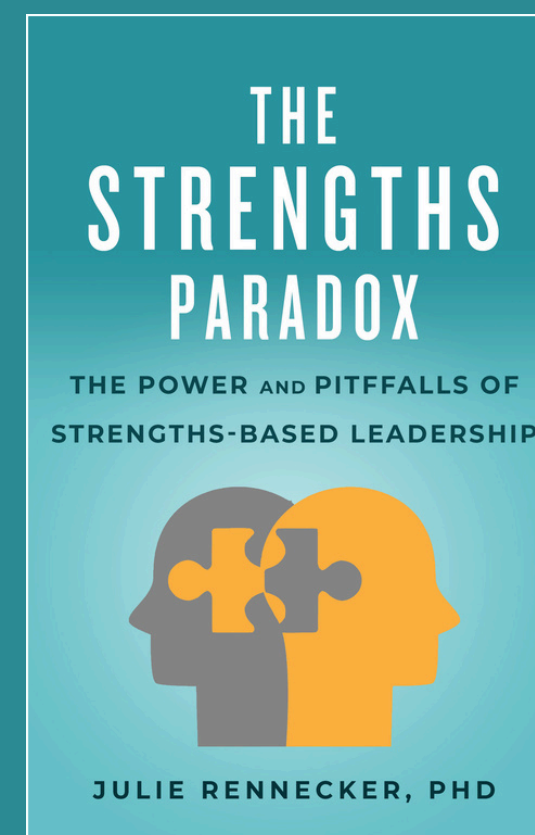


COOL THE CONFLICT

Supplementary
Toolkit for



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Dear Team Leader

Paradoxically, the very mix of complementary strengths needed for a startup, executive, or product team to be effective can also become a key source of frustration and conflict. Constructive conflict can fuel innovation, but unproductive and destructive conflict can tear teams apart.

Any number of things can trigger unproductive conflict. Peeling through the layers of who said what and sent which email and who didn't meet their deadline, however, often reveals that the conflict began when one person became annoyed by the expression of one or more of another person's strengths.

Maximizing the value of complementary strengths and minimizing unproductive conflict begins with self-awareness. This toolkit includes the Frustration Log exercise explained in *The Strengths Paradox* for increasing awareness of your own strengths and how your strengths predispose you to being annoyed by particular people and situations.

It also includes checklists summarizing the key steps described in the book for:

- 📌 Preventing unnecessary conflict
- 📌 Getting the most benefit from constructive conflict
- 📌 Managing unproductive and destructive conflict

Don't let conflict derail your team. Use these tools to maximize your collective impact by making the most of your collective strengths!



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Understanding Strengths-based conflict

When we feel frustrated, we have a tendency to think something is “wrong” with another person or with the situation. A more constructive way to frame a frustrating experience is to consider that someone or something isn’t consistent with what our expectations. These expectations may have been explicit, but more often than not, they were implicit. In fact, we may not have even known we had the expectation until we experienced the frustration of it not being met!

In the midst of conflict it can be **HARD** to recognize - or even care about - another person’s strengths. If the other person’s strength (or the strength demanded by the situation) is one of your drainers, the effect - the irritation and frustration - can be even more intense.

The following exercise and information tables are intended to help you understand the needs and expectations implicit in your strengths profile. Consider sharing the information in this section with your team to open a discussion about how each of your unique strengths profiles are essential for team success but can also be a source of unproductive friction. Sharing the information equips everyone to play a role in recognizing and managing strengths-based conflicts and keeping the team on track.



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Step 1: Keep a FRUSTRATION LOG

Use the table below as a template for briefly documenting current situations you find frustrating. This doesn't need to be fancy. Use a paper notepad, an electronic document, or a spreadsheet, whichever is most comfortable for you.

- 📍 In the Frustrations column – Write down what was happening when you felt frustrated.
- 📍 In the Unmet Expectations column – Write down what you expected to happen, or think should have happened.

	Frustrations <i>Things that made me sigh, roll my eyes, and grumble.</i>	Unmet Expectations <i>What I think should have happened instead</i>	Strength(s) <i>Which of my strengths is making me uncomfortable with this situation?</i>
1	<i>Example - A hours-long meeting with no decisions.</i>	<i>Example – We should have made at least one decision and left with an action plan for the next steps.</i>	<i>Example - Decisiveness, Initiative, Results-focus</i>
2			
3			
4			
...			



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Step 2: Identify which of your strengths are being frustrated

- 1 Review your entries in the Unmet Expectations column.
- 2 Compare your Unmet Expectations with the Strengthscope™ definitions of the 24 strengths in the list below. Your expectations – what you wish had happened, what you would have been more comfortable with – reflect your strengths.
- 3 Complete the Strengths column in the table above.

