

Quick Questions for Diagnosing Team Problems by Tim D. Keck

When you are in charge of a SWAT team, it's kind of important that your team work well together. If they don't, people may die. In fact, *you* may die. That's the realization that hit me as I prepared, for the first time, to lead my team in serving a drug-related search warrant

We somehow survived that first operation, but it wasn't pretty. Afterward I asked myself how I could make my team more competent, more cohesive, more...bulletproof. Over the coming years I would discover the answer to that question and many more about teamwork and leadership.

I'd like to share some of those lessons with you now.

But, if you are as busy as most leaders, the last thing you have time for is ninety column inches describing the latest philosophy behind teamwork. I feel your pain. Of course, since leaving police work, my job as a consultant is to help you and your team excel. The following is my attempt to do that in under five minutes!

Because of my background as a Chief of Police and SWAT team leader, we refer to our framework for building strong teams as making them *bulletproof*. By considering the six elements that make a team highly successful, and considering possible symptoms, you can quickly determine where you are failing. Then you have the opportunity to address those problems directly.

First, let me define a bulletproof team. A bulletproof team is one that consistently exceeds expectations in an environment where people love both what they do *and* who they do it with. If that statement doesn't describe your team or organization, read through the six tenets below, noting symptoms of a failing in each area, to diagnose where the problem lies. Then take note of the suggested prescription for ONE thing you can do immediately to make your team better.

I. Purpose

Every member of a bulletproof team knows why they do what they do and how it fits into both the purpose of their team and the organization as a whole.

Symptoms of a purpose problem:

- a. People don't understand why a given task matters.
- b. They behave in ways that don't fit the company's brand.
- c. Members see their jobs myopically, not grasping the big picture. Ex: They refer to their job as looking at numbers all day when they actually help people live better lives through making solid investments.

RX: Send out a quick email (or use [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) to make it anonymous) and ask your team why their job matters. Use those insights to determine next steps.

II. Plan

Every member understands how the organization will reach its destination and accomplish its goals.

Symptoms of a plan problem:

- a. Associates seem confused about what to do next.
- b. They may be busy but are working on the wrong priorities.
- c. They become overwhelmed with day-to-day minutiae.

RX: Simplify the current strategy into just two or three sentences and talk to your key leaders about how they would do the same, then challenge them about their progress.

III. People

Each associate is chosen because they share the core values of the organization, have a winning attitude, and are plugged in to a job where they get to do what they do best every day.

Symptoms of a people problem:

- a. Associates struggle to get the job done.
- b. Their outlook won't allow them to readily accept coaching.
- c. They don't seem to be liked by their colleagues.

RX: Ask your people the following question; "If you could do any job (in this organization or in the world) what would it be and why would you be good at it?"

IV. Leaders

A bulletproof team has leaders that are both liked and respected. They set a good example, inspire hope, encourage, hold accountable and over-communicate.

Symptoms of a leadership problem:

- a. Managers play politics, build fiefdoms, and choose favorites.
- b. They filter information up, down, and laterally.
- c. Leaders are not well spoken of by the majority of their people.

RX: Ask your managers to read pretty much anything on leadership written by Ken Blanchard.

V. Relationships

The health of an organization can largely be tied to the quality of the relationships between its members. On a bulletproof team, associates genuinely like each other as people, not just as coworkers.

Symptoms of a relationship problem:

- a. There are cliques and lots of politics.
- b. There are rumors of inappropriate relationships.
- c. People don't know each other very well and therefore don't trust one another.

RX: Begin the trust building process with your direct reports by deepening your relationships with them. Take them to coffee and ask to hear their story - where they came from, how they got here, what is important to them.

VI. Results

High performance teams regularly exceed their goals. When the other tenets are in place, this one is actually the easiest.

Symptoms of a results problem:

- a. Teams don't make their numbers.
- b. Members don't know, on a daily basis, whether they have done a good job.
- c. Too much emphasis is placed on keeping the boss happy.

RX: Post a dashboard for all to see that tracks your team's progress toward its current goals.

Maybe you recognize some of your team's behaviors in the symptoms above. I saw them all in my early days as a SWAT team leader. I also learned that the key is *do* something about it. Change is possible and you can start with the tips above.

Of course, if you'd like a little help, feel free to contact us at info@bulletproofteams.com. Through coaching, consulting, or speaking, we can help you build a bulletproof team.

Contact us for free resources and recommendations or to share your own stories.

About the author:

Tim D. Keck is a former crime-fighter turned consultant who works with organizations worldwide to build bulletproof teams. He has been quoted in publications from Newsweek to the New York Times. His clients include Pepsi, Walmart, Tyson Foods, OppenheimerFunds, Marriott and many more.