

Team Pulse by CoastZone — The Deep Dive

Saturday 4 July 2026 (single-topic episode)

The team that keeps getting better: learning speed, and the 15-minute ritual with a 20–25% payoff

Companion read to the podcast. Written for consultants working in a Danish/Nordic context. A single-topic deep dive: one fresh 2026 article, plus the foundational evidence behind it — honestly labeled, not breaking news. Every claim links to its source so you can dig in.

The big picture

We've covered recognition, feedback, meetings and hybrid teams in recent episodes. Today we go one layer deeper, to the question underneath all of them: how does a team get better at *getting better*?

The fresh anchor is Harvard Business Review's May–June 2026 issue, where psychologist Ron Friedman puts a name on it: **superteams**. His core claim: **in periods of rapid change, the teams that outperform everyone else are not those with the best plans or the most talent — but those that learn the fastest**. And the best-evidenced tool for learning faster has been sitting in the research literature for over a decade: the humble team debrief, worth an average **20–25% performance improvement** according to **Tannenbaum & Cerasoli's meta-analysis**. Three facets today.

Facet 1 — What's moving: learning speed is the new competitive advantage

In the spring of 2022, after a grueling 58-loss season, the Oklahoma City Thunder sat near the bottom of the NBA standings. Then something remarkable happened: the franchise started getting better, fast. That is how Ron Friedman — psychologist and founder of Superteams Inc., author of *Superteams* and *The Best Place to Work* — opens *How to Build a Superteam That Keeps Getting Better* (HBR, May–June 2026).

The evidence. Drawing on research across thousands of teams, Friedman finds a consistent pattern: high-performing teams — "superteams" — **build cultures of continuous improvement**. Their leaders do seven things:

1. Encourage experimentation *even when things are going well*
2. Make curiosity and intellectual humility contagious
3. Surface problems early
4. Stay close to the work
5. Give feedback that supports learning rather than punishing mistakes
6. Invest in people's growth even when it doesn't pay off immediately

7. Tie work to shared meaning — where **progress matters more than perfection**

When those conditions hold, Friedman argues, teams become more resilient, adaptable and capable of sustained success — in business settings and beyond.

The consultant's read. Notice what is *not* on the list: talent density, planning rigor, tooling. The list is almost entirely about how the team metabolizes experience. Which raises the practical question facet 2 answers: what is the mechanism?

What to do Monday. Change the question you ask about a team from "how well is it performing?" to "how fast is it learning?" One diagnostic: when did this team last run an experiment while things were going *well*?

Facet 2 — The evidence: the debrief, a 15-minute ritual with a 20–25% payoff

The most robust answer to "how do teams learn faster?" is also the least glamorous: the **debrief** — a short, structured conversation after a piece of work (a project, a delivery, a shift, an event): what happened, what went well, what do we do differently next time? The military calls it an after-action review; aviation and medicine have used it for decades.

The meta-analysis. Tannenbaum & Cerasoli (2013), published in *Human Factors* (55, 231–245), pooled 46 studies of team and individual debriefs. Result: properly conducted debriefs improve performance by an average of **20–25%** — for both teams and individuals, with structure, alignment and facilitation boosting the effect.

The experiment. In a randomized study, Smith-Jentsch, Cannon-Bowers, Tannenbaum & Salas (2008) assigned U.S. Naval officers either to training in "guided team self-correction" (how to lead effective debriefs) or to a control condition with extra task preparation. Teams led and debriefed by the trained officers showed significantly better teamwork and **over 40% better team performance** than control teams.

Why it works. Most learning never happens in the classroom. Tannenbaum's multi-company research found that only **7–9% of competency acquisition** comes from formal training — the rest is learned from experience, by trial and error and by watching colleagues. The debrief is simply the systematic way to *harvest* that experiential learning: it builds shared mental models (a clear, common understanding of roles, priorities and situations), which meta-analyses show consistently predict team performance.

How to run one. From Tannenbaum's own practitioner guide (*Using Debriefs — A Simple, Powerful Experiential Learning Tool*, OD Network), a 10-minute debrief has four moves:

1. **Set the stage** (~1 min): "This is about getting better at what we do — we're all competent, well-intentioned people." Learning, not blame.
2. **Ask the team first** (~7 min): What happened? What did we do well? What should we do differently? Pause; don't fear silence.
3. **Leader speaks last** (~2 min): add observations only after the team has spoken — otherwise the team defers, and real concerns never surface.
4. **Summarize agreements** (~1 min): what we keep doing, stop doing, who does what, by when.