RELATIONAL Strengths	Collaboration	You work cooperatively with others to overcome conflict and work toward a common goal.	EXECUTION Strengths	Decisiveness	You make quick, confident, and clear decisions, even when faced with limited information.
	Compassion	You demonstrate a deep and genuine concern for the well-being and welfare of others.		Efficiency	You take a well-ordered and methodical approach to tasks to achieve planned outcomes.
	Developing others	You promote other people's learning and development to help them achieve their goals and fulfill their potential.		Flexibility	You remain adaptable and flexible in the face of unfamiliar or changing situations.
	Empathy	You readily identify with other people's situations and can see things clearly from their perspective.		Initiative	You take independent action to make things happen and achieve goals.
	Leading	You take responsibility for influencing and motivating others to contribute to the goals and success of their team and organization.		Results focus	You maintain a strong sense of focus on results, driving tasks and projects to completion.
	Persuasiveness	You can win agreement and support for a position or desired outcome.		Self-improvement	You draw on a wide range of people and resources to pursue self-development and learning.
	Relationship building	You take steps to build networks of contacts and act as a 'hub' between people that you know.		EMOTIONAL Strengths	Courage
Common sense	You make pragmatic judgments based on practical thinking and previous experience.	Emotional control	You are aware of your emotional 'triggers' and how to control these to ensure you remain calm and productive.		
Creativity	You generate new ideas and original solutions to move things forward.	Enthusiasm	You demonstrate passion and energy when communicating goals, beliefs, interests, or ideas you feel strongly about.		
Critical thinking	You approach problems and arguments by breaking them down systematically and evaluating them objectively.	Optimism	You remain positive and upbeat about the future and your ability to influence it to your advantage.		
Detail orientation	You pay attention to detail in order to produce high-quality output, no matter what the pressures.	Resilience	You deal effectively with setbacks and enjoy overcoming difficult challenges.		
Strategic Mindedness	You focus on the future and take a strategic perspective on issues and challenges.				







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Step 3: Identify potential stressors and strengths conflicts with your teammates.

Now that you have a sense of your Relational, Execution, Thinking, and Emotional strengths, find them in the list on the following pages (organized alphabetically) for information about the teammate types you're most likely to identify with and be annoyed by; those most likely to be annoyed by or frustrated with you; and the situations you're most likely to find stressful and/or de-energizing.

COLLABORATION

-  **You identify with** people who are open to collaboration and who look for win-win solutions.
-  **People who might annoy you** focus on their own agenda and argue too strongly to defend their point of view or interests without seeking to work cooperatively
-  **People who might be annoyed by you** are decisive and results-focused. They think you spend too much time trying to collaborate when quick or straightforward decisions are required
-  **You might be stressed by** having to work alone and/or not having time to work directly with others

COMMON SENSE

-  **You identify with** people who appear "down to earth" and make pragmatic judgments based on practical thinking and proven approaches.
-  **People who might annoy you** come up with ideas you regard as too radical, idealistic, or not sufficiently grounded in common sense logic. You think they lack pragmatism and realism and either oversimplify or overcomplicate reality.
-  **People who might be annoyed by you** are creative, visionary, and strategic-minded. They find you too dismissive of ideas and solutions that don't fit with conventional logic and see you as someone who stifles creative and inspirational ideas.
-  **You might be stressed by** situations and people that don't take into account what's worked well in the past.



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COMPASSION

- 📍 **You identify with** people who share your deep and genuine concern for the wellbeing and welfare of others.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** don't respond appropriately to the needs of others. They may show indifference, lack of concern, or clumsiness with regard to others' feelings and wellbeing.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are analytical & task-focused. They may see you as weak and as allowing yourself to be taken advantage of by others who burden you with their problems.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** being unable to help people who need your help.

COURAGE

- 📍 **You identify with** people who are gutsy, take on challenges, appear confident when faced with risks, and stand up for what they believe in.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** avoid taking risks and follow a more cautious and restrained path. They back down easily, avoiding confrontation and difficult challenges.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are more cautious and risk-averse. They may see you as someone who takes on unnecessarily high levels of risk and challenge and may perceive you as reckless, overly direct, or extreme in defending your beliefs.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** feeling stifled or unable to speak up and share what needs to be said.

