

Empowerment Quarterly

Achieving Team Success

Michael J. Stickler, President

“At Empowered Performance, our mission is to engage and empower the minds and spirits of all of our clients and to transform that intellectual capital into a sustainable force they can use to dominate their competitors”.

-Mike Stickler

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They come in all shapes and sizes, and no two are ever exactly alike. I'm talking about teams. Yours might be a quality circle, a quality improvement team, an autonomous work group or a self-directed work team. No matter what you call it, there is only one way to insure its success: **visible top management commitment and active support.**

Teams are hot. It seems every company serious about improvement (and who isn't?) has at least one. But it takes more than just assembling team members and charging them with a mission. Management must make its commitment and support visible at all times. If not, the team will fail...and fail miserably every time.

A team's success requires more than just your approval, even more than a list of concrete goals. Management must provide visible commitment and support, not just lip service. Here are some tactics that are easy for management to implement and will ensure your team's success.

More than lip service.

1. Give an hour of your time each day. Be visible. Get out from behind your desk and talk with team members. Your job is to foster innovation, fuel new ways of thinking, share information and ideas. Keep the process flowing, and when necessary, improve the process itself. The fact that you are personally investing your time shows that you really think that this is important. It also gives them permission to invest theirs. Remember it is not what you say but what you do.

2. Provide the best possible education and training. You can't expect your team members to work productively together if they don't know how. After all, it wasn't too long ago that all manufacturers required from their employees, and in fact all they wanted, was labor. Suddenly, we want their minds. We want all employees to think creatively, to review systems and processes, to make suggestions for change, even implement change. Perhaps hardest of all, we expect them to work cohesively with the other members of the group. Proper training will deter power struggles, define roles, and clarify action plans and methods. But education and training shouldn't begin and end with the team. Consider all levels of your organization. Should all employees know about the team and its mission? Should top management be educated about realistic goal setting and time frames? This is not the place to cut corners. Provide the best education and training possible.

3. Change the measurement process. Most manufacturing companies run by performance

measurements: How many did you make? How much did you sell? This "pass-fail" method of measuring does nothing to motivate employees. Focus on measurements that move people toward process thinking, being creative and trying different approaches. To do this, you must learn to ask process questions that will give you the opportunity to listen and learn. Never use the "how much" and "how many" questions that simply chase results.

4. Implement a formal problem solving method. Don't just dictate the problem and outline the goals. You've brought together a group of individuals who must work together as a team, cooperatively and effectively. You can throw your best and brightest together, but without a focused plan or approach, you may get some interesting banter instead of an effective solution. You need a team mission and a game plan. Each member should know what is expected of them and the other members at all times.

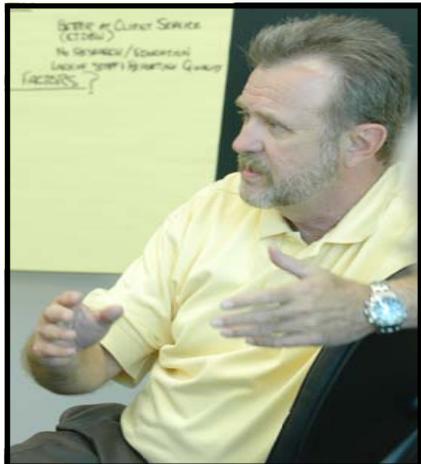
5. Celebrate successes. Recognize and publicize achievements every chance you get. Remember, you are encouraging creativity and different approaches. This means you must let the team implement new ideas (yes, even if you're certain they're a mistake). Let the team members know that their contributions matter. Use newsletters, bulletin boards and verbal acknowledgment whenever possible.

6. Give it time. Teams need adequate time to evolve. The easiest way to demonstrate management's commitment and support is to give the team plenty of time to grow and develop. Give them time to succeed.

7. Challenge your people. Use rewards and incentives to motivate everyone, including top management, to search out better ways of doing things - even those things that your company does very well already. Welcome all new ideas with enthusiasm and praise. It creates an atmosphere that challenges employees to think creatively.

