TEAMBUILDING 101
HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU NEED TEAMBUILDING[1]

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What make some sports team successful and others a failure? Why are some companies more successful than others? Whether a successful sports franchise or a successful company, the best organizations have managers who are able to create winning teams. When we talk about creating a winning team, we are describing the set of activities that a manager and leader use to develop, support and reinforce superior teamwork and success.

But, what is a team? Every team is a group of people, but not every group of people is a team. A team is a special kind of group that is defined in terms of its goals and how it goes about achieving them. A team must have goals that can be achieved only through the cooperation and combined efforts of all its members.

The criteria for identifying a team are:
1. A group of people
2. The group shares a set of goals and objectives
3. The group has to work together (interdependence) to achieve those goals

Organizations have learned to use teams to respond quickly to market demands for quality, customer service, efficiency, innovation and cost control. They have learned that management systems based on teamwork can promote high levels of cooperation and interaction within and between departments. Teamwork can lead to consistent approaches to customers, increased responsibility and ownership for products and services, and improvements in morale. In the end, the value of teamwork for a business is that it results in greater productivity and better service. Before you consider management training on teambuilding, you have to ask a number of questions:

- Do our managers know how to build a team?
- Do our work teams need to improve in ability, productivity, quality, or cost?
- Do our teams maximize the potential of individual team members?
- Do our teams work effectively with other teams in our organization?
- Do our customers receive the needed levels of service and quality?

If the answer to the majority of these questions is "no" then the leader has to consider management training on team building.

Other signs that you may need teambuilding include when:

- There is a shift in goals or priorities
- A department or office management has changed
- There is confusion about purpose, resources, or standards
- Staff are complaining about being personally overwhelmed or overworked.
- Mistakes or inefficiencies occur because staff are not cooperating nor supporting one another
- Individuals are reluctant to take on problem-solving responsibilities
- Individuals lack independence or initiative
- You hear a lot of "that's not my job"
- Customers complain about poor or inconsistent service

If your company is experiencing any of these warning signs, then it is prudent to carefully examine your work teams and management.

What should you consider? In general, successful teams and team members have great technical skills (i.e., they do the work of the company well in providing services and producing products). But, beyond individual abilities, they also function well as a group; in other words, they are an effective team.

Think of your favorite successful sports team. Chances are the team you are thinking of has very good individual players who have learned and practice the basics of their positions consistently on a day in and day out basis. Several of these same players may also perform their roles at exceptional levels on a regular basis. But, it is also likely that your favorite team would not be nearly as successful if it did not also work well together as a unit.

When we consider successful sports or business teams we see that they do the following well as a unit, they:

- Set team goals
- Communicate to each other
- Define roles and responsibilities
- Share roles and responsibilities
- Cooperate together at high levels and compete with one another at low levels
- Critique and evaluate their performance and provide feedback to each other
- Demonstrate openness and trust
- Encourage spontaneity and creativity.
- Engage in recognition of individual and team accomplishments
- Anticipate problems
- Problem solve together

In deciding if your work teams need improvement, you should start with four main areas:

1. **Ability.** Do the individual team players have all the skills required to do the work of the company successfully? If they don't, training may be necessary to improve basic technical skills.

2. **Internal Teamwork.** Have team members learned how to interact and perform successfully as a group? If they haven't, a wide range of team skills need to be taught to the group including things like team decision making, how to conduct and run meetings, how to problem solve, how to evaluate team performance, how to communicate effectively, and how to ensure balanced participation on the team.

3. **Intra Teamwork.** Do your teams interface successfully with other teams and units or departments in your company? If they don't, selected members of the team will need training in presentation and negotiating skills, feedback skills and report development; project management, and, understanding internal policies, standards, and performance measures. It may be beneficial to require that team members visit and "job shadow" workers in other departments to "spend a day in some one else's shoes".

4. **External Teamwork.** Do your teams interface successfully with your different customer groups? If this is an issue, your teams likely need training in what constitutes basic customer service and how to provide exceptional service.

