

## Teamwork and Team Dynamics

We all know that we are supposed to “get along”. We’ve heard this since we were youngsters. Then why is it so hard to practice as adults? We have our degrees, titles, gray-hair, and nice offices, but when it comes to playing on (or establishing) teams, many of us struggle.

### Why We Need Teams

Vince Lombardi, the successful leader of football teams and of men in general, said this about teams; "Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work." Lombardi knew the secret to success was not 'knowing' something that others did not, but rather, in executing a plan in a way others would not, or could not.

"Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."-- A speech made by Winston Churchill in the House of Commons. Churchill went on to say that, "a whole nation [was] fighting and suffering together." On paper (or on Hitler's map), the British were as good as defeated. Gallant efforts from every individual in England would not have saved off the Germans. But an organized team-effort by the Brits did the job just fine thank you.

But are teams really needed in today's business? Some may say the answer is obvious ... however, the “obvious” answer may vary depending upon who you ask. Most business leaders say teams are a necessity for any business with more than one employee. Even with only one employee, teamwork is required in order to work with vendors, financiers, customers, etc. The complexities of today's businesses require effective teamwork for any company daring to succeed.

### Teamwork

Just calling a group of people a “team” does not a team make. As a manager, you know when a team is not hitting on all cylinders. The symptoms are easy to detect. Here is a list of a few causes and associated symptoms common among troubled “teams”:

1. **There is no clear direction** – due to a gap in, or poor, leadership. A lack of clear direction does not necessarily point a finger at the team-leader. Perhaps the team-leader is not receiving clear direction. Lack of clear direction manifests itself in *missed deadlines, fragmented or disjointed results, and in a lack of team commitment.*

2. **There is no clear leader** – either by lack of appointment, or by lack of acceptance, absent leadership results in *wasted time, inefficiencies, poor results, incorrect results, no results, and poor team-member morale.*
3. **There seems to be no connection to the business** – because the business objectives have not been tied to the project / individual tasks, or the project simply does not connect to business objectives (proper justification was never required). Team members become *disenchanted* with the leaders / company, *feel isolated* and not part of the ‘real’ business team, and tend to *lose sight of the business purpose.*
4. **People dwell (work) in silos** – to protect their own interests, to control specific outcomes, to ensure ‘something’ gets done, or to mimic the operating style of the overall corporation (silos may be prevalent throughout the organization). Common symptoms of ‘silo dwelling’ include *poor meeting attendance, inadequate communication, limited brainstorming, and scarce cross-functional problem-solving.*
5. **It is hard to retain or attract team-members** – or it becomes impossible. Obvious symptoms include *requests for transfers, members leaving the company, and no requests to join* the ‘team’. Over several months / years a “team’s” composition would gravitate toward average, or poor, performers.
6. **Members bicker and argue** – more than they laugh and problem-solve. A few symptoms include an *absence of communication, accusatory communication, and common phrases* such as: he said, she did, they didn’t, etc. These demonstrated behaviors replace healthy team behaviors (discussed in the following section).

As easy as these symptoms may be to discover, finding solutions are just as difficult. Before discussing possible solutions, let’s look at some causes and effects found in healthy teams.

1. **The purpose is clear** – and team-work is needed to accomplish the mission. Many teams are formed to accomplish tasks that should be performed by individuals. For instance, establishing a team to order a pizza would be ridiculous. This task could be performed by most six-year-olds. A team might be essential, on the other hand, if you want to erect a building. Yes, one person might be able to construct a building without

human assistance. This approach would take considerable time and the results would probably be of lesser quality than if done with a team approach.

2. **Members have a sense of pride** – by connecting contributions to specific business initiatives and results.
3. **Job satisfaction** – is obvious. Members strive to, and often do, accomplish objectives much larger than otherwise would be individually possible. Job satisfaction results in higher levels of retention, higher quality work, and more consistent results (not to mention creating a more stimulating work environment).
4. **New and innovating ideas** – are shared and fostered. Healthy teams provide a 'safe' haven for members to bring up unconventional thoughts / ideas / approaches for discussion.
5. **Members understand** – every member's role and responsibilities. Timely and effective communication, constructive problem resolution, and consistent escalation processes contribute to results when members understand individual accountabilities.

## **Solutions**

Regardless if your team has been in place for two-years, or it is just forming; there are several critical steps involved in forming, leading, and managing a healthy team.

1. **Team Charter** – is used to define the overall purpose of the team as well as the business benefit associated with the team's objective. The charter should explain the reason for the team's existence and why the stated objectives are better accomplished as a team. The charter should also identify the team's customer(s).
2. **Guidelines** – should be established by the team leader, but with input and 'buy-in' from team-members. Guidelines include processes for communication, problem resolution, escalation, status-reporting, and questioning. This tool should not be used as a rigid device to monitor team progress, efficiencies, effectiveness, etc. Guidelines should be used to provide an operating structure from which the team functions. Guidelines should also include a process for modifying the guidelines.

3. **Line-up Cards** – should be created for team-members in order to better understand who’s on first. Who is the pitcher, catcher, first-baseman, etc? A line-up card will include an attachment with a list of responsibilities assigned to each team position. These cards should be part of the initial team meeting; discussed to ensure understanding and acceptance.
  
4. **Yardsticks** – are created to communicate the standards used to evaluate individual and team success. This is a critical step in expectation management. Yardsticks are also used as an additional mechanism to ensure tasks are aligned with, and connected to, appropriate objectives.
  
5. **Stage Matrix** – is a feedback tool that allows team-members to provide a personal assessment of the team’s progress, as well as a tool to communicate ‘normal’ stages of team development. The longer a team is expected to work together (the bigger the initiative) the more important the stage matrix. See the following graph.

<p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em; transform: rotate(-45deg);">FORMING</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">           Uncertainty            Doubt / Fear            Exploration            Testing            Dynamics            Low Productivity            Administration         </p>	<p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em; transform: rotate(-45deg);">CONFORMING</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">           Buy-in            Conformity            Avoidance            Informal Comm.            Leader Affirmed            Key Relationships         </p>	<p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em; transform: rotate(-45deg);">STORMING</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">           Question Authority            Conflict Struggles            Cliques Form            Member Turnover            Realization            Individual Progress         </p>	<p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em; transform: rotate(-45deg);">NORMING</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">           Acceptance            Self-Direction            Rules Understood            Team Progress         </p>	<p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 1.2em; transform: rotate(-45deg);">PERFORMING</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em;">           Productivity            Satisfaction            Pick up Slack            Members Manage         </p>
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Attempting to align an existing team will certainly require different tactics from those used to form a new team. However, the previous steps are equally important in both situations; the amount of time and effort will vary.

*Mr. Waters has over twenty-five years of business experience, twenty within information technology. He offers a unique balance of practical business and I/T experience, as well as his formal education; Bachelors Degree in MIS, MBA in eBusiness, and formal Six Sigma training.*

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