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Simple Tactics to Help Busy Managers Improve Team Performance



Team Building Basics

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INTRODUCTION

Hi. My name is Denise O’Berry – aka Team Doc. I’ve spent over two decades working with teams and their leadership to help them improve and be more effective.

Does this sound like your organization?

You've got teams, you've got coaches and you've still got problems.



You are not alone. So what's the missing piece of the team building puzzle? Frankly, working in teams is a lot of work! The biggest mistake many companies make is just changing the name of a work group to "team." It won't make them (or you!) successful. Contrary to popular belief, it is not easy working in teams. And it's definitely not easy managing a team.

My email inbox is filled to the brim with requests for help from managers whose teams can't function because they don't communicate, are riddled with conflict issues, can't find a way to hold team members accountable, and have leaders that don't know how to lead -- plus they are being squeezed by management to do even more with less.

But the problem is many companies just start calling working groups a "team" and expect them to figure out how to make it happen. Clearly, that doesn't work.

I'm sure that's not you -- ☺ -- but no matter how you formed your team, you probably need help. And I'm betting that three of your top problem areas are:

- 1) Keeping team members in the loop with so much information coming at them in any given moment,
- 2) Motivating team members when they have tons of things to do, and
- 3) Sharing the load with the team through effective delegation.

If you can overcome those three obstacles you could make some good gains in team performance. I've covered each of those topics in this report, so make sure you take steps to put them into action for your team. Let's get started!

Denise O’Berry
aka Team Doc

P.S. Hop on over and take a look at my [Team Building Toolbox](#) It's chock full of detailed guides that will **really** make a difference for you and your team.

1

MINIMIZE CHANGE BY BEING A PROACTIVE TEAM LEADER

Change. Any business would stagnate and die without it. It happens so quickly these days and is often out of our control. Sometimes you probably feel like screaming, "Slow down, I want to get off!"

Change can make your [team leader role](#) very difficult. Many productive hours can be lost when team members duplicate effort and redo work because they don't have the information they need. The key is to be as proactive as possible.

WHY DOES IT HAPPEN?

Your team may have difficulty keeping informed on critical changes because they're not in the "center" of what's happening in the organization. They may be located at a remote site, work different shifts, have no representation in staff meetings or informational sessions, have no access to electronic mail boards, or other forms of communication.

Or it's possible you might be the problem. If you are unwilling to share information or only share on a "need to know" basis because you are trying to be sensitive to team overload, you could be doing more harm than good. Whatever the reason, no one likes to feel as though they are working in a fog or isolated from the rest of the organization.

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Think for a moment about what problems your team has encountered in the last six months as a result of lacking information on important business issues. Or perhaps you received information, but it was so complicated it took your team hours to decipher. Would you have done things differently if you'd known about the changes in advance?

It's time to change the way your team receives information. Have a discussion with them about what problems they've encountered. The discussion should focus on specific areas for improvement based on past experiences. Use caution that the discussion doesn't turn into a gripe session that goes nowhere. Your team needs to understand they have the power to make changes to the way they receive and react to change in the organization.

You've probably been involved in a discussion like the one that follows between Mary, the team leader, and two team members.

Sam: “So what’s going on with the new Miller contract? I overheard a conversation with the engineering people today and they said it was going to involve some major work.”

Mary: “Honestly Sam, I don’t know much about it. I have been so tied up with work schedules; I haven’t had a chance to think about much else. Why are you so concerned?”

Sam: “Well, we’ve been asked to come up with our staffing plan for next year and I’d like to know how this contract will affect our resource requirements. It’s kind of difficult to plan when you don’t know what’s coming down the line.”

Joe: “Sam’s right. We are all putting in a lot of overtime now. If we’re going to be hit with a huge increase in our production requirements next year, it would be nice to be able to plan for that now. We really should know more about the contract anyway -- what’s it for? How long is it supposed to last? Will it impact each department the same way or will we be the only team affected? It’s really embarrassing when our customers know more about our company direction and new product lines than the employees responsible for producing them. I’m kind of tired of being the last ones to know about these kinds of things.”

Mary: “I guess I didn’t realize how much of an issue this was for all of you. You brought up some very valid points I hadn’t had time to consider. Would you be willing to provide me with a list of your concerns about the contract? I’ll discuss it in the next staff meeting and give you an update next week.”