Total success. Is your company's management commitment visible to your teams? Is management actively involved in the team's efforts? Is everyone properly trained to embark on the mission or adequately educated about the team's mission? Do you have highly trained coaches to assist the teams? Does management foster creative thinking? Do the team members receive encouragement and recognition? Is management willing to devote their time to supporting the teams?

If you answered yes to these questions, your team's efforts will have a measurable success. And, remember, the team's success is your company's success.



The Characteristics of Highly Effective Teams

Michael J. Stickler, President

I have been thinking about business, and where teams fit in for a while and as I reflected on my experiences with a number of very successful teams and some not so...These characteristics emerged...

This is a work-in-progress, but I wanted to share it with you. Feedback from your experiences are welcome.

1. There is a clear unity and focus on purpose and results. There is free and open discussion of the objectives until team members commit themselves to them; the objectives are meaningful to each team member and tie back to the business objectives.

2. The team is very self-conscious about its own team process.

The team has taken time to explicitly discuss the "team" process, how the members will function to achieve its objectives. The team has been taught and uses a clear, explicit, and mutually agreed-upon approach: mechanics, norms, expectations, rules, etc. Frequently, the team members will stop to determine how well they are doing or what may be interfering with their progress. Whatever the problem may be, it gets open discussion and a solution is determined and implemented.

3. The team has set clear and aggressive performance goals.

The team sets aggressive performance goals for itself and has translated these performance goals into well-defined concrete milestones against which it measures itself. The team members define and achieve a continuous series of "small wins" along the way to larger goals. They have a never give up mentality.

4. The atmosphere tends to be professional but, comfortable, and relaxed.

There is no obvious tension. The team members are in a working atmosphere in which all members are involved and interested. Team members have a very high sense of urgency.

5. There are numerous discussions in which all team members participate.

These discussions almost always remain pertinent to the purpose of the team's goals. If the discussion drifts, a team member will bring it back into focus quickly. The members actively listen to each other. All ideas are given a hearing. Team members are not afraid of appearing to be foolish by presenting or suggesting a creative thought even if it seems extreme. The wilder and crazier the better.

6. All team members are free and open in expressing their thoughts and feelings as well as their ideas.

There is a strong feeling of comfort and security among team members. There is no fear; everyone is vested in each other's success. Team members know that they are there for each other.

7. There are disagreements and this is viewed as good, necessary and natural.

Disagreements are encouraged not suppressed or overridden by premature team member action. The reasons for the disagreements are carefully examined, and the team members seek to resolve them rather than dominate the dissenter. Dissenters are not trying to dominate the team; they have a genuine difference of opinion. If there are basic disagreements that cannot be resolved, the team members figure out a way to live with them without letting them block its efforts.

8. Most decisions are made at a point where there is general agreement.

However, team members who disagree with the general agreement of the team do not keep their opposition private and or let an apparent consensus mask their disagreement. The team does not accept a simple majority as a proper basis for action, they constantly strive for consensus, but they don't use a lack of consensus to keep them from action.

9. Each team member carries his or her own weight.

Team members strive to meet or exceed the expectations of other team members. Each individual team member is respectful of the mechanics of the team process: arriving on time, coming to meetings prepared, completing agreed upon tasks on time, etc. When action is taken, clear assignments are made (who-what-when) and willingly accepted and completed by each team member. Team members ask for help and they get it.

10. Constructive criticism is frequent, relatively comfortable and usually well thought out.

The criticism always has a constructive flavor; specifically oriented toward removing an obstacle that keeps the team from attaining the goal.

11. The leadership of the group shifts from time to time.

The issue is not who controls, but how to get the job done. It is not unusual for members to take on different rolls based on the problems or goals and their expertise and experience in a given situation.



Food For Thought

Team Success Story #1: Empowered Performance working with a manufacturer with 50 employees wanted to insure participation and communication among the hourly shop floor employees. In order to prepare them for a transformation from functional machine operators to structured flow cell team members they went through extensive Lean training and team building exercises. These team members met twice monthly for one year to work on problem solving using a structured approach. The results: the teams improved scheduling, print revisions, house-keeping, raw material layout, changeover times, quality and other daily operational tasks using data collection, analysis and problem solving rather than opinions and finger-pointing. They improved productivity by over 50%. The team members attitude changed from "I just do my job" to the recognition of the ability to contribute ideas and improvements beyond their own work area, including taking personal responsibility and accountability.



