

# GATHER THE PEOPLE

Community and Faith-Based Organizing and Development Resources

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## TEAM-BUILDING AND PARTICIPATION: GUIDE TO TIPS ON PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

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Teamwork may be the most important variable in successful professional practice. To a significant extent, one's ability to be helpful depends in large measure on effectiveness in building teams and contributing to team efforts.

Our professional experience in planning, community and congregational organizing and development, and administration highlights the importance of proactively developing organizational culture and structure<sup>1</sup> that incorporate the following team-building principles and practices:

### *Incentivizing co-worker relationships on the job:*

Without relationships between team members, the trust and commitment required for effective team action is likely to be stunted. Relationships between members of a team may be initiated and developed through working together on formal team tasks or through relationship-building exercises. An example of the latter is to pair up members of a team, have each interview the other for a limited amount of time (e.g., 10 minutes), beginning with a question such as: "What gives you satisfaction in your life right now?"—and then have each introduce the person they interviewed to the entire team, summing up the high points of what was shared by the person they interviewed.

### *Achieving early consensus on team vision:*

Endeavors that produce benefits far beyond the contributions of what a single individual can accomplish require a vision of the shared future to be attained and the shared sacrifices that will be necessary to reach it. In effect, individuals involved in such endeavors must recognize that they will be among the beneficiaries of an accomplishment that reaches far beyond what they could achieve by themselves, and that its achievement requires that they set aside some of their individual needs and instead contribute their time, energy, resources, and spirit to the larger cause. It's essential that soon after its formation, the members of a team discuss and reach *consensus* on the vision for their team.

### *Setting the stage for the emergence of team spirit:*

Ideally, team culture promotes a spirit that penetrates the intellectual and emotional life of the members in a

way that fosters their unstinting commitment to the team's moral vision and the tasks to achieve it. The enabling condition for the emergence of such team spirit might be thought of as a variation on the idea of "distributive justice." That is, the certainty that every member of the team has an equal opportunity to contribute his or her knowledge and skills to the team's shared enterprise, and that every member of the team has an equal opportunity to enjoy the benefits of the team's accomplishments—and that the justice of these conditions is transparent to the team as a group and to every member individually. The underlying principle here is that to a significant degree, team spirit is a function of "ownership," which follows in part from the certainty of every individual team member that he or she is valued and treated fairly.

### *Clarifying decision-rules and their assignment:*

Teams can waste an inordinate amount of time and energy getting caught up in decision-making swamps, failing to recognize that no single decision-making rule should apply in all situations. The basic calculus is that there is an inevitable tradeoff between inclusivity/exclusivity and ownership/speed of decision-making: more *inclusive* decision-making enhances ownership; more *exclusive* decision-making enhances speed. In any particular situation, it's essential to determine which consideration is most important, and to ask the following questions: Which decisions must be fully owned by every member of the team? In effect, which decisions require the participation of all the team members? Which decisions must be made without any delay? In effect, which decisions may individual team members make?

### *Using the wisdom and experience of the team:*

One of the most productive team practices is to ensure that the planning and evaluation of initiatives and tasks undertaken by individual team members are reviewed and critiqued in detail by the full team. In other words, for example, a team member who has responsibility for planning and preparing a grant application may formulate the strategy and tactics to be incorporated in the grant application process, but the detailed plan is placed

on the agenda of a team meeting for consideration and feedback. The process of evaluation following an individual team member's initiative should also not be conducted in isolation, but again placed on the agenda of a team meeting for consideration and feedback.

#### ***Multiplying alternatives at times of crisis:***

One of the staples of organizational life is the unforeseen event, the unanticipated problem or crisis. Even the most effectively run teams occasionally encounter circumstances for which they have not planned. During the moments of initial surprise and shock, team members may react in a number of predictable ways: Some few may "lose their heads" and become totally useless, incessantly complaining of the injustice, chaos, or pain of the situation. More than a few are likely to resort unreflectively to roles and responses they have filled in other situations, which may not be relevant to the current crisis. And one or two may even suggest postponing any response to the crisis until "things blow over," arguing that the mere passage of time will remedy the situation. However, one of the most constructive approaches to any unforeseen crisis is to focus team efforts actively on multiplying alternatives by asking exploratory questions, such as: Given the present circumstances and all our available resources, what are the all the options we have for action?

#### ***Repeating mistakes is not inevitable:***

The culture of many organizations reverses what should be our understanding about mistakes. Not uncommonly, less-than-ideal organizational culture encourages hiding or denying mistakes and then, because their causes and cures were never addressed, endlessly repeating them, often "below the radar" of ordinary organizational life. A more constructive approach positively sanctions the practice of openly acknowledging that mistakes are inevitable, and then by bringing them into the open for analysis, it's possible to generate policies and practices to deal with similar situations in the future—and thus we can avoid endlessly repeating them.

