

# It's a Team Effort

**T**EAM. WHAT DOES that word bring to mind? Perhaps a high-energy, synergistic crew rowing in synch—hopefully not a motley crew scrambling for oars.

Organizations use teams to increase performance. So, this month's Training 101 offers two articles to help keep your team on track. In the first article, Kenneth Hultman delivers 10 golden rules for team leadership. Then, Thomas Keen and Cherie Keen tell you how to conduct a team audit.

## THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF TEAM LEADERSHIP

BY KENNETH E. HULTMAN

**W**E OFTEN DISCOVER what works by learning what doesn't work. Over the years, I've seen leaders make many blunders—some harmless, but some devastating. You can avoid making many needless mistakes by following these 10 commandments of team leadership.

1. Don't stray from your mission and vision. Mission and vision are crucial to team effectiveness. A mission statement defines an organization's or team's purpose, while a vision statement describes a desired future state that fulfills the mission statement.

Once they're established, mission and vision guide teams in developing and using more specific strategies and plans. Teams can lose sight of the big picture and get lost in details as pressure increases to get results. When that happens, it's important to remind team members of their mission and vision by asking, "Is that consistent with our mission" or "In what other ways can we achieve our vision?"

2. Don't tolerate unacceptable behavior. Behavior is so crucial to team success or failure that a willingness to abide by agreed-upon values and norms should be a qualification for membership. Making that expectation nonnegotiable sends a strong message. So, when people refuse to abide by expectations, they are, in effect, deciding not to be on the team. The members allowed to remain in spite of their be-

havior will undermine the team's morale and performance—you may win the battle, but you'll lose the war.

Typically, values and norms evolve over time and remain both unspoken and unwritten unless they're violated. Though a team leader can't control how the members feel about each other, he or she can make behavioral expectations clear. Team members often test the limits to see whether the leader is serious about the standards.

A leader who champions positive behavior gains respect; a leader who ignores negative behavior loses it. A leader's credibility hinges on modeling the values and norms—"walking the talk"—and holding members accountable.

3. Don't allow self-interest to prevail over mutual interest. A team can outperform individuals working alone, but only if the members suspend self-interest in favor of mutual interest. Some people have trouble working in teams because they're unwilling to share control; others have trouble because they're unable to make the adjustment from independence to interdependence.

Team members can sense when someone has a hidden agenda or is seeking personal gain, and the result is resentment, competition, and conflict. One way a leader can deal with that is to make teamwork a criterion for

satisfactory performance. If self-promoters aren't held accountable, there's no incentive for them to behave differently. Once they realize that they can't succeed without contributing to their team, they're forced to reassess their actions.

4. Don't allow fear to control team behavior. Fear focuses on preventing negative things from happening, instead of making positive things happen. It operates as an invisible barrier between people and keeps them from developing effective work relationships.

A leader can help team members neutralize their fear by championing such norms as honoring confidentiality, encouraging risk-taking and hon-

est communication, sharing opinions, agreeing to disagree without taking it personally, treating each other with respect, dealing with issues face-to-face, supporting decisions that everyone doesn't agree with, and giving the same story to all team members.

5. Don't allow cliques to control team dynamics. Cliques are troublesome because they prevent a team from becoming a cohesive unit. Cliques tend to compete with each other and exhibit self-interest over mutual interest. By their nature, they work against the larger team mission.

A team leader should inform team members that cooperation is expected. Cliques don't usually go away on their own. A leader should convey that identifying and resolving clique differences is nonnegotiable. Sometimes, you need an outside consultant to deal with those issues.

6. Don't shy away from conflict. All teams go through three stages of development, which I call the Three Cs: courtesy, conflict and cohesiveness.

During the first stage, people are polite and diplomatic with each other; fear inhibits any open expression. In the second stage, anger, frustration or resentment break through the fear as divisive issues begin to surface. Anger is a more productive emotion than fear, because it can serve as a catalyst for positive energy. In the third stage, people bind closer together as a result of resolving conflict effectively.

A leader shouldn't be afraid of conflict; cohesiveness cannot emerge without it. A team must learn that it can handle conflict, otherwise the members will never fully trust each other. Rather than avoid conflict, team members should resolve or manage it. Sometimes it's better for the whole team to discuss an issue; other times, it's better for the members directly involved to discuss it privately. Either way, there should be norms guiding how to handle conflict, and team members should expect to abide by them.

7. Don't accept lack of trust as an excuse. Mistrust leads to fear and defensiveness. On the surface, it can appear as though people are get-

ting along fine, when in reality their relationships are calculated and controlled.

Of course, it's much easier to build and maintain trust than it is to lose and try to rebuild it. Once in place, mistrust is a permanent fixture unless there's a determined effort to get rid of it. Because people almost always consider themselves trustworthy, a team leader may have to challenge their assumptions that others can't be trusted. When trust issues surface, the leader should insist that team members face them head-on and never accept mistrust as a reason for lack of cooperation.