Sound familiar? Most of your team members would probably agree that Sam’s concern is a valid one. And have you ever been in the situation Joe has described? How do you feel when you’re not aware of what’s happening within the company? Often it can make you feel like a victim of change, powerless over the direction the team is moving in. How do you feel about Mary’s response? It’s easy to place blame on the [team leader](#). Many times the team leader doesn’t share information because they don’t think the team will be impacted or that team members care to know.

So, whose responsibility is it to keep team members informed of organization and business changes? It’s important that each team member understand his or her responsibility in searching out information and sharing it with the team. The team leader isn’t the only person that should be keeping the team informed.

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH IT?

Your team needs to take responsibility for making sure they have the information they need. Here’s an easy process to use to identify what areas to focus on and how to deal with the information so your team can be proactive about those things that affect them.

Identify Changes That Could Impact Your Team

A useful starting point for understanding change is to identify the types of changes that could significantly impact your team. Then describe how the changes could affect your team's performance. In this step, each team member should identify the business changes they need to know and understand, and to identify the potential impact of that information to the team.

Identify Information The Team Needs

Information on organizational and business changes is usually available in a number of forms. Does your company publish a company-wide or departmental newsletter that discusses anticipated changes? Are there bulletin boards around your company that have information posted on them? Is there a general meeting with the leadership where company changes are reviewed? In this step, you'll identify what information you'd like to have and who can provide it.

Make The Information Simple To Understand

Many times information is readily available to teams, but not easily understood in the form it has been presented. Have you ever felt you were speaking a foreign language when talking with someone from a different group in your company? In this step, you'll identify which types of information are not usually available in user-friendly form and what action could be taken to make the information easier to interpret.

Getting The Information Your Team Needs

Ask team members to identify actions that can be taken to gain more information. Challenge them to identify actions they can take and those that can be recommended to others outside of your team.

Turn It Into Action

Review the list of suggestions and conduct a discussion with the team to identify the most feasible suggestions to implement. Assign ownership of each suggestion and identify a due date for status to the team as well as completion of the suggested action. Determine a schedule for periodically reviewing each issue.

Staying on top of changes by breaking them down into small pieces and sharing the responsibility between team members will help your team feel in control and more "on top" of what's happening in your company.

2 MAKE SURE YOU SHOW APPRECIATION (EVEN WHEN THE ECONOMY STINKS!)

Remember the days when companies would spend thousands of dollars (hundreds of thousands?) on lavish celebrations and parties to reward their team for the tiniest effort? Those days have been gone for a while -- along with a lot of the companies who spent so lavishly. But does that mean making an effort to show appreciation to your team doesn't exist anymore? Especially during tough economic times? Absolutely not.

Celebrations of success are important to the [health and wellness of your team](#). Don't get so caught up in the day-to-day work routine that you forget to step back and celebrate your team's successes. You might have team members who think celebrations are "silly." But I guarantee, deep down inside, those team members appreciate the effort whether they show it or not.

Successes are the "motivating fuel" that keep all of us pushing toward achieving the "bigger and better" goals that we set. If you want to maintain your team's high performance, you simply must do something to show it matters.

DON'T GET STUCK ON WHAT'S WRONG

Think for a minute about the type of team interaction and discussions that normally occur on a day-to-day basis within your team. If your team is typical, regular discussions probably follow these themes.

- What's going wrong with the current project.
- Recovering from changes that impact your product or service schedule negatively.
- How to satisfy a disgruntled customer.

If all of your team interactions focus on what's wrong, think about what happens over time. Team members lose sight of the positive things they do. This can have a demoralizing affect on a team and your company. Don't let that happen.

CREATE A TEAM CELEBRATION PLAN AND STICK TO IT

Team celebrations help a team bond together and maintain focus on their common goals. Celebrations can help team members deal with stressful changes and prevent "burn-out." Even the smallest celebration can provide revitalization for your team. Has your team celebrated any successes lately? What did they celebrate? How did they celebrate? For some teams, it's necessary to add structure to the celebration process to ensure that they make the time to celebrate success. If you can't remember the last time your team celebrated something, it's high time for a change.

So here's your next challenge. Use this three step process to create a celebration plan for your team -- and

stick to it! It's easy. First you'll identify what to celebrate, then determine how, and last you'll create a celebration action plan. Ready?