#### ***Jettisoning unproductive embarrassment and guilt:***

The misplaced guilt and embarrassment often experienced by newcomers to professional practice who have made an unwitting mistake is one of the obstacles that prevents openly dealing with mistakes in organizational life. However, even in cases of mistakes caused by negligence, guilt and embarrassment per se are not helpful. Ultimately, the "wallpaper" of organizational culture should teach and reinforce the understanding that embarrassment and guilt over mistakes is at best unproductive and at worst wasteful, even destructive, and perversely self-indulgent—they are "personal idiosyncrasies" that have no place in professional practice.

#### ***Fostering intolerance for destructive individuals:***

One of the verities of building teams and participating on them is that we encounter individuals who are "hell-bent" on playing destructive roles for self-interested

motives. By not revealing their true intentions, such individuals multiply their destructive power and effectively bamboozle other members of their teams, making it difficult to remove them. However, team culture should foster unqualified intolerance when a team member has been revealed as a committed free-loader (i.e., one who consistently takes advantage of whatever benefits are afforded by team membership, but inevitably fails to fulfill his or her obligations to the team), dead-weighter (i.e., one who consistently fails to participate and contribute and, instead, adds a dead weight to the process, undermining by perpetual silence), or cool alternator (i.e., one who is two-faced, affecting loyalty to the team in one setting, but in another setting acting entirely contrary to the team's best interests, and alternating between the two in a "cool" way). Team policy and practice should promote confronting and when necessary expelling such individuals without hesitation.

The following tips on team-building and team-participation principles and practices have been culled from a wide variety of Internet sources. Some are shown here as originally published; others have been excerpted to increase their relevance to nonprofit applications. Certainly their usefulness will vary dramatically from one setting and application to another, depending on the organizational context, goals, etc. of the team.

Many of these tips were originally proposed from the perspective that they would be implemented from the top down by an organization or group manager or director. Of course, group members themselves may nonetheless employ these principles and practices from the bottom up.

## **HOW TO BUILD A TEAM<sup>2</sup>**

### **1. Vision**

Vision means being able to excite the team with large, desired outcomes.

Large outcomes mean devising goals that attract missionaries. The first step in vision is to project such a goal. This goal must be bigger than a paycheck. It must contain challenge, appeal to personal pride, and provide an opportunity to make a difference and know it. Then the goal can become a powerful vision.

Next, team leaders position the goal by picturing success. Initial questions might be, "What will it look like when we get there?" "What will success be like, feel like?" "How will others know?" When a large, missionary-friendly goal has been pictured and clearly communicated, the vision is complete.

### **2. Commitment**

Commitment can be a dangerous concept because of its attendant assumptions. Some may assume, for example, that commitment means long hours, while to others it may mean productivity. When expectations are defined, success rates soar. When leaders assume that everyone "should" be committed, as a matter of course, we over-

look the difficulties many have with certain commitments.

If people cannot initially commit, it doesn't mean they don't care. More often, it means they do care, and they are caught up in a process of doubt. This process precedes every meaningful commitment. Effective leaders catalyze this process, so that the critical mass of people can pass through this stage efficiently on their way to genuine commitment and innovative strategies.

This pre-commitment process is the same for team leaders and members. When we ponder a new commitment, we climb up to a kind of mental diving board. Commitments contain unknowns, and some warn of possible failure. It is common for people to neither jump nor climb back down the "ladder," but rather to stay stuck at the end of the board, immobilized in pros, cons, obstacles, and worries. In this state of mind, the obstacles begin to rule, obscuring the vision, blunting motivation.

When leaders do not understand the commitment process they tend to seek accountability without providing support. Without a means to process doubts and fears, people often feel pressured to commit, but can't. One option, often unconscious, is to pretend to commit, to say "yes" and mean "maybe" at best. The pretended commitment is a form of wholly unnecessary corporate madness.

The solution to this set of problems is two fold: establish an atmosphere of trust, and within that atmosphere encourage inclusion.

### 3. Trust

Trust is the antidote to the fears and risks attendant to meaningful commitment. Trust means confidence in team leadership and vision. When trust prevails, team members are more willing to go through a difficult process, supported through ups, downs, risk and potential loss.

Trust is most efficiently established when leadership commits to vision first, and everyone knows those commitments are genuine. The process for leaders to commit is the same as for everyone else: assess pre-commitment doubts, questions, unknowns and fears. This involves three simple steps:

- List the unknowns
- Assess worst-case scenarios and their survivability
- Research the unknowns

The list of unknowns reveals some answers and further questions. Some of these questions lend themselves to research (others' experience, a small pilot plan), and some have no apparent answers from our pre-commitment position. These latter comprise the bottom line or irreducible risk. We learn the outcome only after commitment. Every major commitment contains some irreducible risk, some lingering unknowns. We therefore make every major commitment in at least partial ignorance.

Leadership now understands the potential loss and gain involved in the new vision. At this point, leader-

ship can commit itself, and prepare to include other team members. That preparation must include a plan for leadership to share visibly both risk and reward with the other team members who will be coming on board.