CREATIVITY

- 📍 **You identify with** people who generate new ideas and original solutions, who like brainstorming and exploring new possibilities and opportunities to do things in untested ways.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** conform too easily to the status quo or fail to look for innovative solutions, alternatives, and opportunities to improve products, services, processes, or outcomes.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are more cautious and pragmatic. They like proven solutions and might see your ideas as unworkable, taking little account of the realities of the organization, its context, and customer needs.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** insufficient opportunity to explore new ideas.



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CRITICAL THINKING

- 📍 **You identify with** people who like analyzing information in a detailed, systematic way, breaking it down and evaluating it objectively to find the best solution. They quickly spot flaws and weaknesses in arguments and rarely get sidetracked by emotions attached to a decision.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** appear to accept and offer arguments and solutions too quickly, without dissecting and analyzing them to assess their true value.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are creative and decisive people who are more comfortable making decisions on new or limited data. They are likely to get frustrated with your time-consuming and systematic approach. More optimistic, “glass half full” people may be quickly frustrated by the way you continuously question proposed solutions and spot flaws, perceiving you as overly critical, negative, or pessimistic.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** making rushed decisions without analyzing the data thoroughly.

DECISIVENESS

- 📍 **You identify with** people who make quick, confident, and clear decisions, even when faced with limited information.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** have a habit of putting off or deferring decisions, even when all the relevant information is available to them.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are more cautious and systematic in the way they make decisions. They might regard you as overly hasty or rash and are uncomfortable with the limited time you spend considering the options.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** slow decision-making that is preventing things from moving forward.



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DETAIL ORIENTATION

- 📍 **You identify with** people who pay attention to detail in order to ensure high quality output, no matter what the pressures.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** pay little attention to the detail of a task or project. To you, they appear careless or “sloppy” in the way they conduct their work and don’t appear to work to the same high standards you value.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are strategic, big picture thinkers and pay little attention to detail. They might see you as spending too much time focused on details at the expense of the bigger picture. Results-focused, decisive people who want to get things done quickly might also see you as too much of a perfectionist who struggles to work fast under pressure.

You might be stressed by sub-standard work and avoidable mistakes; also, not having enough context.

DEVELOPING OTHERS

- 📍 **You identify with** people who value and spend time promoting other people’s learning and development and who enjoy seeing others fulfill their potential.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** ignore or pay little attention to other people’s growth or personal development needs.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are more task-focused and place little value on others’ longer-term development. They might see you as spending excessive time helping people develop at the expense of short-term demands.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** others’ inability or unwillingness to learn and grow.



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EFFICIENCY

- 📍 **You identify with** people who use a well-structured and methodical approach to achieve planned outcomes, people who come across as highly organized and work systematically to get things done.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** appear to be spontaneous and unsystematic. They often leave things to the last minute and appear chaotic, inefficient, and/or untidy.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are more creative and flexible in their approach to work. They might feel constrained by your focus on organization and planning and might feel that your strong emphasis on efficiency leaves little scope to incorporate new information or options as the project unfolds.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** wasting time, money, or other resources (aka “inefficiency”).

EMOTIONAL CONTROL

- 📍 **You identify with** people who are calm and remain productive in the face of stress and pressure
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** are impulsive, excitable and emotional. They openly share their feelings and emotions with others without fully considering the impact on others and their work.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are more passionate, enthusiastic, or emotionally open. They may see you as dispassionate and aloof as you don't share your emotions and feelings openly with others.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** people who are overly emotive and careless about sharing information.



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EMPATHY

- 📍 **You identify with** people who are able to see things from other people's perspective and understand others' situations.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** struggle with understanding others' feelings or situation and come across to you as unconcerned, self-centered, or insensitive.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are very task-focused, analytical, or self-sufficient. They might find your empathy an unnecessary distraction and see you as too concerned with others' views and feelings rather than having strong independent views and opinions of your own.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** situations where others' perspectives are not properly considered.

ENTHUSIASM

- 📍 **You identify with** people who get excited about things they believe strongly in and who show passion and energy when communicating their goals, beliefs, interests, or ideas.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** never appear to get excited about anything, who remain dispassionate and show little enthusiasm or energy, even when communicating beliefs, ideas, or views they feel strongly about; who come across as apathetic, indifferent, or aloof.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are more dispassionate, cautious, or cool-headed may find your behavior too emotional, overwhelming, or overzealous at times. Your enthusiasm could also leave them feeling that their views and ideas are being "steamrollered" by the sheer intensity of your emotional energy and drive.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** situations where you have to be "buttoned up" and emotionally restrained.



