

Title:

Team Work? No Thanks!

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Summary:

Years ago when we still worked at corporate, we'd shrink in dismay at being assigned to a team to make certain changes in a policy or in a process. Our first reaction was always, "another traffic congestion in the making." To us, team work was synonymous to excessive yak-yak-yak, delays, unnecessary activity and frequent meetings with no meeting of the minds.

Keywords:

green belt, management, gannt, black belt, lean flow

Article Body:

We might as well admit it: we hate working in a team.

Years ago when we still worked at corporate, we'd shrink in dismay at being assigned to a team to make certain changes in a policy or in a process. Our first reaction was always, "another traffic congestion in the making." To us, team work was synonymous to excessive yak-yak-yak, delays, unnecessary activity and frequent meetings with no meeting of the minds.

We're sure we're not the only ones who feel this way. Our dislike for team work was confirmed when we were downsized over two years ago. Instead of looking for another job, we decided to go it solo. Friends and family warned us of the dangers of being a solitary worker.

You know something? We proved them wrong. Solitary work was our passport to happiness. Perhaps it's the nature of our work, we don't know. But one thing was clear: going back to the workforce only to work in teams was out of the question. It's been over two years and there are certainly no regrets.

Caveat: what's right for us may not be right for others. Team work is still a value cherished by companies. Team work is a virtue and it does generate benefits. Team work brings out the best in people; it also serves as a filtering process for great and mediocre ideas. The idea behind team work is to combine the thinking and experiences of others and to fuel motivation and initiative.

There's strength in numbers, so the saying goes. So for those of you who like working in teams to carry out change, what makes for good team work?

Hail to the Chief!

The one thing that team leaders must be careful about is to NOT let teams waste time and resources. To do that, these measures are essential -

1. Let's be specific - it's fine to do a song and dance about goals and objectives but if they're too general, they run the risk of being unattainable or unrealistic. A bad goal is: let's cut costs on the factory floor. A good goal is: monitoring of expenses on the factory floor reveals that 23% of raw materials are wasted. Let's cut that down to 15% in three months.

2. Let's share the wealth - when team members agree to work on a project, they like to think that their efforts will be recognized and properly compensated for. This is true especially when workers are asked to take on additional work by sitting in a specially-formed committee and are still expected to do their own work with no decrease in productivity levels. While you can't promise fat bonuses or perks, assure team members that there are rewards waiting for those who contribute to the group effort.

3. Let's get some division of labor going - the role of team leader is obvious enough. A leader leads, supervises, and accepts responsibility for progress. What about the members? A structure - it doesn't have to be an org chart - and a definition and assignment of roles are required. Who will take care of monitoring factory workers, who will inspect raw materials, who will look after machine maintenance, who will do the statistical analysis of idle machine-worker times?

4. Let's get on board the time capsule - the team leader must be firm about performance levels. He or she should state at the outset what minimum level of performance will be acceptable. How team members will interact with each other should also be described. What measuring tools will be employed to gauge success? And what are our target completion dates?

5. Let's find out what's going on - keeping everyone in the loop about the project is indispensable. Clear communications at all times is vital. No one should withhold information. Accomplishments must be shared. Also, credit must be given to where it's due. Make sure everyone understands the meaning of "intellectual honesty."

Eliminate Deadwood

We said earlier that the purpose of a team is to filter good ideas from bad and to draw upon the experiences of others so that the learning curve for less experienced members is not steep. It can happen that one member will stick out like a sore thumb, be uncooperative, disruptive and be an irritant to other members. Non-performers are found everywhere. The team leader must immediately eliminate members who are draining the team's resources and taxing the patience of team members.

By eliminating the deadwoods, we are sending a clear message to the group about the values that are cherished and behavior that won't be tolerated at any cost.