

Title:

A Team That Gleamed

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Summary:

Too many techies get a bad rap for lacking teamwork and communications skills. The stereotype is that while techies are great at what they are trained to do, they cannot parlay their knowledge onto others. Because of the stereotype that techies cannot communicate, they also can be stigmatized that they lack adequate teamwork skills. So, what are the chances of two Helpdesk teams communicating with each other to successfully form one team while not compromising customer service?

Keywords:

Communication, Teamwork, Teambuilding, Techies, Information Technology, Call Center, Team, Motivation, Inspiration

Article Body:

Too many techies get a bad rap for lacking teamwork and communications skills. The stereotype is that while techies are great at what they are trained to do, they cannot parlay their knowledge onto others. Because of the stereotype that techies cannot communicate, they also can be stigmatized that they lack adequate teamwork skills. So, what are the chances of two Helpdesk teams communicating with each other to successfully form one team while not compromising customer service?

Does this plan initially sound like an enormous task? Does it sound impossible? Not if you were lucky enough to have been on such a dynamite team like mine.

In 1997, I started working at the Ameritech Advertising Helpdesk, which was supporting Yellow Pages Salespeople, Artists and Data Entry from Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois and Wisconsin. When Southwestern Bell Corporation acquired Ameritech in 1998, procedures started to change. Ultimately, The Ameritech Advertising Helpdesk became the SBC Yellow Pages Helpdesk and we were to support clients not only in the five-state Great Lakes region, but clients in other regions in which SBC resided. SBC had Yellow Pages clients in the east in Connecticut, in the middle of the country in Missouri and Kansas, in the southwest in Oklahoma and Texas and in the west in Arizona, Nevada and California.

There were two Helpdesks: the Helpdesk who supported clients in the Great Lake region and the Helpdesk that supported clients in the eastern, middle, southwestern and western regions. The Helpdesk supported clients 24/7 during the weekdays, a part of Saturday and was on call for Sunday. The Great Lakes Helpdesk had about seven to eight dayshift personnel, two afternoon people and one mid-nighter. The eastern, middle, southwestern and western region Helpdesk had about eight to ten personnel that worked different hours from 7 a.m. until 10p.m. eastern time.

The grand plan was to combine both Helpdesks and have all of the analysts versatile in all of the applications in order to support clients from all of the 13 states. For example, most of the analysts who supported clients in the Great Lakes region had never worked with VMS systems, but were very familiar with systems like the Remedy Helpdesk software. Conversely, most of the analysts who supported clients in the eastern, middle, southwest and western U.S. had been trained on the VMS systems, but had never worked with Remedy.

Being in Information Technology, one may get used to systems and applications going wrong. It seems that in too many instances, techies are troubleshooting and fixing systems.

So, how did combining operations go without sacrificing customer service?

1. It was about a six-month plan, which started around February 2002 to gradually adjust analysts from both Helpdesks. One analyst from each Helpdesk was trained for several months before supporting clients in all 13 states.
2. Both Helpdesks were in different parts of the Call Center. A couple of analysts from both Helpdesks switched desks in order to familiarize each other with systems.
3. Management was very supportive of the transition and realized that there was a learning curve during the transition.
4. There were two analysts from both Helpdesks called Helpdesk Advocates, who were the liaison between the analysts and management. Both Advocates communicated the analysts' concerns to management.
5. Clients were informed that both Helpdesks were in the process of being combined and to please be as understanding as possible during the transition.
6. Every analyst was receptive to any question from other analysts. Every

analyst was in the same boat - so to speak. Every analyst knew that he or she would have questions about systems in which he or she was not as familiar. How every analyst handled any question from a coworker would reflect the way in which he or she would be treated when he or she had a question. It was the human nature aspect.

7. Every analyst had a desire to learn.

8. Every analyst had a willingness to train

9. If an analyst could learn one system, he or she could learn other systems.

10. Every analyst was a team player. Although there were folks who had years and even decades of experience on some systems, no one was too good to help out any analyst who had never worked with a particular system. The fact that every analyst was cooperative during the transition made it an enormous success.

This is what I personally learned from the experience:

1. Teamwork is not about individuals. When a client's problem was solved, it was the whole Helpdesk that triumphed.

2. When superstars play as a team, the team will ultimately win. Every member of the team was a superstar who played as a team and we ultimately won in transitioning both Helpdesks.

3. Every analyst proved that they could parlay their knowledge and translate that language to other analysts and clients.

4. Perception and reality may be two completely different things. I knew very little about the folks at the other Helpdesk. When I got to know them, they were as wonderful as the folks whom I already knew at my own Helpdesk.

5. Teamwork is all about dealing with people. What you make of your relationships is up to you.

6. It is amazing what a team can do when it is up to the challenge. My team only had a certain amount of time to transition its operations and we did it!

7. Sometimes just a desire to learn can make the difference between success and failure.

8. Investment in relationships with people is invaluable with a rewarding rate

of return.

9. Random acts of kindness

10. You can actually appeal to people's better nature and not just their self-interest.

Everyone involved displayed so much cooperation and willingness to train no matter how many times they were asked a question. Everyone involved during the transition should be very proud that they were part of that awesome period and it is something that they can take with them anywhere else they go. All of us were a part of a group that needed to implement the greatest effort of teamwork or we were not going to make the transition.

Considering that three shifts were involved makes the event even more a source of pride for all of those who were involved. Any person on the team could be approached and they were more than willing to help with any question. We were an example to follow and we certainly set a great standard for teamwork!!

Teamwork is all about people. Those in technical professions are people too. No matter what your profession, people in technology have great skills like everyone else. My team broke the stereotype that techies cannot communicate well and are not team players. It's not your profession that determines what makes you a great team player, it's who you are. It's not how much people skills that you possess, it's what you do with those people skills that matter.

This article is dedicated to the one of those great team members, Monica Mitchell, who died of pulmonary embolism on Wednesday, November 5th, 2003. May God's grace be with you always, Monica. For those of us who had the pleasure to have worked with her, we will greatly miss you.

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