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FLEXIBILITY

- 📍 **You identify with** people who are adaptable and flexible in the face of unfamiliar or changing situations. They are good at “going with the flow.”
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** appear inflexible or uncomfortable with new ways of working or changing circumstances; who prefer greater predictability and stability at work and in their life generally; who resist change and attempts to move forward.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** have a strong need for planning, organization, and security in their career. They may see you as being too flexible and regard you as restless and overly optimistic in the face of change.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** not having enough variety and change in your daily work; **too much monotony and repetition.**

INITIATIVE

- 📍 **You identify with** people who take independent action to make things happen and achieve goals; who don't wait to be asked to do something.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** rely too much on others' direction and guidance in deciding what to do and how to do it. They often appear uncomfortable taking independent action.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are cautious, thorough, and need clear direction before taking action. They may see you as someone who starts too many initiatives or activities without fully considering the consequences. You might also appear too independent, overzealous, and quick to act at the expense of proper consultation and agreement.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** having to wait on others to begin; not making progress toward goals; and slow or bureaucratic decision-making.



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LEADING

- 📍 **You identify with** people who take responsibility for and appear at ease with influencing and motivating others to contribute to the goals and success of the organization.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** stand back and allow others to take the lead. They expect clear guidance and direction from others and may appear unable or unwilling to act if leadership is not forthcoming from others. They may complain about a “lack of leadership” as the reason for their inaction or poor performance.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** may be strongly independent, specialized in their own field, or simply want to control their own work approach and outcomes. They might see your leadership as unnecessary, domineering, or controlling, particularly if someone else is already performing the leadership role effectively.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** insufficient opportunities to lead; having to take a “backseat” too frequently.

OPTIMISM

- 📍 **You identify with** people who remain positive and upbeat about the future and their ability to influence it to their advantage.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** are overly critical, negative, pessimistic, and who rarely see the benefits and opportunities arising from new situations and ideas; who readily express doubts and gloomy predictions; who live a “glass half empty” existence.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are likely to be more pessimistic and/or critically-minded. They may see you as unrealistically positive and upbeat about the future and perceive your approach as too simplistic.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** critical people and situations with too much focus on problems and flaws.



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RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

- 📍 **You identify with** people who are good at initiating and building relationships; who have a strong network of contacts; who act as a 'hub' between people they know.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** are more reserved and cautious in initiating relationships; who tend to shy away from making new contacts and deepening relationships; who hold back on sharing personal information.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are more cautious in building new relationships. They could see you as overly hasty, superficial, or even naive in the way you initiate and manage connections. They might also get frustrated that you spend too much time building relationships at the expense of getting on with the tasks at hand.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** insufficient opportunity to be out meeting new people; Encountering people uninterested in making new acquaintances.

RESILIENCE

- 📍 **You identify with** people who love the buzz of a challenge and are good at overcoming setbacks and stressful periods at work and in their personal life.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** approach each setback or challenge as a major problem or insurmountable hurdle; who are likely to avoid tough challenges or attribute poor performance in these situations to factors outside their control.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are more emotionally vulnerable, sensitive, and are not good at coping with stressful situations. They might see you as someone who deliberately challenges yourself for the buzz that comes with it, irrespective of the mission's value. They might see you as reckless or careless.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** insufficient challenge in your daily work.



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RESULTS-FOCUS

- 📍 **You identify with** people who focus on getting things done, on driving tasks and projects to completion.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** pay little attention to goals and priorities and get easily distracted from major priorities and outcomes, focusing instead on tasks that have no clear payoff and aren't directly related to results.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are more creative, people-oriented, strategic, or focused on personal growth. They may get frustrated with you for missing opportunities to reflect on and learn from the project or activity.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** unclear or unknown goals; lack of a clear plan.

SELF-CONFIDENCE

- 📍 **You identify with** people who have a strong belief in themselves and their ability to accomplish their tasks and goals.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** may have low self-belief that undermines their ability to accomplish goals through indecision, procrastination, and lack of assertiveness.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** value modesty and humility over confidence and may be less assertive. They may regard you as brash, overconfident, or even arrogant, seeing you as someone who is too consumed by your own sense of self-importance to recognize flaws in your thinking and behavior.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** having to speak about a topic you know little or nothing about.



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SELF-IMPROVEMENT

- 📍 **You identify with** people who have a strong growth or learning mindset and draw on a wide range of people and resources to further their self-development and learning.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** have a fixed mindset and don't believe they can grow and develop. They may demonstrate a dismissive or complacent approach to new knowledge and learning.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** are task-oriented and don't value lifelong learning. They might be annoyed by your focus on accumulating knowledge and learning for its own sake rather than to achieve specific outcomes.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** insufficient opportunities to learn new things and develop yourself.

