



AFTERRBURNER

THE PROS OF DEBRIEFING



It happens time and time again. A project or endeavor comes to an end, be it successful or otherwise, and the team...does what? Of course, the “what next” is generally determined by the outcome of the mission: celebratory team outing or a heads-down push to the next plan. This “what next” can be any number of things, but it rarely includes reflection on the just-completed mission. But why is post-execution performance analysis important? If the objective was met, what is there to learn? We achieved the mission so let’s move on to the next one and continue the streak, right? Wrong.

This is especially true for—dare we say—failed missions. That dirty, forbidden word can make entire teams cringe, representative of achievements that never came to fruition. Reflecting on missteps isn’t fun nor will it change the circumstances of that particular endeavor, but it will put your team in a better position to avoid mission failure in the next try. Identify the root causes that led to setbacks and transfer those lessons learned, even when you’ve successfully completed a project, there will always be some sort of takeaway that—when integrated into the next planning session—can accelerate learning and ensure actions that led to mission achievement are repeated. Sounds like an obvious addition to your current operations, right? We agree, and to make the decision even easier, we’ve compiled a list of reasons why you should be STEALTH Debriefing. Some are immediate, tangible benefits that emerge directly from debriefing and others are the cultural, intangible benefits that emerge from the consistent practice of debriefing.

Closing the Loop

Debriefing allows you to formally conclude a task or project, drawing a line in the sand between one mission and another. It provides an appropriate means to putting the past behind you while allowing you to grow from the endeavor prior to moving on.

Fills the Need for Effective Learning

When done promptly, the cause and effect analysis of a Debrief allows your team to capitalize on meaningful learning that time delays could inhibit or prevent. How long can one mistake be repeated before it’s formally integrated into planning? How does your organization benefit from the experiences of its members if there is no method of aggregating the learning outcomes of these missions?

The Catalyst for Change

It goes without saying that an unmet mission objective is the black sheep in a herd of organizational operations. It’s not something you want to occur and will endeavor to prevent, but doing so is one thing—acting on it is another. Missed numbers and deadlines can be the result of a number of small setbacks or one major misstep. Regardless of what caused mission failure, there is a change to be made. This change can be one that is easily integrated into operations or one that can only be addressed in contingency planning, but if you don’t identify the root cause, how will you know what to change?



THE PROS OF DEBRIEFING

There's Cause...Then There's Root Cause

It isn't enough to recognize that you've won or lost the battle, your team must look below the superficial causes to guarantee it wasn't luck or some other force at work. Digging deeper is an essential part of the STEALTH Debrief because prominent, recurring root causes can fester and grow if misidentification allows them to go unaddressed. Debriefing provides an opportunity to sort through the ambiguities in your complex environments to improve at the core organizational level.

Specific and Actionable Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned can result in a change or amendment to existing procedures, further development of a program or plan, improvement of training standards, or it may simply result in a list of steps for use in future planning. Regardless of how you integrate your Lessons Learned into future use, each one should have an action tied to it to ensure future benefit.

Provides a Rapid, Simple Approach to Continuous Improvement

Debriefing should be performed after missions of all sizes: large and small, long-term and short-term, one individual or the entire company. When you achieve a culture of Debriefing with the intent to share and leverage Lessons Learned, improvement is near continuous as these Lessons Learned are pumped into the system and applied to missions of all kinds throughout the organization. At this point, your organization achieves accelerated learning and continuous improvement by decreasing the size of the learning curve through shared experiences.

Develops a Culture of Learning, Openness, and Honesty

Debriefing is a group learning process, a forum in which team members learn from themselves and from each other. When performed properly following the STEALTH framework, the Debrief is nameless and rankless, focusing the conversation on analyzing what went wrong instead of who caused it to happen. Because this process encourages self-identification of areas of improvement, beginning with the group leader, the Debrief environment organically transforms into a process to accelerate organizational performance rather than point fingers or assign blame.

Leadership Development

Because the Debrief is leader-led, the success of that process is incumbent upon that leader's ability to demonstrate the qualities that he or she wants from team members. This helps to build current leaders who are tasked with establishing a culture of Debriefing and driving adoption in their teams. It also nurtures the leadership traits in individual team members who observe the explicit and implicit leadership qualities demonstrated by current leadership.

Each of these benefits could be broken down and examined even further, but one thing that we can't emphasize enough is that these benefits only occur when the Debrief follows a framework and the merits of "nameless and rankless" are strictly adhered to. If conducted haphazardly or with little regard for the importance of blameless review, a Debrief can easily do more harm than good. To avoid this, the process by which your team Debriefs should be structured and should establish the open, honest environment that is needed. Next month we will look at the STEALTH Debrief as the framework for your culture of Debriefing and how it can drive the behaviors you want to see.