With leadership's commitment to a clear vision, and a genuine plan to share risks and rewards, the atmosphere for trust is in place. We are now ready to include others in our team effort.

### 4. Inclusion

Inclusion means getting others to commit to the team effort, helping others through their "diving board doubts" to genuine commitment. Since leaders now understand this process first hand, we need only communicate with the potential team members to complete inclusion.

The best setting to obtain buy-in and build trust is in small groups that facilitate thorough give and take. The basic tasks are to communicate the vision, make sure it is understood, communicate leadership's commitment (including sharing risk and reward, and how), and elicit and address peoples' doubts.

Leaders will need three communication skills to achieve inclusion. These are the non-assumptive question, good listening, and directed response.

1. Non-assumptive questions ("What do you think?" "Can you tell me what is happening with this report?") invite real answers because they are inclusive, not intrusive. Questions containing assumptions ("Why are you skeptical?" "Why is this report so incomplete?") invite defensiveness. When converting an atmosphere of change and possibly skepticism to trust, added defensiveness is counter-productive.

2. Listening means separating the process of taking in information from the process of judging it. Kept separate, both processes are valuable. Mixed, especially when the receiver is a designated leader, the sender is invited to stop communicating or to change the message midstream.

3. Directed response. Effective team leaders demonstrate responsiveness. Since leaders have already processed their own pre-commitment doubts, many questions can be answered on the spot. Some require research and a time line for response. And some, which relate to the bottom line, irreducible risk, require a truthful "I don't know. I'm in the same soup as you."

### 5. Help Exchange

The final step in creating the team is to establish a corroborative, balanced strategy for reaching the committed vision. This plan will consist of all of the tasks and help exchange necessary to realize the overall vision. Your teammates themselves are in the best position to supply this information. Since by this time you have laid the groundwork for trust, and established good buy-in, your teammates are likely to be enthusiastically cooperative.

At this point, the leadership role is to catalyze consensus, not to issue orders. Consensus means that team members agree to, whether they necessarily agree with,

a particular approach. Consensus occurs easily when most feel their ideas were heard and considered, whether or not the team ultimately chooses those ideas. Obtaining consensus again requires use of leadership communication skills: non-assumptive questions, good listening, and directed response.

Effective teams often produce lively discussions of divergent viewpoints before reaching consensus. Diverse views can mean unresolved argument, or they can mean increased team intelligence and ultimate consensus. The difference is a well-built team. To improve the effectiveness of your team, Learning Center offers customized teamwork training.

### TEN CORE TEAM VALUES<sup>3</sup>

1. Listening to each other with an open mind without interruption
2. Sharing knowledge, information and experience with those who can benefit
3. Taking key decisions based on reasoning not rank
4. Expressing concerns only to those responsible for dealing with them
5. A responsibility culture not a blame culture
6. Basing our work on the 'customer'
7. Striving for continuous improvement
8. Behaving with integrity
9. Positively challenging dishonesty or destructive behavior
10. No ego

### INDISPUTABLE LAWS OF TEAMWORK<sup>4</sup>

#### 1. The Law of Significance

People try to achieve great things by themselves mainly because of the size of their ego, their level of insecurity, or simple naiveté and temperament. One is too small a number to achieve greatness.

#### 2. The Law of the Big Picture

The goal is more important than the role. Members must be willing to subordinate their roles and personal agendas to support the team vision. By seeing the big picture, effectively communicating the vision to the team, providing the needed resources, and hiring the right players, leaders can create a more unified team.

#### 3. The Law of the Niche

All players have a place where they add the most value. Essentially, when the right team member is in the right place, everyone benefits. To be able to put people in their proper places and fully utilize their talents and maximize potential, you need to know your players and the team situation. Evaluate each person's skills, discipline, strengths, emotions, and potential.

#### 4. The Law of Mount Everest

As the challenge escalates, the need for teamwork elevates. Focus on the team and the dream should take care of itself. The type of challenge determines the type of team you require: A new challenge requires a crea-

tive team. An ever-changing challenge requires a fast, flexible team. An Everest-sized challenge requires an experienced team. See who needs direction, support, coaching, or more responsibility. Add members, change leaders to suit the challenge of the moment, and remove ineffective members.

#### 5. The Law of the Chain

The strength of the team is impacted by its weakest link. When a weak link remains on the team the stronger members identify the weak one, end up having to help him, come to resent him, become less effective, and ultimately question their leader's ability.

#### 6. The Law of the Catalyst

Winning teams have players who make things happen. These are the catalysts, or the get-it-done-and-then-some people who are naturally intuitive, communicative, passionate, talented, creative people who take the initiative, are responsible, generous, and influential.