STRATEGIC MINDEDNESS

- 📍 **You identify with** people who like to focus on future possibilities and take a more strategic, big picture perspective on issues and challenges.
- 📍 **People who might annoy you** are so focused on the "here and now" or the detail in a task that they rarely step back to see the big picture.
- 📍 **People who might be annoyed by you** may be detail-oriented, take a "common sense" approach, or spend most of their time focused on the present. They might be frustrated by your lack of attention to detail, what's worked in the past, or current realities.
- 📍 **You might be stressed by** not having "big picture" context; by not understanding why something matters.



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Step 4: Reflect

(a) Do you see any patterns?

- We identify with people like ourselves.
- The people you're most likely to be annoyed by are also most likely to annoy you!
- The conditions or situations you're most likely to find stressful are the ones your "annoying" teammates are most likely to prefer.

(b) How might you use these and other insights gained from understanding the inherent tensions between complementary strengths to increase team effectiveness and decrease unnecessary and unproductive conflict?

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Every day, lifesaving products get delayed, care quality suffers, talented team members disengage (or leave), and both companies and employees suffer due to unmanaged strengths-based conflict.

- If managed well, the differences that frustrate us individually can be used to make us more effective collectively.
- If unmanaged, or managed poorly, everyone loses – the company, the employees, and the customers.



COOL THE CONFLICT TOOLKIT

PREVENTING AND MANAGING CONFLICT

The checklists below capture the key steps outlined in Chapter 8 of The Strengths Paradox for preventing unnecessary conflict and dealing with both constructive and unproductive conflict.

Prevent **UNNECESSARY** Conflict

- Invest in strengths-awareness training
- Develop Team Ground Rules (or “Rules of Engagement”)
- State project and meeting goals at the beginning of each meeting
- Overcommunicate to minimize information asymmetries
- Understand and manage your own stress triggers

Harvest the Benefits of **CONSTRUCTIVE** Conflict

- Restate the goal of the conversation or meeting
- Clarify the time horizon for action to determine if divergent or convergent thinking is needed
- Use “The Six Thinking Hats” exercise to eliminate information asymmetries and optimize thinking
- Get out of your heads by creating physical diagrams, charts, or prototypes
- Do something different - take a break and/or run an experiment



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Managing UNPRODUCTIVE & DESTRUCTIVE Conflict

- Recognize when a conflict has become unproductive or destructive**
 - Repetitive debate without surfacing new information or insights
 - Team members shutting down or withdrawing
 - Snide remarks or negative personal attributions (inside or outside the meeting)

- Stop the action and contain the pain**
 - Stop the conversation
 - Move the conflict “offline”
 - Allow for a cooling off period
 - Activate the relaxation response

- Avoid “triangulation” – listening to people talk about each other rather than to each other**

- Facilitate a repair process**
 - Have each party complete the left-hand column exercise
 - Facilitate a meeting with the conflicted parties
 - Use participants’ left-hand column exercises as the basis for asking one another clarifying questions before making requests
 - Close with exchange of appreciation for one another’s strengths

- Review – and possibly revise – the team Ground Rules**

- Reconvene and kickstart the larger team**
 - Acknowledge the conflict
 - Report that repair has taken place (see sample script in book)
 - Restate focal topic/decision that needs to be addressed



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YOUR STRENGTHS MASTERY JOURNEY DOESN'T END HERE

While the Cool the Conflict Toolkit provides practical, actionable guidance you can implement immediately, many teams find that working with an experienced partner accelerates their progress and ensures lasting results. If your team is underperforming due to conflicts within or between teams, we can help you get your team back on track and accelerate the transformation of talent into results.

ABOUT SYZYGY TEAM SOLUTIONS

In today's interconnected world, teams that collaborate effectively across professional and geographic boundaries gain a decisive competitive advantage over those that don't. At Syzygy Team Solutions, we understand that even high-performing teams sometimes encounter overwhelming challenges. Whether the challenges come from the marketplace, a senior leader shakeup, supply chain disruptions, a new competitor, or unexpected personnel losses, professional teams are experiencing unrelenting pressure to both "stay on course" and "adapt."

Our evidence-based methods and practical tools help teams harness individual and collective strengths to:

- Navigate complex change.
- Transform conflicts into opportunities.
- Achieve sustainable results.

We have programs and formats to accommodate a wide range of budgets and schedules:

- Executive coaching
- Peer coaching groups
- Team workshops
- Keynote presentations.



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Ready to take the next step?

Schedule a complimentary 45-min strategy session to discuss your team's specific challenges and goals.

Contact us

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