as being oppressive—creating “organization men”—and stifling creativity and innovation. Stanley Milgram’s studies during this period pointed out that anyone could become a victim of authoritarianism, and Douglas McGregor in *The Human Side of Enterprise* noted that most managers in organizations operated using theory X assumptions (people are basically untrustworthy and lazy) but should have been basing their actions on theory Y assumptions (people essentially are good and want responsibility).<sup>1</sup> Other writers such as Chris Argyris and Abraham Maslow argued that organizations as human systems needed to allow people to achieve their potential and become self-actualized. It was in this context that the group dynamics and humanistic psychology movement began to flourish in the 1960s.

T-groups were composed of strangers led by a T-group trainer, whose job was to allow group members to explore what it meant to be part of a group that would provide them with feedback about their own behavior, require them to respond in an “open and honest” manner, and encourage group members to accept responsibility for their behavior, as well as be willing to engage in relationships based on equality rather than hierarchy or status. It was in this environment that Bill, as a T-group trainer, initially learned about the dynamics of groups and the individuals who were part of them.

For several years, Bill consulted with many organizations that wanted to use the T-group to improve the performance of their employees and their teams. Those within the movement believed that the T-group could be the vehicle to change the values of organization leaders and, that by so doing, these new values would filter down throughout the organization. Organizations in this way could be transformed into more humane and creative systems. Bill also was influenced at this time not only by Jack Gibb but others, such as Dick Beckhard and Ed Schein, who later

became the founders of a new field of practice, organization development. Moreover, famous psychologist Abe Maslow had a significant influence on Bill, since Maslow attended a T-group sponsored by National Training Laboratories in Bethel, Maine, and Bill was chosen to be Maslow's T-group trainer.

As children growing up in the Dyer home, we often heard our father tell stories about Maslow and his wit and wisdom. These stories invariably had to do with the importance of being honest and being a "congruent" person—sharing openly what we think and feel—and acting in a way consistent with our values. One story that our father shared was about Maslow and his wife when they invited a friend, Harry, to stay with them. The first morning at breakfast, Abe's wife, Bertha, burned the toast and profusely offered an apology to Harry. To which, Harry replied, "Don't worry. I kind of like burned toast." So every morning after that, Bertha remembered to burn the toast for Harry. Finally, one morning Harry had had enough and blurted out at the breakfast table, "What's with the burned toast? Why are you giving me burned toast every morning?" To this, the Maslows replied, "But we thought you liked burned toast—that's what you told us." Harry then came clean: "I don't like burned toast. I only said that to be nice." After that incident, when either Abe or Bertha felt they weren't being completely honest with one another, one of them would often say, "Remember Harry's toast." In Bill's office hung a sign that read "The cruelest lies are often told in silence." Bill often talked about the importance of being a congruent person and wanted his children to apply the ideas of personal congruence that Maslow taught him.

Growing up in the home of a social scientist like Bill also created some interesting opportunities for learning. For example, on one occasion, he had a long conversation with a friend about the different dynamics in their two families. The two of them decided that it would be a useful exercise for each of their families to gain some deeper insights into how families functioned (e.g., rules about chores, homework, bedtime, and so on). To gain

this insight, they decided to swap a child for a week and then have each child report back on what it was like to be a member of the “new” family. Then the two families would get together to discuss the differences between the families. Apparently Bill and Bonnie felt that Mike, the second oldest, was expendable, so Mike spent the week with the McLean family, and we received Herb McLean in return. It proved to be an insightful and memorable experience for us, and we remember it even forty or so years later.

Bill had a unique ability to share his philosophies regarding management in a way that others—even his children—could understand. On one occasion, his son Jeff commented that Bill wasn’t catching very many fish on a family fishing trip. The four Dyer boys were outcatching him—and Bill was supposed to be the expert fisherman. Bill proceeded to describe his role as “manager” of a group of Dyer children (four boys and a girl) on a fishing trip. He explained that in order for the trip to be a success, all of the members of the Dyer fishing group needed to experience success in catching fish. That meant that Bill needed to spend much of his fishing time showing each of his children how to tie on hooks and cast and basically coaching us in the art of fishing. As a result, his personal production decreased, but the team production increased. Collectively we caught more fish because the manager, Bill, was less concerned with his individual achievement than with team achievement. This analogy offered a poignant lesson on the art of management and what it takes to be an effective team manager.