#### 7. The Law of the Compass

A team that embraces a vision becomes focused, energized, and confident. It knows where it's headed and why it's going there. A team should examine its Moral, Intuitive, Historical, Directional, Strategic, and Visionary Compasses. Does the business practice with integrity? Do members stay? Does the team make positive use of anything contributed by previous teams in the organization? Does the strategy serve the vision? Is there a long-range vision to keep the team from being frustrated by short-range failures?

#### 8. The Law of the Bad Apple

Rotten attitudes ruin a team. The first place to start is with your self. Do you think the team wouldn't be able to get along without you? Do you secretly believe that recent team successes are attributable to your personal efforts, not the work of the whole team? Do you keep score when it comes to the praise and perks handed out to other team members? Do you have a hard time admitting you made a mistake? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you need to keep your attitude in check.

#### 9. The Law of Countability

Teammates must be able to count on each other when it counts. Is your integrity unquestionable? Do you perform your work with excellence? Are you dedicated to the team's success? Can people depend on you? Do your actions bring the team together or rip it apart?

#### 10. The Law of the Price Tag

The team fails to reach its potential when it fails to pay the price. Sacrifice, time commitment, personal development, and unselfishness are part of the price we pay for team success.

#### 11. The Law of the Scoreboard

The team can make adjustments when it knows where it stands. The scoreboard is essential to evaluating per-

formance at any given time, and is vital to decision-making.

### 12. The Law of the Bench

Great teams have great depth. Any team that wants to excel must have good substitutes as well as starters. The key to making the most of the law of the bench is to continually improve the team.

### 13. The Law of Identity

Shared values define the team. The type of values you choose for the team will attract the type of members you need. Values give the team a unique identity to its members, potential recruits, clients, and the public. Values must be constantly stated and restated, practiced, and institutionalized.

### 14. The Law of Communication

Interaction fuels action. Effective teams have teammates who are constantly talking, and listening to each other. From leader to teammates, teammates to leader, and among teammates, there should be consistency, clarity and courtesy. People should be able to disagree openly but with respect. Between the team and the public, responsiveness and openness is key.

### 15. The Law of the Edge

The difference between two equally talented teams is leadership. A good leader can bring a team to success, provided values, work ethic and vision are in place. The Myth of the Head Table is the belief that on a team, one person is always in charge in every situation. Understand that in particular situations, maybe another person would be best suited for leading the team. The Myth of the Round Table is the belief that everyone is equal, which is not true. The person with greater skill, experience, and productivity in a given area is more important to the team in that area. Compensate where it is due.

### 16. The Law of High Morale

When you're winning, nothing hurts. When a team has high morale, it can deal with whatever circumstances are thrown at it.

### 17. The Law of Dividends

Investing in the team compounds over time. Make the decision to build a team, and decide who among the team are worth developing. Gather the best team possible, pay the price to develop the team, do things together, delegate responsibility and authority, and give credit for success.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT SECRETS ABOUT TRUST<sup>5</sup>

- Feeling able to rely upon another person;
- Cooperating as a group;
- Taking thoughtful risks; and
- Experiencing believable communication.

## Build fun and shared experiences into the organization's agenda

The manager should help the team think as a unit within a fun work environment so that everyone on the team feels involved and appreciated. For example, management could sponsor company dinners or business trips to sporting events or team retreats.

## Use icebreakers and time-limited fun team-building exercises

The manager should use icebreakers and group activities at the beginning of meetings to promote interaction and camaraderie among team members. The bottom line is that icebreakers help associates to get to know each other on a more personal basis.

## Celebrate group successes publicly

The manager should recognize the group as a whole for their accomplishments, not just individuals within the group. Constructive group praise is always the best policy.

## LEADING YOUR TEAM TO PEAK PERFORMANCE<sup>6</sup>

### Align people with the stuff they are good at

Take stock of all the talents . . . on the team and reshuffle the deck if it means that [the] . . . team has a better chance of success. Don't keep someone in a job role just because they've been doing it for long time if you truly think their talents are better suited and could make a bigger contribution in another role.

### Avoid blame (a.k.a. throwing people under the bus)

There are going to be times when you fail, and there will be things that simply don't pan out the way you had hoped. Do a post-mortem (even if it's informal) to figure out what went wrong and learn from it. If there were egregious errors made by individuals, deal with them privately. If necessary, let the person know your expectations for how this should be handled in the future. Don't publicly blame individuals—directly or indirectly—in meetings or team e-mails. If you do, you risk creating an atmosphere in which people are so afraid to make mistakes that they don't spend enough time doing the proactive and creative work necessary to avoid future problems -- or more important, to drive new innovations.

## BUILDING A WINNING TEAM<sup>7</sup>

1. Lay the foundation before you begin construction. In my experience, the most successful teams invest time in laying the foundation to create a common framework for everyone. The building blocks are in the team infrastructure and team dynamics. You may get started by addressing the following: What is the purpose of the team; their function in relation to the business goals; the actual team goal? I recently posed these questions to a newly formed team of 17 people and got

17 different perspectives. Don't assume everyone is on the same page until you have the discussion.

