

Why Worry About Teams?

by Waid Johnson

Effective teams drive better results. Poorly functioning teams can negatively impact the performance of any organization. So, why worry about teams? It's about more than dollars and cents. If you want top performance through team interactions, you need to get ready, get real, and get results.

I often hear from top leaders of organizations that their teams are "dysfunctional." Whether it's a board of directors of a small non-profit, a tech group, a manufacturer, or a service company, the same messages keep coming through. "Our people just don't work well together," or "Our leadership team is like the three blind mice."

Some leaders are saying, "We've been through teaming programs in the past, and we don't need rope courses or sitting around campfires. We need results."

Why is there such lack of commitment and trust in organizations? What causes such low energy around strategies that should be driving organizations to higher levels of success? Poor team interactions lead to poor performance. Building effective teams is simple, but not easy.

Get Ready

Great teams have structure and process. They are clear on their vision and purpose. They understand accountability and know how to measure success. Great teams work together to have clear expectations and design effective team processes that provide a creative, safe space that allows people to confront each other and hold each other accountable in a way that is less threatening.

Not every task or function of an organization requires a "team effort," however there are far too many decisions made or projects implemented in isolation without the benefit of effective team input.

Recently, while working with a small company on its strategic plan, I experienced a different type of result. Typically in this situation, someone from the leadership team would take it upon him/herself and write the plan, then present it to the group. But nothing would get done, in large part because the individual had not created a shared vision and the current plan was not clear to other team members. However, this time, through effective team structure and process, the organization was able to discover each team member's strengths and interests, and bring quality ideas to a plan that everyone embraced and stood behind as it was implemented.

Get Real

Most of us have experienced working on a highly effective team. It's exciting when people are working together to meet a common goal while navigating the challenges of today's rapidly changing marketplace. People invested in the project are willing to go the

extra mile to meet the team's goals and deadlines. Energy and results are generated by effective team work.

Teams can have candid, full dimensional conversations once they have structure and processes in place. These conversations are only possible in a trusting environment. Effective team members are aware of the issues they face, are able to name them in a candid non-judgmental conversation, and take action. Relevance is placed on the information and ideas shared, not the job title of the team members. There is a commitment to courage and openness.

Recently, a meeting took place with an organizational committee comprised of many strong individuals who hadn't seen productivity for weeks. After working to open up the conversation through effective team interactions, everyone got engaged in the challenge they were facing and generated scores of new ideas that weren't on anyone's mind at the beginning of the meeting. The creativity turned into action once the energy was sparked.

Get Results

The teams with effective structures treat each other with respect and trust that results will be achieved. These teams get the benefit of everyone's knowledge. They are able to cooperate and work together because they know they are working together toward a common goal.

Teams, by their very nature, can address challenges better than individuals. Teams provide richer thinking and broader perspectives. Teams allow members to co-create meaning. Through working with others and having powerful interactions, they gain perspectives, learn, and build synergy that isn't possible with one individual.

Good teams impact organizational efficiency; they allow for more effective and efficient work, minimizing overall hours, and thereby conserving energy of the best workers. With improved communication and increased creativity, teams can quickly and effectively adapt to the rapidly changing marketplace. When teams are functioning well, workers have longer tenures and companies retain valuable and accessible knowledge.

Focus on Making Teams Work

Today's economy is volatile: companies are more vulnerable, competition is tougher, and organizations need top performance from everyone. Effective teams that can adapt quickly to the changing market are essential to remaining competitive in this new economy.

Waid Johnson specializes in team development, creating new ways to communicate; consensus workshops focused conversations, and thinking strategically. He is principal of Paint the Elephant Enterprises.

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