

Building an Effective and Productive Team



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The team concept • teamwork • team building • the team. Over the past few decades, these terms have become common buzz words to describe an environmental shift in business and industry. While many leaders have enjoyed success in implementing a smooth-functioning team environment, others have found it difficult to move beyond theory to the practical application of the team concept.

What marks the difference between those teams that are successful and those who are not? Even company leadership, managers, and employees whose attitudes are favorable for the success of a team environment are sometimes at a loss to pinpoint the specific behaviors that support effective teamwork.

In general, we do know that successful leaders, whether in sports or in business and industry, define the vision and mission of the team and its members, and they excel at setting goals and implementing a plan of action to achieve those goals. All members have the responsibility to motivate themselves, and they share the responsibility of creating a climate conducive for motivating their other team members.

What Makes Up a Successful Team?

What exactly is meant by the word "team?" A team can be defined as "a small group of skilled people who work together toward a common goal or purpose." The most effective teams are those that consist of no more than 20 people. If a team grows larger than that, it becomes increasingly difficult to get everyone in agreement to work toward a common purpose and goal. A team also is composed of skilled people. If you think of a sports team, the most obvious example of team-work, the coach strives to place the most skilled players in the appropriate positions. A person whose skills are insufficient for

that position is either moved to a more suitable position or is removed from the team altogether.

An effective team also works together. Interdependence among individuals is a key characteristic of successful teams. If a group of people don't need to work closely together and they don't depend on one another to complete a task or reach a goal, then there really isn't a need to form a team. A team's success is largely determined by the team members' ability to work interdependently. A key hallmark of a high-performance team is that all the members work toward a common goal or purpose.

While the characteristics and requirements for successful teamwork are most obvious when it comes to athletic teams, they hold true in any team building effort. **Use the following steps to build a successful team:**

- Define the team – Identify the members of your team and determine the role each team member will play in the success of the entire organization.
- Define specific team goals and an action plan – State the primary purpose of the team. Identify goals the team is to accomplish: • today • this week • this month • this year • this decade
- Identify specific behaviors that support team goals and a team environment – Specific actions and behaviors mark the most successful teams. Among these behavioral characteristics found in team members are a positive attitude, commitment, persistence, and discipline. Team members who demonstrate these qualities are generally considered successful team members. Not only are they considered successful themselves, but their winning attitudes and actions have a positive, constructive effect on the other team members.
- Outline how you and others will be held accountable – Recognizing team members for their specific contributions to team success with positive feedback encourages continued high level achievement. Give verbal or written feedback one-on-one to the individual, or if appropriate, give public praise to individuals or the team for meeting goals. In contrast, consider the consequences to team members who fail to uphold certain responsibilities or attitudes. Address unmet expectations before they drive a wedge into working relationships and negatively affect the team. Some personnel issues, by nature, should be handled under the organization's policies. But be careful not to ignore the impact that unfulfilled responsibilities have on your team's morale.

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