**2. Make the team aware of the four stages of development.** Those stages are: forming, storming, norming and performing. Explain that the team will progress and digress depending on multiple variables such as turnover and change. Ask the team which stage of development they see themselves and what needs to occur to move to a higher level.

**3. Take a team "pulse."** This can happen in a couple of different ways. One way is through an initial team survey that generates data on how members perceive team functioning and interactions. A survey will include topics such as commitment, trust, communication, and conflict resolution. Administer the survey at least quarterly to determine progress and team development priorities. Another way to take a team "pulse" is to have periodic frank discussions about what is working and what is not. Practice regular, informal conversations that keep communication channels open.

**4. Assess.** Identify a tool to assess behavior work style (such as DISC) of each team member. This exercise invariably illuminates each member's style preferences, their team contributions, and gives everyone information to adapt and work together more effectively. For most people this creates an "ah ha" experience that is pivotal in fostering understanding and communication.

**5. Push proactivity.** Don't wait until there is conflict to establish a team charter. A charter, generated by team members, should specify guidelines and behavioral boundaries. This will set expectations and clarify what is acceptable and intolerant behavior. Make it clear that the charter can always be amended. Be sure everyone has a copy. Review it on a regular basis and go through it carefully with a new team member.

**6. Form common skills.** Be sure everyone has a common skill base for communication, conflict resolution, problem solving, giving and receiving peer feedback. I find that teams who have these common skill sets are much more productive than teams that don't. Technical expertise is only half of the success quotient.

**7. Examine expectations.** Are the expectations of team members and the leader clearly communicated? This goes beyond job descriptions. For example, what do people expect to get out of working together as a team, i.e., expression, creativity; what can be expected of their contributions? There is a very user-friendly instrument, *Managing Work Expectations*, by Inscape Publishing, that can be helpful in this process.

**8. Acknowledge unique talents and contributions.** Each team member brings value to the team. Point out or showcase various abilities. Take time in a meeting to recognize one or two members. Be sure everyone receives equal recognition.

**9. Build dialogue, extinguish monologue.** Aim toward two-way interaction, exchange of ideas, and developing new insights in regular communication. Invite members to ask about others reasoning or thinking and explain how they think of or see a situation. The Ladder of Inference referred to in Peter Senge's, *The Fifth Discipline*, is a good starting ground.

**10. Do some teambuilding.** Initially you may consider a series of team sessions that incorporate the suggestions above with team building activities. Once the team is grounded, you may benefit by having quarterly or bi-annual team building sessions. The type of team building you choose, from classroom experiential to rope climbing, needs to match the culture and challenges of the team. There are hundreds of activities that are metaphors for what goes on or doesn't go on, in the team experience. Whatever you choose to do, be certain there will be valuable learning and fun.

**11. Laugh together.** Laughter is a common language the entire team will understand. So legitimize levity among team members and you will likely lessen their stress and build their bond. Create times for people to laugh together and loosen up. This will also stimulate creativity. Consider some of these ideas: start a meeting with a relevant joke or funny story, show a clip of a comedy video tape (or sports bloopers) that pertains to a current challenge; buy everyone a pair of Groucho Marx style nose and glasses.

**12. Celebrate.** Provide a continental breakfast or bring in lunch and celebrate for no special reason than to say thank you to the team. Or identify a theme (Mardi Gras, Cinco de Mayo) and ask people to bring in food to share. Play music and decorate the lunchroom. Don't expect employees to gather after work hours. Most people have family obligations and personal commitments.

## TIPS FOR BETTER TEAMWORK AND TEAM BUILDING<sup>8</sup>

- Make sure that the team goals are totally clear and completely understood and accepted by each team member.
- Make sure there is complete clarity in who is responsible for what. Do your best to avoid overlaps of authority. For example, if there is a risk that two team members will be competing for control in certain area, try to divide that area into two distinct parts and give each more complete control in one of those parts, according to those individual's strengths and personal inclinations.
- For issues that rely on the team consensus and commitment, involve more the whole team in the decision making process. For example, use group sessions with collective discussions of possible decision options or solution ideas. What you want to achieve here is that each team member feels his or

her ownership in the final decision, solution, or idea. The more he or she feels this way, the more likely he or she is to agree with and commit to the decided line of action.

- Make sure there are no blocked lines of communications and you and your people stay fully informed.
- Build trust with your team members by spending one-on-one time in an atmosphere of openness and honesty. Be loyal to your employees, if you expect the same.
- Be careful with interpersonal issues. Recognize them early and deal with them till full resolution.
- Do not limit yourself to negative feedback. Be fair. Whenever there is an opportunity, give positive feedback as well.

### LEARN HOW EVERYONE CONTRIBUTES TO THE GOAL<sup>9</sup>

One of the main obstacles to team building is the fact that the majority of people . . . on a team do not really understand what the other team members do every day to contribute to the goals of the group. Most of us have blinders on and only see what contributions we make and often give ourselves more credit to the success of the team than we really should.

