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Did you know:

- *80% of employees could perform significantly better if they wanted to?*
- *70% of employees are less motivated today than they used to be?*
- *50% of employees only put enough effort into their work to keep their job?*

Here are some thoughts for your consideration on how to motivate your employees and help them be the best they can be working as a highly effective team…

Building Highly Effective Teams
By Scott R. Playfair, President, P Squared Consulting

Because of the synergy (the whole is greater than the sum of the parts) created, teams can always out perform an individual effort. Always!

So what is a team? A team is a group of individuals…

- Who are committed to achieving common organizational objectives;
- Who meet regularly to identify and solve problems and improve processes;
- Who work and interact openly and effectively together;
- and Who - most importantly - *produce results*.

Most companies now understand that their only source of long term competitive advantage is their employees. Because they understand this, they begin well intentioned Employee Involvement or Empowerment Programs. Yet, many of these programs never achieve success, because the programs seem to wander aimlessly, unfocused or are presented with problems that the employee teams are not equipped to solve.

Whether you have embraced the concept yet or not, you already have teams in your organization. Every group or department that consists of a supervisor and that person's direct reports is really a team. Every day those teams perform and manage processes that are their own. They know these processes better than any one else in your organization. And who better to improve those processes than the team that "owns" those processes. When a problem is identified in any of a team's processes, they typically bring together another type of team - a project team - to find the root cause of the problem and to solve it.

When companies talk about "Team Building", one's natural inclination is to think of some sort of adventure challenge or whimsical game. There is this weird myth that if we can play some "fun" game together without killing each other, then this will increase our future ability to work well together on a real life project. Nice idea, but unfortunately team building isn't a game. Thus, team building must be centered around getting "real work" done.

For a team to be an effective, high performing group of individuals, four key elements must be in place.

The first element is a **Well-defined Mission or Goal**. What is the team's unique reason for being; a clear direction and clarity on what specifically they are tasked with doing. Do they understand what they are being asked to do and *why* it is important? Without this well-defined mission, a team can find themselves crossing

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undesirable boundaries, lacking direction and floating aimlessly without progress. A clear mission needs to be established and agreed upon from the very beginning. Team involvement in identifying the team mission will increase each member's buy-in and commitment. So, of utmost importance is that team members define the team mission and work in unison toward reaching their goals.

The second element is **Management Support**. Any team effort is doomed from the beginning if it isn't receiving internal support from management. For example, has management provided the team with the essential training it needs to get the job done? Are team members meeting in a desirable location, and do they have the necessary tools and support to complete their tasks? Does management show interest in the team's progress? This level of support speaks volumes to team members, boosting morale and ensuring all members that senior management notices and appreciates their efforts toward achieving the defined goals.

The third element is a set of **Operating Norms**. Operating norms represent a clear set of agreements about how each member of the team will behave and how the team will work together. When the team gets together, their agenda is like a road map and their operating ground rules ensure that the team will have a smooth ride. The results or "minutes" of each team meeting should be a clearly defined list of action items mutually agreed to by all team members. The minutes should also document any decisions that were made in the meeting. In doing that, all members of the team are committed and accountable for follow-up and all decisions that were made are communicated and not repeated six months later.

The final element is a **Commonly Shared Understanding of the Team Roles.** For each member of the team, including the leader, it is important to understand what is expected of them - that all members must contribute and exhibit constructive behaviors. The leader should guide without dominating, should keep the group on track and provide the essential focus on meeting purpose and the agenda. Each team member should provide constructive participation, contributing and listening to the view of others. And, above all, each team member must be trusted to prepare for the next session and come through with their assignments.

In a perfect world, teams would be comprised of capable individuals who can solve problems and reach attainable goals. The perfect team would be made up only of members who can work in unison and reach mutually agreed upon goals.

However, it is not a perfect world, and teams are not always the perfect combination of people and ideas. In fact, many managers believe that teams are more trouble than they are worth. In that case, teams may be given little direction, no tools to complete their tasks, no training, and no clear model to help them identify the process from the beginning to the end.

Many organizations may soon be rethinking how to address their attitudes towards company teams. If you seriously consider providing your teams with a solid foundation, a proven model to follow, and enthusiastic support, your teams will achieve high levels of success and most importantly, achieve _significant business results_ that impact the bottom line.

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