

Beyond the Horizons Consulting

Volume 1, Issue 6

July 2004

Essential Qualities for Teams

For the last three months, we have dealt with what makes teams work and what doesn't. We have used Patrick Lencioni's material, *The Five Dysfunctions of Teams*, and Katzenbach and Smith's excellent book, *The Wisdom of Teams*. Last month we talked about **size** as being an essential quality of teams. We also learned that teams, as opposed to groups, need to have **complementary skills**, and we discussed these in detail. This month we will be looking at two other *sine qua non*'s of high-performing teams.

- 1 true teams are committed to a common purpose, with specific performance skills, and
- 2 team members hold themselves *mutually*



accountable for team performance

A Common Purpose — an Uncommon Team!

Katzenbach and Smith emphasize that true teams usually *begin* in response to a demand or an opportunity put before them by management. However, the team building process usually results in the creation of a **statement of purpose which all team members can own**. The value of this process lies in the weaving together of all the unique strands contributed by team members — ideas and interpretations of customer needs, governmental constraints, competitive products, the parameters of obtaining supplies and outsourcing tasks, and so on. All these become part of the statement of purpose and perhaps *more importantly* the specific performance goals.

Specific team objectives are the step-by-step procedures that will ultimately yield the results the team is striving for. These objectives are more than a blueprint. In fact, they are a **rallying call** that continually brings team members back to the bigger purpose while solidifying their commitment to the team as a whole.

There is nothing that builds success more than success! And so with the accomplishment of each small objective, the team feels buoyed up to rise to the next with increased energy! Not only that, but the camaraderie that develops between teammates allows people to know one another at a level deeper than the *pro forma* level that is usual in business dealings. Use of first names and nicknames does not indicate disrespect but a deep regard for the essential person

revealed in the mutual struggle toward achieving a meaningful goal.

The compelling nature of performance objectives is neatly summed up in *The Wisdom of Teams* (p. 55): “Drama, urgency, and a healthy fear of failure combine to drive teams who have their collective eye on an attainable goal. The Eli Lilly medical probe team, for example, put its pride on the line when it committed to getting the new product to market in record time. Nobody beyond the team could make it happen. It was *their* challenge.”

Here are some questions you can ask yourself about your team or about teams in your business:

- 1 **Do all team members feel the purpose of the team is important, if not exciting?**
- 2 **Do all team members understand the team’s main thrust and define it in essentially the same way?**
- 3 **Are team members able to define their purpose to other employees and/or outsiders?**
- 4 **Do members often refer to their purpose and come back to it in team meetings?**

Mutual Accountability

In our present culture in the United States, it is often difficult to get people to understand that they are *individually* responsible for the consequences of decisions they make. That is why *team accountability* is a concept of second-degree magnitude.

Team accountability starts with the premise that each member, agreeing to the team purpose, will do his/her best to fulfill whatever tasks s/he signs on for during the entire project. Honesty and trust are clearly the cornerstones for any group working together, whether that be a marital dyad, a family, or a volunteer group.

A second aspect of mutual accountability concerns the concept of *nonblame*. Because team members are committed to a common purpose, they do not blame another member for a mistake that may have arisen due to a misunderstanding, a flawed concept, a miscommunication, or an event beyond one’s control. Instead one assesses the situation, makes the necessary changes, and goes about trying to fulfill his/her part of the process. In team meetings predicated on such premises, members know that they can express their views on all

aspects of team performance and that these views will receive a fair hearing and constructive criticism.

It is not natural for us to put our “fate” into the hands of a group, even if we have dealt with the group members individually and feel that we “know” them. By instinct we know that the group itself is more powerful than the total number of all individual participants. This is precisely why teams are so extraordinary! They go against the grain of the usual and make us proud to be human beings! Of course, teams do not form overnight from groups. It takes time to develop the team purpose, its performance goals, and the skill levels of the members. It is through this **process** that members begin to trust each other and the team’s regulatory process of revision and fine-tuning. In many ways this is what each of us has wanted from our own faulty family system, which has usually failed. Being a member of a high-performance team gives us the opportunity to mature in a functioning system that appreciates and encourages all its members!

All of the above skills can be learned. Sometimes, however, poor interpersonal relationships and communications are habits that have become part of a person’s ego. In these instances it is difficult to change such learned behaviors. The ideal solution to remedy this weakness in a team is to engage a professional business coach.

Professional business coaches are able to analyze the “heartbeat” of a team and work with members to help them become stronger, more self-confident persons. Step by step they will learn to take appropriate risks and to practice “active listening.” A deep experience of self-confidence, based on knowing one’s true worth, allows us to avoid taking things personally, to be truly appreciative of others’ efforts and achievements, and to accept constructive criticism gracefully!

Call today to set up an appointment to discuss your human relations needs *free of charge*. In addition, a limited number of no-cost assessments are currently available to your business for the next three months (505)466-4990

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