In determining if your work teams need team building you should carefully evaluate individual performance in relation to the team's overall performance. For example, if you have performance concerns, is the nature of the performance deficit based on the individual performance of one or two team members or is the performance of the entire team below standard? If the entire performance of your team is below standard, you have a team building need.

If the performance of the team is being lowered by one or two individual then it is likely that you don't need teambuilding and the team may resent any suggest that the "team" needs to improve. Mangers who dislike confrontation and conflict can sometimes hesitate or fail to address individual team member performance directly and waste time and effort in declaring the issue as a "team problem".

Individual teams members who under perform may be doing so for a variety of reasons. But often, the keys to improving that person's performance is through a careful analysis of what the person is doing and not doing and the consequences and incentives that are present for the employees non-performance. Handling individual performance issues directly with the individual (and not the team) will be the correct solution.

You may also have team members who come from highly competitive backgrounds and who are not accustomed to waiting for consensus or "team permission." They find, as team members, the very actions that got them ahead in the past are now contrary to the goals of the

team. This is a time when establishing team goals that take advantage of the unique skills of each team member are important.

Remember, the goal of forming a team is to produce optimal performance from each member. Optimal performance by individuals in a team setting means identifying and utilizing strengths and needs differently. The challenge in managing the independent person lies in keeping what is best while establishing performance goals that require cooperative and supportive actions toward members of the team to achieve those goals.

When the non-performing individual, independent, or uncooperative person, impedes the achievement of team goals, their behavior or performance must be changed or they must be released from the company. A team's performance depends on every individual and truly successful team performance will be greater than the sum of its parts. In the end, if individuals do not perform at their best, the team will not be successful.

As you consider management training on team building, consider these final questions and issues.

Is there a leader? Every team needs a leader. Successful teams have a leader who understands what role(s) he or she has to play for the team to be successful. In the work teams in your organization, ask yourself, who is the leader and what is the role of the team leader? Does the leader provide clear direction? Does the leader micro-manage? Does the leader get others involved? Does the leader play a facilitator role or act a resource to the team? Does the leader generate commitment in others?

Successful teams do not "just happen" because you have good people on the team. Good people are often not the most important factor in making a good team. Leadership is! Real teamwork happens as a result of a deliberate, well thought out plan, executed by a skilled team leader who has a clear vision, specific goals, and a definite strategy to get people working together effectively.

DO YOU NEED TEAMBUILDING?

A manager friend we worked with, once told us he couldn't define what a successful team was, but he knew one when he saw one. Several months later we gave him a rating scale to use to help assess whether team building was needed. What follows is a similar assessment that may help you in evaluating your teambuilding needs.

TEAM ASSESSMENT

Using a five-point scale with 5 = strongly agree, 3 = neutral, and 1 = strongly disagree, rate the following statements. If your overall average rating is below "4" you should consider management training. If only one or two items scores below "4," focus on these items.

	Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree
1. The leaders style matches the needs of the team	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. Goals and objectives are clear to team members	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. Communication is open and frequent	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. Members offer frank, constructive criticism	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. Roles within the team are clear	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. There is a high degree of cooperation	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. The is a low degree of competition	①	②	③	④	⑤
8. The leader acts as a facilitator	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. Creativity and innovation are evident	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. Productivity and efficiency are high	①	②	③	④	⑤
11. Quality is consistently high	①	②	③	④	⑤
12. Work level among the team is consistent day-to-day	①	②	③	④	⑤
13. Work levels match member's ability	①	②	③	④	⑤
14. Team members trust each other	①	②	③	④	⑤
15. The team climate / morale is positive	①	②	③	④	⑤
16. Team members put forth their best efforts	①	②	③	④	⑤
17. Customers like working with the whole team	①	②	③	④	⑤
18. The team has fun together	①	②	③	④	⑤
19. The team advocates for itself	①	②	③	④	⑤