Team Success Story #2: Empowered Performance worked with six Customer-Focused Teams. These cross-functional operational and sales/marketing teams focused on developing key customer accounts. A 3-day tailored hands-on workshop was designed and held where the employees would learn teamwork on the first day, listen to five of their key customer's specific issues on day two and then build specific action plans around customer-specific issues on day three. The results: The \$200MM computer parts manufacturer saw the percent of revenue from these five customers grow from 15% to 60% of their business over three years as revenue increased to \$600MM. In one case, the company was ranked 25 of 28 competitors and six months after the cross functional team process, was re-ranked by their customer as 3 of 29. Shortly after that, the company was sold to a competitor. The cross functional team process was reintroduced to the acquiring organization with even greater results.

Team Success Story #3: Another company Empowered Performance recently worked with was in trouble, they were in a death spiral. The business was losing market share and had gone through several rounds of downsizing. When we looked at the sales process in the business we discovered that it was taking them up to four weeks to respond to a request to quote, with an additional week allowed for follow up by the sales force. Five weeks to respond to an opportunity had become an acceptable level of performance in the business. We gathered the people who were involved in this process into a conference room with the information necessary to respond to a request to quote and had them process an inquiry. The turnaround time was less than twenty minutes. They called the customer with their quote and booked the largest order of the year. With this new way of acting, in the three weeks that followed, they booked more business than they had booked in the whole prior quarter! By getting these people to act differently we were able to get a breakthrough in the way they were thinking. This new way of acting and thinking has started to turn around this business.

Great Teams Need Great Coaches

Being from the Windy City (Chicago), I have had the opportunity to see many great teams (also some lousy, disappointing, heart breaking, ones). The thing that stands out for the great ones is that they almost always had great coaches, I am not talking top management, and I am talking coaches. The 85 Bears had "Da- Coach" Mike Ditka. The Bulls had Phil Jackson...get my drift; it is probably the same where you come from. I had a chance to meet Mike Ditka and here are some of the things that he said about the role of a coach.

Coaching is taking the team where they couldn't go by themselves.

The Coach...

- Explains the game and the rules
- Works with and teaches the skills
- Helps and guides the players to their potential
- Develops the team and teamwork
- Sets goals
- Creates the game plan
- Celebrates (and agonizes) with the team
- Instill a winning can do attitude

This all takes Time...Care...Patience...



If you are going to invest in teams, make sure that you invest in your coaches!



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Recommended Readings

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable

By Patrick M. Lencioni

The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization

By John R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith

Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances

By J. Richard Hackman



Quotes for the Quarter

"What we need to do is learn to work in the system, by which I mean that everybody, every team, every platform, every division, every component is there not for individual competitive profit or recognition, but for contribution to the system as a whole on a win-win basis."

-W. Edward Deming

"A group is a bunch of people in an elevator. A team is also a bunch of people in an elevator, but the elevator is broken!"

-Bonnie Edelstein

"We trained hard, but it seemed every time we were beginning to form up into teams, we would be reorganized. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion inefficiency and demoralization."

-Petronii Arbitri Satyricon AD 66

"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." - Henry Ford

Cigar of the Quarter

Brand: Nub
Vitola: 460
Length: 4.00
Ring Gauge: 60
Wrapper: Cameroon
Binder: Nicaragua
Filler: Nicaragua
Country of Origin: Nicaragua
Price: Around \$7.00



Brand:

The Nub line of cigars is a creation of Sam Leccia, a former sales representative for the Oliva brand. In mid 2007 the idea of the Nub was pitched to the no nonsense Oliva Family and they were more than skeptical. After having smoked numerous samples the excitement began to grow on them and the line went into production. I rate this cigar a 90+. Great with Jack Daniels on the rocks.