

Six Leadership Tips to *Harness* the *Power of Teamwork*

As a leader, it's up to you to give your team guidance if you want them to be effective for your business.

There is strength in numbers. More people working together makes less work for all — most of the time. The idea of “team” can bring to mind the image of people pulling together in one direction toward a common goal. When it's working well, a team can do a lot. Dividing up duties and having a plan to work together in a cohesive unit can make accomplishing a project faster, better, and with more enjoyment.

Unfortunately, the reality isn't always so positive, with conflict between team members, at times unequal distribution of responsibilities, and sometimes one member who can pull down the whole group. You may spend more time managing the individual personalities and conflicts than reaping the rewards of the team's joint efforts.

There are big differences between a team that works really well and produces for you and one that does nothing more than frustrate the members and the leaders in charge. If you want effective teams in your business, help them to get there. As a leader, you can either give them guidance and facilitate the process or act as the team leader until they get on track and become productive. Here are six tips to harness the power of teamwork.

1 Focus

Put a similar and equal focus on making the team work together on the plan and the project itself. In many cases, a team has a customer request or a company plan it needs to implement. It focuses on the goal and what needs to be done. It might take the time to divvy up the work, but not take the time to figure out how best to work together.

When assigning projects or putting department teams together, take time to identify the strengths and areas for improvement of each team member. Talk about working styles and set expectations early on. Establish team ground rules. Put these in writing and circulate them to each team member for signature.

Discuss communication approaches and what to do if the team gets off track. Initiate a meeting with them solely devoted to the topic of working together effectively. Put the plan or project or initiatives to the side and focus the dialogue on working well together. Prepare the team in advance for a collaborative experience. Don't just expect it to happen.

2 Plan the work

Often each team member knows what to do. After all, they are experienced professionals who know their jobs. When the work gets divided, each team member may just act — they hear what's needed or receive their assigned piece of the overall puzzle, and then begin right away to do what's necessary.

Instead of jumping to action, take time together as a team to construct a project plan. This doesn't have to be a complicated process; it can be managed alongside whatever technology tool or more comprehensive project planning software the company might use. This is just a “cheat sheet” of exactly what has to happen and what each team member's role is in the process.

The project plan should clearly outline everything. What specific steps does the team need to take? How are these steps broken down into smaller pieces? What are the deadlines for each step? Who is responsible for each piece of the process? Lay out a clear list of what, who, when, and next steps.

Put this in writing and circulate it to all team members. Keep it updated as the team progresses.

3 Identify obstacles

Warning signs often come early on in a team setting: The customer didn't give you enough information; the project is becoming more costly than expected; or the team is missing a key strength to be successful.

A plan can go off track for many reasons. The biggest problem comes when the team ignores the smaller things, which become bigger and more obstructive. With teams that work together regularly and those that come together on a project or customer resolution, schedule meetings just to review obstacles to success.

Highlight what's in the way and then categorize the obstacles. What's in the team's control? What's in its influence? What's completely out of the team's control? Focus the discussions on what the team can control and influence, and brainstorm ways to overcome the obstacles.

Don't let something fester until it becomes too big to handle.

4 Communicate

Emphasize communication and understanding one another's personal style. Some people are more talkative; some like to listen and ponder before they contribute.

Some people prefer to know the whole process in advance, wanting it clearly mapped out. Others prefer to roll with it, figure it out as they go along. Some want the rule book on exactly what's required and how to measure success. Others want to be creative and open to out-of-the-box thinking.

None are right, and none are wrong. These are just differences in the way we communicate and approach work requirements.

Problems arise when we expect that all team members have to be like us and do it our way. If one team member who is talkative and engaging puts down another for their quiet demeanour or lack of engagement, the team becomes fractured. All styles and approaches add value; they just do it in different ways.

Instead of criticizing team members for their differences, understand them and find

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ways to leverage the complement instead of squashing it in favour of sameness.

5 Celebrate wins

Create a set of milestones and celebrate wins. When working in a team, particularly in an open-ended fashion within a department, on a challenging project, or with a difficult customer, sometimes it can feel like it is all obstacles.

The problems become the focal point, and the team can be dragged down by trying to solve them on a regular basis. Be sure to establish milestones and success points along the way, however small they may be.

For example, if unforeseen problems arise at the customer site in an installation, establish success milestones, such as identifying what needs to be done or researching the problem to find its source; or communicating to the customer so they thank you; or even learning something new that all team members share. Don't wait until the completion of the installation to celebrate as a team. Instead, find wins along the way and have some sort of acknowledgment for these. It could be a team lunch or a series of high-fives.

It doesn't matter how big the celebration is, it's important just to take the time to identify what's gone well, note it for all team members, and give it a public team "atta boy and atta girl" to make everyone feel good about the progress.

6 Remember individuals

Each team member remains an individual. They come together and work together in a team setting, but the individuals still exist and still contribute what they are able. There is nothing wrong with being oneself within the team. In fact, it's not possible to be otherwise. The important piece is that each "I" takes responsibility for their own actions and seeks to understand other team members.

If each person defaults to believing "it's the team" overall and takes no individual

responsibility for their efforts, the team starts to fall apart. Each person must act as if success depends on them.

As a leader or owner you may work in a team setting with other senior executives, vendors, or colleagues, and you may have opportunities to assign your staff to team projects and goals. Understanding how to harness the power of teamwork is a critical skill for any leader.

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Reprinted with the permission of David Dye, who works with leaders who want to get results without losing their soul (or mind) in the process. He is an internationally recognized leadership speaker and award-winning author. *Winning Well: A Manager Guide to Getting Results Without Losing Your Soul* will be available in spring 2016. For more information visit www.trailblazeinc.com or email david@trailblazeinc.com

Drake P3 is a powerful psychometric assessment tool that will help you determine each of your team member's personality traits, behavioural competencies, conflict handling styles, and much more, to help you guide your teams more effectively. To find out how Drake P3 can help you build and lead strong teams, contact the Talent Management Solutions team:

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