The ability to see through the eyes of the other team members is an invaluable thing for everyone. The concept of empathy team building seeks to accomplish just that.

Empathy shows your ability to see through the eyes of others or put yourself in their shoes. There is an old saying that you cannot judge others until you have walked a mile in their shoes. Empathy teambuilding does what it can to figuratively allow you to walk in others shoes and they are able to walk in yours. Once you know what everyone else does all day to contribute to the success of the team suddenly there is a whole restored understanding and sense of group given to the team member.

When a team member feels that they are contributing tons more to a task than they feel everyone else is doing this can create a lot of internal friction. This friction is usually completely unfounded but perception is reality and so if it is felt it is there.

Once a team member feels more important and more beneficial than the others the team unit begins to crumble. Right now . . . most teams are degrading because of this concept, which is why once a company learns about empathy team building they strive to teach and train it. You should not be left behind, get in on the ground floor and benefit your teams today.

### TEAM-BUILDING WITHOUT TIME-WASTING<sup>10</sup>

**Begin by asking each member of the team to confidentially record their individual answers to two questions:** a) “On a 1-10 scale (with 10 being ideal) how well are we doing in terms of working together as

a team?” and b) “On a 1-10 scale how well do we need to be doing in terms of working together as a team?”

**Have a team member calculate the results.** Discuss the results with the team. If the team members believe that the gap between current effectiveness and needed effectiveness indicates the need for team building, proceed to the next step in the process.

*In most cases team members do believe that improved teamwork is both important and needed. Recent interviews involving members from several hundred teams (in multi-national corporations) showed that the “average” team member believed that his/her team was currently at a “5.8” level of effectiveness but needed to be at an “8.7”.*

Ask the team, “If every team member could change two key behaviors which would help us close the gap between where we are and where we want to be, which two behaviors should we try to change?” Have each team member record their selected behaviors on flip charts.

**Help team members prioritize all the behaviors on the charts** (many will be the same or similar) and (using consensus) determine the two most important behaviors to change (for all team members).

**Have each team member have a one-on-one dialogue with each other team member.** During the dialogue each member will request that their colleague suggest two areas for personal behavioral change (other than the two already agreed upon for every team member) that will help the team close the gap between *where we are* and where we want to be.

These dialogues occur simultaneously and take about 5 minutes each. For example, if there are seven team members each team member will participate in six brief one-on-one dialogues.

**Let each team member review his/her list of suggested behavioral changes and choose the two that seem to be the most important.** Have each team member then announce their two key behaviors for personal change to the team.

**Encourage each team member to ask for a brief (five minute), monthly “progress report” from each other team member on their effectiveness in demonstrating the two key behaviors common to all team members and the two key personal behaviors.** Specific suggestions for improvement can be solicited in areas where behavior does not match desired expectations.

**Conduct a mini-survey follow-up process in approximately four months.** In the mini survey each team member will receive confidential feedback from all other team members on his/her perceived change in effectiveness. This survey will include two common items, the two personal items, and an item that assesses

how much the individual has been following up with the other team members.

## DYSFUNCTIONS THAT CAN SABOTAGE ANY LEADERSHIP TEAM<sup>11</sup>

### Absence of Trust

Trust, says Lencioni, is the key. By trust he does not mean "predictive trust" or simply familiarity with how each member of the team will react in any given situation. Lencioni asserts that members of the team must trust each other enough to be vulnerable. They must be able to admit when they don't know something, or don't have the answer to a problem. If a leadership team does not have this kind of trust, then real communication and sharing of ideas won't happen.

### Fear of Conflict

The next dysfunction is a fear of conflict or disagreement. According to Lencioni, "productive, ideological conflict is a good thing." On great leadership teams, people don't hold back. Lencioni asserts that the chief executive's job is to "mine for conflict" and "drag out disagreeing opinions." Debate not only puts all of the ideas on the table for consideration, but Lencioni believes that people are far more likely to commit to a decision if they have had a meaningful chance to weigh in on the issue.

### Lack of Commitment

Lencioni states that if a team does not have trust and fears conflict, the end result will likely be a lack of individual commitment to the decisions made by the team and/or the chief executive officer. He asserts that members of the team may actually sabotage the decision in a passive way because they are not committed to seeing it work, and may even believe it will fail.

It is important for the team leader to force clarity and closure when a decision has been made by making sure everyone knows what was decided and what the next steps will be.

### Avoidance of Accountability

Without commitment, there will be no accountability claims Lencioni. Individuals on the leadership team who had the opportunity to debate and participate in a decision are far more likely to hold each other accountable for following through.

### Inattention to Results

Finally, according to Lencioni, "great teams get results." They focus on collective outcomes. An individual who is not focused on the collective outcome and is more concerned with his or her own individual success, may not be a good fit for the team.