8. Don't let people play it safe. During team building workshops, people are usually more open with each other and tend to regard the workshops as a positive experience. Even if a team establishes a norm for risk taking and the members vow to continue their new openness, they gradually revert to old ways after a workshop. Typically, that happens because people get caught up in work demands, and because it's safer to be less open, they take the path of least resistance. It's also safer for people to tell you what they think you want to hear, rather than what they really think.

To maintain more openness, a team leader must model risk taking and reward risk takers. Those efforts will be well worth it when a team interacts more openly.

9. Don't be stingy with information. Because sharing information is such an integral part of teamwork, it's risky for a team leader to assume what the members need to know. If they think that their leader doesn't share enough information, they may falsely conclude that it's deliberate. Mistrust and suspicion can set in.

Sharing relevant and timely information should be high on any list of team norms. As a rule of thumb, it's usually safer to share too much information than too little.

10. Don't neglect process in a rush to get results. When under pressure, people tend to forget team norms and use methods they think will get fast results. To prevent that, a leader must remind the team of its norms and stress the importance of abiding by them. In addition, it's a good practice to review team process at the end of

meetings. Stepping back from content to focus on process gives a team the opportunity to correct itself.

In addition, team leaders should ask for specific feedback about their performance. Sometimes, team members question a leader's behavior, but the fear of reprisal keeps them from speaking up unless the leader seeks input actively and follows through with change.

Observing those commandments consistently can help you lead a team more effectively.

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## CONDUCTING A TEAM AUDIT

BY THOMAS R. KEEN AND CHERIE N. KEEN

CORPORATE AIR reverberates with the spirit of teamwork—Team Xerox, Team Pontiac, Team Nabisco.

Teamwork can be a powerful way for organizations to gain productivity, operate a redesigned operation, increase flexibility, reduce waste, and improve quality and customer satisfaction. However, using teams effectively requires that you incorporate change into the culture.

So, what happens when a flattened, empowered organization geared to a new team concept doesn't seem to respond? You don't have an all-star team. Now what do you do?

You can conduct a team audit using a macro and a micro evaluation. A macro evaluation examines the entire organization for good organizational fit with the team concept. A micro evaluation looks at one particular team to ensure that it's working properly.

### Audit the system: the macro evaluation

A cross-functional team should conduct an internal audit of the relationship between teams and the organization. It's important that the audit team be given autonomy to conduct the assessment and complete amnesty in writing from the CEO.

The internal audit team should answer 10 questions to determine how

the team system is working.

Question 1: Did top management do its job? In other words, once management decided that teams were part of the plan, did it help to make them work? Find out whether management

- ▶ understood how teams work
- ▶ determined the impact of change across the organization
- ▶ spent time to ensure that the organization was ready for the transition to teams
- ▶ developed a team vision that provided a specific endpoint.

Lessons: Top managers must take a personal role in motivating teams. That's required to project the change in image from an aloof management to an active, interested team management. If teams don't sense commitment and support from upper management, a business-as-usual attitude may reign and hamper any team efforts.

Question 2: Has enough time elapsed? One of Deming's key guidelines for teams is that they take time to work effectively. Look for evidence of team culture in

- ▶ satisfying team experiences
- ▶ organization-wide success stories about team accomplishments
- ▶ team spirit, confidence, and a can-do attitude.

Lessons: The transition to teams takes time; a few, brief instructional meetings aren't enough. There must be time for all organizational, cultural, and employee issues to sort themselves out. Sometimes, effective teams take years to achieve the cohesion required for top performance.

Question 3: Is the steering team a success? Setting up a subteam of senior-level managers is necessary to guide and nurture team structure and operation. A steering team should

- ▶ maintain a top-level view of all team activities to eliminate duplicate activity
- ▶ write clear and explicit charters describing specific team projects
- ▶ provide trust and reassurance that the team approach can and will work.

Lessons: The steering team has a responsibility and an authority to sanction team activities. It must lead by example and be a staunch advocate for the team process. It's important that management make teams

feel empowered and supported.

Question 4: Is a process and customer focus in place? An organization must be oriented to processes and customers. Look for widely available, easy-to-read charts tracking work, rework, and schedules—and an orientation geared to both internal and external customers.

Lessons: Only a process-oriented approach provides the internal mechanism for team self-management. Flowcharting organizational processes tracks overlaps in team responsibility, identifies new opportunities, and uncovers problems that can limit team success.

Everyone, top to bottom, must understand customers' needs in detail. That orientation includes discovering what customers want, need, value, and, most importantly, expect as team output. One way to do that is by conducting internal and external customer surveys.

Question 5: Is a new way of doing business evident? There must be an entirely new system of rewards and performance evaluations. Look for positive guidance for team members during the transition and a transition structure to be in place.

Lessons: It's critical that team members change the way they view their jobs. People need support, feedback, and encouragement to make the transition to teams work.