Many of the ideas in this book come from Bill’s belief that groups can be used to help people learn, can bring out the best in people, and can create much of what is good in the world. Through his T-group experience, he also learned the importance of team skills such as problem solving, communication, and conflict management and how to develop those competencies in a team. His thoughts on these topics are central to what is presented in this edition of *Team Building*.

The early 1960s were an exciting time for those involved with T-groups. Many felt that the T-group would be the vehicle that would help change the nature of authoritarian organizations and help unleash the human potential that had been suppressed. However, a study conducted by Campbell and Dunnette in 1968 was to change most of that thinking.<sup>2</sup> Campbell and Dunnette reviewed the major studies that had looked at the impact of T-group training on individuals and on organizations. Not surprisingly, they found that the T-group did in fact help individuals become more comfortable with themselves and their ability to manage interpersonal relationships. However, the study also showed that T-group training had virtually no impact (and sometimes a negative effect) on organizational or team performance. The T-group experience often helped people become more open and honest, but this sometimes led to dysfunctional confrontations in the team and didn't necessarily translate into solving the team's specific performance problems.

Given these findings, Bill had to make a decision regarding his work as a T-group trainer. It was at this point that he decided to create a new paradigm for working with groups—the team-building paradigm. He wrote about this change from T-groups to team building as follows:

As practitioners developed more experience in applying the T-group methods to work units, the T-group mode shifted to take into account the differences of the new setting. It became clear that the need was not just to let people get feed-back, but to help the work unit develop into a more effective, collaborative, problem-solving unit with work to get out and goals to achieve. Slowly the methodology shifted from the unstructured T-group to a more focused, defined process of training a group of interdependent people in collaborative work and problem-solving procedures.<sup>3</sup>

Bill's experience in working with T-groups proved helpful as he worked as a consultant to many teams facing problems, and

in 1977, he published the first book on team building that captured the essence of his consulting experience and his model for helping teams become more effective. The book was an instant success because the theories, methods, and exercises he described in the book worked. They proved invaluable to managers, team leaders, and consultants. Over the years, in subsequent editions, Bill added new material to keep up with the changing times and the evolution of the field.

Bill passed away in 1997. In many ways, we have continued in the tradition of our father. Gibb went to MIT to obtain his PhD degree in management and worked closely with Ed Schein and Dick Beckhard. Jeff worked as a strategy consultant for several years at Bain & Company before completing his PhD work at UCLA, where he collaborated with Bill Ouchi, who popularized theory Z management. He then spent a number of years as a professor at the Wharton School. We both have had our own experiences in consulting with various teams that have found themselves in trouble. And Bill's models of team building have helped us immensely as we have worked with those teams. In fact, on many occasions we turned to this book for help and advice in working with clients or have given it to others to help them with their teams.

A few years ago, a graduate student came to us for help. He was going to Mozambique on an internship to work for a non-profit agency that was apparently in disarray due to a lack of clear goals and strategy and poor teamwork. After we oriented the student to team building and armed him with the team-building book, he went off to his assignment. During his stay in Mozambique, he communicated with us by e-mail about his progress. He reported that the team-building activities that he used from the book had made a significant difference in the organization's performance. Moreover, because the agency liked his work so much, he was hired permanently as director of operations in southern Africa. Like this student, we, too, have found Bill's ideas to have had a significant impact on our clients.

We decided to revise the Fourth Edition as a result of some recent changes in the world and in organizations. We have added a chapter on cross-cultural teams to highlight the challenges many organizations face today as they bring together people in teams that have different cultures and backgrounds. Jeff's work on innovation in organizations, which is found in his recent book with Hal Gregersen and Clayton Christensen, *The Innovator's DNA*, encouraged us to write a chapter on leading innovative teams in today's competitive environment.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, we've updated this edition with some new case examples and have strengthened the Four Cs framework that we developed for the Fourth Edition.

We believe that this Fifth Edition of *Team Building* will provide the next generation of team leaders, team members, and team consultants with the knowledge and skills they need to create effective teams in the future. We believe Bill is pleased that the work he started over a half-century ago is continuing today.