## HABITS THAT SABOTAGE SUCCESS<sup>12</sup>

**Avoiding Conflict**—You are by nature a peacekeeper. You like everyone to be happy and agreeable. The problem is that in life there is always some level of dis-

agreement and conflict and how we deal with it can become the problem.

In the workplace, managers need to be able to manage conflict. Your team members will not always agree or like each other. They might not agree with you or like what you are telling them. What if their job performance is interfering with the goals of the company or the team's morale? How will you deal with it? Avoiding conflict could be an obstacle to your taking on more of a leadership role.

Joyce disliked conflict, but recognized that if she wanted to be seen as a leader she would have to step up. She worked with her coach to develop a 3-step action plan.

1. Acknowledge the conflict.
2. Invite the other person to have a say and listen to their perspective.
3. Jointly develop a game plan for change.

Acknowledging out loud what a challenge conflict was for her, allowed her to "own" it and make changes.

**Poor Boundaries**—We have all known someone who has trouble saying "no," and therefore might get into situations where they are doing more, but are stressed and unhappy about it. Sometimes people take advantage of them because of this weakness. Being able to set limits about what you can and can't do is an extremely important skill. Assess your team. Is there someone who has trouble saying "no?" If so, what can you do to help them?

## WHY TEAMS FAIL<sup>13</sup>

**Selfishness:** At altitude, selfishness kills people when teamwork is critically needed to deal with injuries, equipment malfunction, limited resources, and threats of avalanche and weather. In corporate teams, selfishness kills performance and projects. First, it infects a team when one or more of its members:

- Let their career or personal agendas supersede the team's mission.
- Think that being right is more important than collaboration and dialogue.
- Take individual credit for team achievements, while blaming the team for its failures.
- Are unwilling to compromise or seek consensus during conflict.

Then the damage escalates as fifteen-minute meetings start taking an hour, projects take twice as long as necessary, members say something outside the team meeting that should've been said in the meeting, or talk about someone instead of challenging them directly.

What seems like innocent office politics brings down the best of teams. Postmortem business case-studies blame the failures on reasons like strategic mis-steps or poor implementations of good ideas. But digging deeper among the carcasses we find that selfishness alone drove the denial, avoidance, blindness, or cover-ups until it was too late.

High Altitude teams, on the other hand, are driven by a fervor and zeal for achieving the team's results – what we call a compelling saga (from the ancient Norse term) – and this inspires passion greater than selfish ego's agenda. Is your team driven by a passionate saga, or just empty words in a mission statement?

**Tool Seduction:** In mountaineering, tool seduction endangers climbers every time they dress in the latest gear but apply the wrong techniques and behaviors to the challenge. In their overconfidence (or naiveté) they end up lost on a storm-ravaged slope for days while experienced climbers are at base camp having a beer and watching the weather. Similarly, the danger from a parade of experts packing the latest tools for organizational change, leadership development, process improvement, teambuilding and other management methods bog down progress and distract teams from focusing on the vital issues.

But tools are important, right? Yes. Tools offer hope. Tools make people feel like they have the right answer. Who dares argue with the ideas from a best-selling business book? But the results aren't pretty when you get seduced by the buzzwords and cool concepts. Teams fail when tools become crutches for "safe" answers, or worse, weapons to use against each other. And in critical moments, even the best tools break or fail, resources are lost, or circumstances change. So, the problem isn't with the tools, but how teams relate to them.

Is the team using the tools, or are the tools using the team? Industry feels the costs and risks of tool seduction every day:

- "Our team had all the measurement charts on the wall that they trained us to have but we couldn't figure out what we needed to do differently."
- "Why did our R&D team have to take a TQM class? I mean how are we supposed to measure the quality of creativity and breakthrough? The classes were a distraction. It was ridiculous."
- "Why did we have to waste so much time on Six Sigma? I mean we were only making bottle caps. They worked great at Three Sigma!"
- "Our team still hasn't recovered from the cultural damage of our latest reengineering effort."

High Altitude teams only use tools that drive team success, and don't get distracted by industry fashion trends. They know that tool seduction can suck productivity and morale out of a team so they adapt the tools and focus on behavior – the actions and decisions made – which truly drives high performance results. Do your team's tools allow it to act decisively, or just clog your shelves with interesting, but irrelevant, information? Do these tools fuel team passion for the challenge ahead, or derail production with useless meetings, lingo, and processes?

**Cowardice:** Cowardice dangerously stops both mountaineering and corporate teams from challenging the status quo, holding each other accountable, and expos-

ing weaknesses. This danger happens as soon as team members are too afraid to confront violations of accountability, take necessary risks, or maintain team principles and values during times of trouble. And it causes team failures by stopping the essential act needed for effective execution...tell the truth.

