Tip Sheet: Team Building

Characteristics of Effective Teams

To be successful, a team must have certain characteristics. At the most basic level, effective teams have team members that are reliable and dependable, and who understand their role on the team. To develop these traits, it is essential that teams have clear expectations or goals. In addition, the teams that are the most successful recognize and develop each individual’s strengths, develop an overall group identity, and elicit a sense of commitment, not only to the goals set forth, but also to the team.

One example of a team working together would be a professional sports team. They spend their season working to accomplish a goal. For example, a professional baseball team has a goal of winning a World Series. They work together as a team to accomplish their collective goal. The teams that do well put their own personal agendas aside, help each other overcome obstacles, adapt to change, and focus on the good of the team. Similarly, for any team in an organization to succeed, they must have the following characteristics:

- Members are able to depend on each other.
- The team leader is committed to working with a team approach.
- Each member feels comfortable and is willing to contribute ideas.
- Members have developed a mutual trust.
- The team and individuals are prepared to take risks, such as learning new skills or adapting to change.
- Goals are clearly communicated.
- Each member is clear on his/her role on the team.
- Members can make mistakes or examine errors, and receive constructive feedback that helps them continue to grow and develop.
- The team is able to generate new ideas or suggest improvements.
- Each member knows they can contribute to the team.

It takes time, patience and commitment to build an effective team. However, experts agree that the time spent building strong teams is always worth the investment in energy and resources – because great teams achieve greater results. Team building exercises, such as those below, can help improve communication, collaboration and trust among team members.
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**Team Building Exercise #1: Team Talk**

The goal of this game is to allow team members to communicate with one another by asking each other questions. Team members get to know each other and feel comfortable with one another by asking each other about their opinions, concerns and maybe even what their aspirations are.

**Instructions:** Team members break into groups of 2 and take turns interviewing one another for 5-10 minutes each. Some possible questions include:

1. **What qualities do you most value and respect in a team member?**

2. **What advice would you give to new members of the team?**

3. **Tell me about one of your work-related goals for the future? How will you achieve his goal? Will anyone help you?**

4. **Tell me about one of your personal goals for the future? How will you achieve this goal? Will anyone help you?**

5. **Other: ______________________________________________________________________________________?**

This exercise promotes good communication and allows team members to learn something new about each other and gain a better understanding of one another, which in turn can break down communication barriers.
Team Building Exercise #2: The Drawing Game

While you may think that you are a clear communicator, others still may have trouble understanding you. Thanks to contributors such as family and educational background and culture, everyone communicates differently. To assess how clear of a communicator you really are and to help you improve, you can use team-building activities, such as the drawing game.

Instructions: Break into groups of two. In this exercise, you must explain to a teammate how to draw a picture, using only words. This exercise asks you to break down and simplify a task that appears easy to you, to someone else who may not find it that easy - something you must often do in a team scenario. Each person takes a turn being the communicator and the illustrator. After the exercise, the leader will ask each team to describe their experience. What was most helpful? What was least helpful? How can you apply what you learned to the workplace?