DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE TEAM BUILDING STRATEGY
By Michelle Eggleston

While teamwork is a fairly simple concept, there is a lack of understanding around the complexity of team dynamics. It takes high levels of discipline and persistence to maintain an effective team. And, without a team building strategy in place, there is a risk of developing a dysfunctional team that will negatively affect company profit.

Unity is the essence of a team, where a group of individuals collectively work toward a common goal. But all too often, when things go wrong, joint accountability dissipates and finger-pointing occurs, resulting in a breakdown of team dynamics. That is where teamwork then becomes individualized, according to Nicholas Conner, owner and chief consulting officer for Catalyst Team & Leadership Consulting.

To maintain a sense of unity, it’s important to understand the four stages of team development outlined in the Tuckerman Model:

- **Forming**: When a team first comes together and they seek guidance from leadership.
- **Storming**: Known as the conflict stage. Roles are allocated and trust is beginning to form. This is an opportunity to become aligned and move forward with one vision.
- **Norming**: The team culture emerges with rules and expectations outlined.
- **Performing**: A high performance team has developed with a growing sense of trust, moving toward self-directedness.

While all stages of development are appropriate to conduct team building initiatives, the norming stage is a particularly crucial opportunity to jumpstart training when the team is functioning at a high level and trust is at its peak, Conner said.

In addition, many people are conditioned to avoid conflict, which is a major reason why the storming stage is often skipped. If this step is skipped, the team cannot fully function as one unit. Teams need to successfully deal with the conflicts that arise in order to grow trust and build a solid foundation for teamwork. When team training occurs during the storming stage, it often becomes an intervention to move the team forward.

“Change is inevitable,” Conner added. “It is the leading factor that impacts team development. Change creates uncertainty and the offspring of uncertainty is distrust. When change occurs you must re-form and go through the team stages of development again.”

**MOTIVATION**

It is a leader’s job to inspire a vision that appeals to the values, hopes and dreams of the team members. There is a big difference between managing people and leading people, Conner said.

Management is the act of getting people to “do” what needs to be done, while leadership is the art of getting people to “want” to do what needs to be done. A leader instills a sense of purpose and motivation within employees and team building helps develop that purpose and motivation.

When analyzing what motivates employees in business, the Murphy Model indicates that 60 percent of employee motivation comes from the perks that are obtained when starting a new job, which includes benefits, salary, office, parking spot, etc. Another 20 percent of motivation comes from the opportunity for advancement, such as a promotion, bonus, stock options, etc. The remaining 20 percent has absolutely nothing to do with money or perks. People are looking for more than money; they want autonomy, mastery and purpose. In this post-9/11 economy, people are concerned with quality of life, Conner said.
THE BOTTOM LINE
There are many reasons why companies lose money, and it can often be traced back to team performance. If there is a lack of communication, power struggles or disrespect within a team environment then it will have a negative impact on company profit. It is crucial for leaders to persistently work on developing a healthy, functional team.

“Business is about money, there’s nothing wrong with saying that,” Conner said. “No one goes into business to lose money. High performance teams create healthy margins, which create profit. The more dysfunctional we are as a team, the more money that is lost due to rework.”

MAKING TEAM BUILDING WORK
There are several ways organizations can ensure that team building is successful, including being mindful of course content, outlining a clear strategy, road mapping for change and developing a consistent follow-up process. Here are few strategies to increase success:

- **Making it relevant:** Define clear objectives and desired outcomes. Hold facilitator interviews with key decision makers and participants. Use a measurement tool to determine the group’s presentstage of development and for tracking purposes post-training.

- **Tailoring programs and training:** Begin with the end result in mind. What does a successful program look like? Use data from measurement tools to determine appropriate activities, learning models and support tools.

- **Strategy and action planning:** Analyze the insights and data gained from the program. Be specific of the changes that need to be made. Follow up with participants on a continuous basis to assess performance.

Team building is not just about bonding and having fun; it needs to be measured and assessed. After all, if something is worth doing, it’s worth measuring, Conner said.

Assessing team performance before and after a training event is necessary to analyze the outcome of the program. By tracking performance based on which stage of development the team is currently in allows organizations to plan training activities that will resonate with learners. This assessment process should be ongoing, not a single, isolated event.

MOVING FORWARD
There is a great deal to be garnered from team building. Organizations can reap the rewards by increasing profit and employees have an opportunity to reach the point of self-actualization and tap into something that money cannot buy: a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

“Create a plan on how to move forward as a result of the insights and results gained from training,” Conner said. “Studies have shown that high performing teams do prosper financially, but in order to get the most out of team building, you must measure for impact.”

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