Question 6: Are team goals clear and communicated effectively? All team members must understand project goals. Find out whether there are achievable transition goals and detailed end goals that are communicated organization-wide and that agree with team goals.

Lessons: Organization-wide goals provide boundaries that guide teams, but it's important that they match those of each team, the team leaders, and each team member. Teams should identify and correct any obstacles that stand in the way of their team goals.

Question 7: Have tools such as benchmarking been used? The main objective of benchmarking is to use successful innovations that others have developed and to fit those into your own operation.

Look for benchmarking against the best or most innovative internal

departments, suppliers, or customers—and for benchmarking of the company's best competitors.

Lessons: As a starting point, companies can benchmark the more successful, well-known users of the team approach. Benchmarking is not a one-time event; to make any team effective, benchmarking must become a way of life to improve team processes continually.

Question 8: Have the teams been trained effectively? All team members must be prepared for a new way of doing work. They must be trained in

- ▶ process improvement techniques
- ▶ problem solving
- ▶ group-conflict management
- ▶ process methodologies, such as flowcharting
- ▶ interactive skills
- ▶ consensus and compromise.

Lessons: A team must be trained to seek solutions. The members must realize that they're in control and no one else is going to tell them what to do or how to do it. They must ask for and offer suggestions in an open environment. That way, the entire team will be comfortable evaluating suggestions openly and honestly. A team shares authority, responsibility, and decision making; there are no team bosses.

Question 9: Is teamwork evident? Teamwork essentials must be in place. Look for

- ▶ people who don't belittle other team members—either privately or publicly
- ▶ a team that enjoys what it's doing and has fun doing it
- ▶ buy-in to the common goals of the team
- ▶ a team leadership hierarchy
- ▶ open communication
- ▶ intolerance for hidden agendas
- ▶ team empowerment
- ▶ attention to both the process and content of team activities
- ▶ mutual trust among all team members, respect for individual differences, and constructive conflict resolution.

Lessons: Some key things happen when there's effective team interaction. One, a team acts as a whole, not separate parts. Two, all team members are open and honest with each other and willing to try new things. Three, they stretch themselves by

thinking outside of their own boxes. Four, they stay focused.

Look for the basic teamwork tasks: initiating activity, getting information or opinions freely, and summarizing ideas or suggestions.

Question 10: Do teams really feel empowered to manage themselves? A team must feel empowered to act and make decisions. Look for

- ▶ team members who are comfortable with authority and power and responsible for their actions.
- ▶ team members who understand that the old way, in which authority means power, is outdated
- ▶ teams in which all members can take action.

Lessons: Our definition of empowerment is giving authority to members to act on their own. That's the opposite of a bureaucratic, hierarchical concept of authority that has layers of management and the power to force lower-level people to act. In an empowered organization, authority means that you have the power to get things done.

If a cross-functional audit team completes an internal audit impartially, it should be able to pinpoint the reason for poor performance. The correction could be a simple fix, such as providing more transition time. Or it may need a more complicated fix, such as revamping the entire organizational structure. Going into an audit, top management must realize that the correction may be difficult. And it must accept that the problem may be top management.

## Audit the individual team: the micro evaluation

After the team system audit, the next step is to review individual team performance using a micro evaluation.

To find out why a particular team isn't working, you can use a team development and internal audit (see the box, Individual Team Audit). Any team with a low score (5 or less) on any element can identify the problem area immediately.

Each team member should complete the audit form anonymously and objectively. That provides a neutral ground for highlighting team deficiencies. You can calculate a rating for the entire team and compare it to

the benchmark for other teams.

In addition, a team's customers should complete the evaluation to provide another view of the team's performance. Input should come from both internal and external customers. You can use that separate score to compare to benchmark scores for other teams.

A team that rates well on both measures can be comfortable about performance. A team that has a high internal score and a low external score, however, needs to get back in touch with customers.

An audit should be conducted at least twice as a benchmarking activity. The purpose of the first audit is to identify key team weaknesses and provide a current-state benchmark. You can conduct a second audit approximately six months after the first

to measure improvement. Because continuous improvement should be a basic team objective, use the audit after benchmarking to guide a team through future activities.

There's no question that teams contribute considerably to an organization's competitive strength. After all, competitiveness rests with an organization's ability to make the best use of its skills and abilities. Many people agree that teams are the best way to do that.

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## INDIVIDUAL TEAM AUDIT

Team name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Area	Team Needs Improvement										Team Excels									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
The team understands the corporate objectives.																				
The team has translated those corporate objectives into actionable team goals that all members are committed to accomplishing.																				
The team has completed all stages of team formation.																				
The team operates effectively as a unit with all members feeling part of the decision-making process.																				
The team recognizes and appreciates individual differences, and members respect each other.																				
The team develops new ideas and solutions proactively to achieve its goals.																				
The team uses process tools effectively to accomplish tasks.																				
The team has developed and adheres to defined timelines.																				
The team maintains its focus and does not drift from defined goals.																				
The team acknowledges and effectively confronts internal conflicts.																				