

The STAR model describes four steps that help leaders and their teams develop and maintain a painstaking focus on small, repeatable actions that produce a practical culture of success. Team leaders need not be charismatic visionaries. Teams do best when they focus on seemingly insignificant, observable habits that operationalize shared goals and values.

Our research has shown that High Performing Teams create a culture of success by acting like “STAR”s. To be a STAR, you should:

- Target **S**pecific objectives
- Take small steps toward achieving those objectives
- Alter the environment to facilitate taking action
- Cultivate a **R**ealistic optimism about the challenges of implementing new behaviors

How Leaders Use It:

- *Target Specific Objectives:* An executive who attended Wharton’s Executive Development Program noted after some reflection that he expressed his ideas like a “machine gun” in team meetings, spraying his words indiscriminately around a conversation and killing his group’s creativity. His teammates told him to talk 75 percent less next time. The specific target helped him calibrate his contributions and gave others an opportunity to bring their proposals out into the open.
- *Take Small Steps:* Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz helped turn around the company in 2008 by reviving the practice of grinding beans in-store. It was a small step, but it helped invigorate a flagging brand by reintroducing the “romance and theater” of buying a great cup of coffee.
- *Alter the Environment:* Simple checklists are surprisingly useful in creating routines that help manage complex situations. During the 2014 Ebola outbreak, the Centers for Disease Control altered the environment by issuing a checklist. It reminded healthcare providers to follow life-saving guidelines, such as wearing three pairs of rubber gloves instead of one, when treating infected patients.

- *Be a Realistic Optimist:* HPTs in the military use so-called Red Teams to reveal all of the risks inherent in a given strategic direction. Red Teams are either groups of insiders or knowledgeable outsiders who test a strategy by trying hard to defeat it. Red Teams reduce groupthink and help a team anticipate challenges that might arise.
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Take Action:

Be Specific

What 1-3 specific goals are you committing to tackle?

e.g. I will spend at least 3 hours a month talking about strategy with people from different divisions

Take Small Steps

Describe the small steps you're going to take towards achieving your stated goals.

e.g. I will identify 3 individuals from different departments with whom interaction will have the biggest impact on my work.

Alter the Environment

In what ways will you alter your environment to facilitate your new goals?

e.g. I will create automatically recurring meetings on my calendar so that the time is regularly blocked off and I don't have to spend additional effort scheduling each month

Be a Realistic Optimist

Describe why or why not you will be successful in reaching your goals--specifically outline any barriers or success factors you anticipate encountering along the way.