Cowardice eats truth. Lack of truth eats team performance. Initially telling the truth can upset people and cause discomfort, but good teams love it and it drives accountability to new levels. The alternative of keeping the truth at unspeakable levels only produces collateral damage which can include accumulating dead-weight from marginal team members and sticking with doomed projects are too long. High altitude teams develop bravery which allows them to achieve the accountability, risk-taking, commitment, and truthful communication necessary for achieving their goals.

Rather than reveal the truth about a situation does your team choose avoidance, denial, and silence in order to avert possible discomfort, anger, retribution, and other unpleasantness? Do team members hide or only whisper about the uncomfortable team issues?

**Lone heroism:** The danger of a selfish, glory-seeking lone-hero breaks a team as they step on other team members without even removing their crampons. Lone heroism contributes to higher operating costs, lower innovation, increased risks, delayed execution, higher turnover, and missed sales opportunities. The lone hero's journey makes for compelling literature, but in real-life human experience dating back to the earliest prehistoric times, it typically equates with failure and death. High altitude leaders choose a different path: partnership – engaging and leveraging others to help them. Imagine how much more productive teams would be if lone heroes spent less time proving their superiority and more time producing results. Lone-hero damage can be extensive:

- Slow performance as everyone thinks they're the only one able to contribute meaningfully.
- Low accountability from lone-heroes avoiding accountability or usurping it from others by doing their jobs. In an accountability vacuum everyone wonders why nothing is getting done.
- Misaligned direction by putting personal agendas ahead of team's goals.
- Demoralization. No one wants to work with someone to just make that person look great.
- Hostages. Is there someone the company thinks it's can't live without?

Is lone-heroism happening in your team? Who is trying to do it all? Who thinks it's a sign of weakness to ask for help? Or, worse, who thinks he or she is the only one who can do something right?

Viewing team failures from a higher altitude lets us see the hidden dangers which derail most well-intended team building methods. Which dangers most threaten your team?

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<sup>1</sup> For more on organizational structure and culture from a community organizing and development perspective, see “GTP ORGANIZER TRAINING, Training Guide #7, Organizational Structure and Culture” ([http://www.gatherthepeople.org/Downloads/007\\_STRUCTURE\\_CULTURE.pdf](http://www.gatherthepeople.org/Downloads/007_STRUCTURE_CULTURE.pdf)).

<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, “How to Build a Team: Using Vision, Commitment & Trust,” Learning Center (<http://www.learningcenter.net/library/building.shtml> as of 1/4/10).

<sup>3</sup> Martin Edwards, “The Ten Values of Excellent Teams,” LeaderValues.com (<http://www.leader-values.com/Content/detail.asp?ContentDetailID=1064> as of 1/4/10).

<sup>4</sup> Regine Azurin and Yvette Pantilla, “The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork,” LeaderValues.com (<http://www.leader-values.com/Content/detail.asp?ContentDetailID=265> as of 1/4/10).

<sup>5</sup> Susan M. Heathfield, “Trust Rules: The Most Important Secret About Trust, What Is Trust?” About.com Guide ([http://humanresources.about.com/od/workrelationships/a/trust\\_rules.htm](http://humanresources.about.com/od/workrelationships/a/trust_rules.htm) as of 1/4/10).

<sup>6</sup> Jason Hiner, “10 tips for leading your team to peak performance,” builder.au (<http://www.builder.au.com.au/strategy/projectmanagement/soa/10-tips-for-leading-your-team-to-peak-performance/0,339028292,339278390,00.htm> as of 1/4/10)

<sup>7</sup> Ginny Hronek, “12 Tips for Building a Winning Team,” businessknowhow.com (<http://www.businessknowhow.com/manage/12winteam.htm> as of 1/4/10).

<sup>8</sup> Sergey Dudiy, Ph.D., “Top Nine Tips for Better Teamwork and Team Building,” Time-Management-Guide.com (<http://www.time-management-guide.com/teamwork-tips.html> as of 1/4/10).

<sup>9</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, “Know What Others Are Doing,” Team Building Tactics (<http://www.teambuildingtactics.com/empathyteambuilding.php> as of 1/4/10).

<sup>10</sup> Marshall Goldsmith and Howard Morgan, “Team Building Without Time Wasting,” Leader Values (<http://www.leader-values.com/Content/detail.asp?ContentDetailID=939> as of 1/4/10).

<sup>11</sup> Catherine L. Moreton, J.D., “Five Dysfunctions That Can Sabotage Any Leadership Team,” HR.BLR.com (<http://hr.blr.com/HR-news/Staffing-Training/Leadership/Five-Dysfunctions-That-Can-Sabotage-Any-Leadership> as of 1/4/10).

<sup>12</sup> Gail Solish, “3 Habits That Sabotage Workplace success,” SearchWarp.com (<http://searchwarp.com/swa272589.htm> as of 1/4/10).

<sup>13</sup> Donald Schmincke, “Why Teams Fail: A Higher Altitude View,” My Article Archive (<http://www.myarticlearchive.com/articles/8/235.htm> as of 1/4/10).

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