

## UNDER PRESSURE? HERE'S WHAT GREAT TEAMS DO DIFFERENTLY BY CAMPBELL FORSYTH

On a recent Teams call, an executive told leaders, "Today will be the slowest we will ever go as a business." The message was clear, things will only get faster and more complex. Yet, many leaders already felt they were operating at full capacity, managing high-pressure team and stakeholder environments.

When teams face pressure, they develop patterns to manage tension. Some foster collaboration and performance, while others create distractions, slow decisions, and drain energy.

### **Unproductive Ways Teams Manage Tension**

- Triangulation – Pulling in a third party to take sides on an issue.
- Complaining – Venting about others to feel better.
- Avoiding Conflict – Letting others have tough conversations instead of taking a stance.
- Blaming – Focusing on others rather than tackling the real issue.
- Doubt & Criticism – Assuming others aren't up to the job.

Individually, these behaviours bring short-term relief, but at a team level, they waste time, dilute accountability, and erode trust. The common mindset behind them? "Someone else needs to change."

### **How Great Teams Respond Differently**

Instead of avoiding or blaming, we see maturing teams:

- Define their own thinking without needing validation from others.
- Take responsibility for themselves, asking, "What is my work in this?"
- Seeking to understand perspectives rather than assuming negative intent.
- Recognize and support others' growth, even when the other persons approach differs greatly.
- Tolerate discomfort, stay engaged and be present in the tension.
- Balance confidence with openness, listening deeply while staying principled and clear about what is important to them.
- Take clear leadership actions that create value for teams and customers.

Teams don't grow by avoiding tension, but by learning to work through it productively. Leaders who help teams navigate tension build the foundation for real progress, accountability, and collaboration.

The next time your team faces a challenge, ask:

- Are we engaging in productive tension or just alleviating personal or social discomfort?
- Are we addressing differences directly or using workarounds?
- What behaviours could help us move forward more effectively and challenge with care?

The best teams don't eliminate tension—they harness it. The key is knowing whether tension is fuelling progress or burning energy.