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Leadership & People

How to Build a Better Team – 10 Ideas

By Scott Byorum

It is a time worn concept of the modern business era: “better teamwork produces better results.” But the concept is as old as the human experience of time. When people work together in cooperation with a shared goal they tend to produce results that exceed that of those working independently.

So you’ve gone to great lengths to assemble a winning team. You’ve given them a mission statement, job descriptions, training and performance incentives. You’ve provided them communication courses and team building exercises. You might have even taken them on a retreat to a “Ropes Course” or something similar. You’ve got company celebration days, employee recognition plaques...the works.

But something doesn’t feel right. Where is the energy, the enthusiasm, the camaraderie? Where is that tell-tale spark of a winning team? Where are those superior results?

According to a study by Stanford University’s Graduate School of Business, the problem may be that you’ve inadvertently conditioned your organization to think alike. In all things, energy comes through tension; and tension does not have to be a bad thing. Teams make better decisions when there is diversity.

Teamwork requires cooperation, respect, and good will. But exceptional teamwork requires diversity, as well. Here are 10 ideas to build a better team:

1. **Alternate Leadership.** Appoint different people to head up projects or lead meetings. Give them guidelines and goals, if necessary, but allow their own style to emerge to the forefront amongst others.
2. **Ask For Dissension.** Intentionally seek out and ask for alternate or opposing viewpoints and discuss them amongst the team. The more ideas that are explored the better the chance of running across something that was initially overlooked.
3. **Create Competition.** Competition generates innovation. Tasks can get done faster with better results. Break your team up into smaller groups and give them the same goal or “bar” to reach. Spell out the result you want, the resources available, the time frame to work in, and the reward and let your team’s creative juices flow.
4. **Delegate Responsibility.** Give individuals a manageable area of responsibility in the company that you or someone else in management might otherwise handle. It will help cross-train the organization and boost the confidence of others.
5. **Don’t Take Yes For An Answer.** One of the problems you may be in is that you’ve created a “yes” team full of “yes” people. A companion to idea #2, encourage decision making by

having the team weigh benefits and consequences. Make alternatives and choices a part of the team's operation. The more direction the team has control over, the more loyal and energetic it will be. You will be helping the team develop ownership.

6. **Encourage Questions.** Don't ask if there are any questions. Tell the team that you want to hear questions. If people do not understand the reasoning behind what they are doing or what others are doing, you have a serious problem of disengagement. There are no stupid questions, only those not verbalized.
7. **Establish A Peer Review System.** Often times a manager is somewhat removed in knowledge from everything their employees do and how well they do it. Employees who directly work with each other realize the subtleties of their work and interaction on a more immediate level.
8. **Explore Personalities.** Mix people up. Rotate them around. The more opportunities people have to work and interact with different individuals the stronger your team will become.
9. **Teach Constructive Conflict.** Make this course mandatory. Send people to a seminar or bring the training in-house. Destructive conflict tears teams apart. Constructive conflict brings teams together and makes them thrive. People need to know how to disagree without getting personal.
10. **Value Diversity.** Embrace the differences in people as much as their similarities. Encourage your team to do the same. Recognize the value in all ideas and opinions, even those discarded. They are information and opportunities that lead you and your team down the pathway to success.

Each of these ideas requires that you and your team step out of your comfort zones a little, so don't try them all at once or you will overwhelm people and defeat the purpose. Choose one you think your team will respond to best. Work at it until it becomes part of the culture, then move on to something else. Teambuilding is not an end result; it is an ongoing process.

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