1. Identify What To Celebrate

It's important to determine what events or activities the team should celebrate. These can be major events like a completed project or events that help the team reach a small milestone. Get your team together and brainstorm a list. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Identifying and solving a major roadblock (e.g., customer or quality related issue)
- Taking on added responsibility
- Adding new team members
- Dealing with a project crisis

2. Determine How To Celebrate

Next, identify how you could celebrate. Again, with your team together, brainstorm some celebration activities. These don't have to be major. They could be fun stress relievers or activities that help make your team more visible to upper management. Try on these ideas, then come up with some of your own.

- Create a presentation for upper management highlighting the team's achievement. Present with all team members in attendance
- Have the entire team meet with a customer during an on-site visit
- Invite a senior manager to your team meeting
- Bring snacks to a team meeting
- Put congratulatory posters on the wall
- Send a thank you note
- Have a pizza party

Team celebrations don't have to be expensive, time consuming, or difficult to plan. Team celebrations can be formal or impromptu. **The key is that it must be sincere.**

3. Create Your Team's Celebration Action Plan

Create a celebration action plan for the team for (at least) the next six-month time frame. Once the action plan is created, have your team plan the first celebration that will occur in the coming months. This gives them something to look forward to while accomplishing team objectives. It will take a little effort on your team's part to complete this process, but the payback in productivity will be worth it.

Get going. It's time to celebrate! And never forget the power of saying "thank you" face-to-face. It won't cost you a dime. 😊

3

EASE YOUR STRESS BY USING SIMPLE DELEGATION SKILLS

Are you swamped? It's easy these days to get overloaded since so many organizations are trimming back and focusing on doing more with less. That doesn't mean you have to do it all. You might think you're effective at juggling a ton of tasks, keeping your projects straight with a board full of sticky notes that cite status and completion data. But the truth is you're probably not. And on top of that, if you're doing it all what are your team members doing?

To be an [effective team leader](#), it's important you have strong delegation skills -- not only to save your sanity, but to achieve the goals of the organization and help grow your team members' skills. But you can't jump on the delegation bandwagon without some proper planning no matter how much you have to do or you'll end up with a disaster. So heed these guidelines for delegating properly and you'll end up with less stress and plenty of successes under your belt.

First, let's be clear what delegation means so we're all on the same page. Wikipedia describes delegation as:

...the assignment of authority and responsibility to another person to carry out specific activities. However the person who delegated the work remains accountable for the outcome of the delegated work. Delegation empowers a subordinate to make decisions, i.e. it is a shift of decision-making authority from one organizational level to a lower one. Delegation, if properly done, is not abdication.

I agree with that definition except that delegation doesn't always have to occur from a higher level employee to a lower level one. It can occur laterally or you can even delegate up a level -- but those are topics for another day. Let's get a good handle on the delegation skill before you tackle those. ☺

There are some real advantages to delegating properly. The biggest benefit is that it frees up your time so you can spend it doing what you should be doing -- [leading your team](#). Also key is ensuring your team members are willing and able to take on tasks in your absence along with providing them with opportunities to stretch and grow. So here's what you need to do.

Determine what to delegate

You can't just grab something off your desk and give it to someone else to do. Take some time to define what you do. Start by making a list and then determine what you are willing to let go.

You can delegate anything -- easy tasks, tough tasks, tasks you hate to do, tasks that are better suited to other people.

Pick the right team member for the job

Assess the skills and abilities of each team member. What are their strengths? Are they willing to grow? Do they have the time to take on a new task and be successful accomplishing it?

Focus on outcomes, not steps

None of your team members will do a task exactly as you would. But that's okay. What's important is for you to define the end result in clear terms and then get out of the way.

Delegate responsibility and authority

Clearly explain the scope and boundaries for the task. Ensure that you have identified the who, what, when and why behind the work that is to be done. Give the person the authority to make decisions and do what is necessary to be successful.

Follow up

This is probably the most important step in successful delegation. Don't just turn a team member loose with a new task. At the beginning set a follow up schedule so you can determine progress towards the goal and address any issues or road blocks that are getting in the way.

It may be tough at first to delegate tasks to others. You might have a tendency to want to micromanage by providing too much direction and review. It will be a delicate balancing act for you until you get used to it. But the benefits to you and your team members will be worth it.

For more tips and techniques like these visit [Team Building Toolbox](#) today.

The [Team Building Toolbox Program](#) will help you build (or rebuild) the proper team foundation that will minimize team building problems and help you get the team results you expect in 12 step-by-step guides designed to resolve your specific team issues so you can make changes for your team that are guaranteed to stick.