Two classic pitfalls: discussing only the *task* and never the *teamwork* (communication, role clarity, helping behavior — ask "how well did we work together?"), and shooting the messenger — if someone admits a mistake and gets chastised, the debrief dies. Tannenbaum's most powerful tip costs nothing: the leader opens by naming **one thing she herself could have done differently**. Timing matters too: debrief as close to the experience as possible, and the more team members who actively participate, the greater the benefit.

What to do Monday. Book 15 minutes immediately after your next delivery. Three questions: What happened? What went well? What do we do differently? Leader speaks last — and admits one thing of her own.

Facet 3 — The Danish angle: "Your meetings are too poor, period" — learning as a standing agenda item

Denmark has its own, characteristically blunt, version of the superteams argument. Organizational psychologist and PhD **Anders Trillingsgaard** — among the most influential voices on leadership teams in Denmark, who wrote his PhD on how *ledergrupper* develop and has worked with hundreds of leadership groups across municipalities, regions, universities and major Danish companies — puts it plainly in *Ledelsesteamet gentænkt* (Dansk Psykologisk Forlag): "**Jeres møder er for ringe, punktum**" — *your meetings are too poor, period*.

The Danish theory of team learning. Among the book's twelve points, two map directly onto Friedman's superteams:

- "*Ledergrupper udvikler sig i eksperimenterende livtag med gradvist mere besværlige realiteter*" — leadership teams develop through **experimenting wrestling-matches with progressively harder realities**. You don't become a better team by talking about it; you become better by experimenting, evaluating and adjusting. That is Friedman's "experiment even when things go well," in Danish.
- "*Ledelse er ikke noget, I er. Det er noget, I producerer*" — leadership is not something you *are*; it's something you *produce* (kurs, koordinering, commitment — direction, coordination, commitment). Improvement, likewise, is an output you manufacture — not a trait you possess.

The practical tool. On **lederweb** (Væksthus for Ledelse), organizational psychologist and PhD **Rasmus Thy Grøn** recommends that a leadership group's agenda template include a **fixed final item: a short evaluation of the meeting itself** — precisely to ensure "kontinuerlig udvikling af ledergruppens praksis" (continuous development of the group's practice). His broader point: most groups' meeting problems cluster in three places — poor preparation, poor facilitation, and *no follow-up on previous decisions* — and a standing evaluation item attacks all three.

The consultant's read. This is the debrief in Danish dress: not a development project with consultants and an off-site, but **two minutes of discipline at the end of every meeting**. It also fits the Danish trust-based, low-hierarchy culture unusually well — a ritual where the leader speaks last and everyone's observation counts is easier to land in Denmark than almost anywhere.

What to do Monday. Make evaluation a fixed agenda item — two minutes at the end of every meeting: "What should we do differently next time?" Learning is a rhythm, not a seminar.

Books & tools to watch

- **Ron Friedman** — *Superteams* (the book behind the HBR piece); the article itself is the best short intro.
 - **Scott Tannenbaum** — the free [practitioner handout](#) with the 10-minute debrief guide and facilitation pitfalls is immediately usable in client work.
 - **Anders Trillingsgaard** — *Ledelsesteamet gentænkt* remains the Danish reference on leadership-team development.
 - **Rasmus Thy Grøn m.fl.** — the [lederweb agenda template and meeting year-wheel](#), free and field-tested in Danish public-sector leadership groups.
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The three things to remember

1. **Measure learning speed, not just performance.** In rapid change, the team that learns fastest wins — and learning must be cultivated even (especially) when things are going well.
2. **The debrief is the cheapest evidence-based tool you have.** Fifteen minutes, three questions, leader speaks last — and the research says 20–25% better performance.
3. **Make learning a standing item, not a project.** Two minutes of meeting evaluation every time beats an annual development seminar — because it builds the habit.

When did your team last put words on what it learned from something that went well?

Sources & dig deeper

International research & media - Ron Friedman — [How to Build a Superteam That Keeps Getting Better](#) (Harvard Business Review, May–June 2026) - Scott I. Tannenbaum & Christopher P. Cerasoli — [Do Team and Individual Debriefs Enhance Performance? A Meta-Analysis](#) (Human Factors, 2013, 55, 231–245) - Scott I. Tannenbaum — [Using Debriefs — A Simple, Powerful Experiential Learning Tool](#) (OD Network, incl. the 10-minute debrief guide and the Smith-Jentsch 2008 naval study) - SafetyInsights — [review of the debrief meta-analysis](#)

Danish sources & voices - Anders Trillingsgaard — [Ledelsesteamet gentænkt](#) (Dansk Psykologisk Forlag) - Rasmus Thy Grøn — [To enkle værktøjer til mere effektive ledermøder](#) (lederweb / Væksthus for Ledelse)