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Promote Teamwork

Knowing how to build, lead, and work effectively in teams is crucial to accomplishing your organization's goals. Today many teams cross geographical and cultural boundaries. A team leader's ability to understand how successful teams work, what they need, and how they evolve over time plays an important role in fostering team spirit.

Teams are not just groups of people; they must share a common mission and vision, established operating practices, and have excellent communication skills. It takes great people skills as well as organization and cooperation for teams to succeed. By learning how teams work and how to keep them on track, you'll make teamwork smoother for everyone.

Promote Teamwork

In this chapter, we will cover the following areas:

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- ▸ Link the team's mission to that of the broader organization
- ▸ Foster the development of a common vision
- ▸ Make the team's mission and strategies clear to others
- ▸ Build collaboration by establishing, communicating, and reinforcing shared values and norms
- ▸ Promote teamwork among groups; discourage "us versus them" thinking
- ▸ Facilitate the development of teams through the stages of team growth and maturity
- ▸ Provide clear direction and define priorities for the team
- ▸ Clarify roles and responsibilities with team members
- ▸ Use a team approach to solve problems when it is appropriate
- ▸ Involve others in shaping plans and decisions that affect them
- ▸ Invite and build upon the ideas and input of others
- ▸ Value the contributions of all team members
- ▸ Credit others for their contributions and accomplishments
- ▸ Acknowledge and celebrate team accomplishments

Link the team's mission to that of the broader organization

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Talk about the organization's vision and mission. Fill in any missing information and correct any misunderstandings.

Effective leaders thoroughly understand their organization's vision, goals, and business strategy, and also understand how to link their team's mission to the overall vision and strategies of the organization. They translate broad, overarching concepts into tangible, concrete actions and goals. Consider the following suggestions:

▸ Set up a time to discuss your organization's vision, goals, and strategy with your team. Ensure that your team knows and understands them. Spend time discussing the logic behind the direction and why the choices were made.

▸ If you are not well versed about the process and logic used to develop the vision and goals and identify strategic differentiators, invite someone to join your team for this discussion.

▸ Carefully identify and understand the critical business processes necessary for the success of the organization. Determine the role your team plays in achieving the organization's goals.

▸ Whenever you talk about your team, consistently link its goals and role to that of the broader organization. The clearer you are about the role your team plays in achieving the goals of the business, the more targeted you can be about the goals and priorities of the group, the people you need to execute those priorities, and the business processes for which you are responsible.

▸ Understand what the organization expects from your team. In particular, understand your team's goals and how progress toward those goals will be measured. This is the baseline information you need to set the direction for your team.

▸ Look for synergies between your team and other groups. There may be areas in which your combined efforts could better serve the organization. Take the initiative to talk to your peers in other groups to explore options.

Foster the development of a common vision

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Working from a shared set of values and a common vision gives leaders and team members a sense of direction, purpose, and security. Consider the following suggestions:

▶ Begin by discussing the organization's values, vision, and goals with team members so they understand the bigger picture. If this is a new area for you, consider partnering with a more experienced colleague to lead the discussion. This will give you more confidence that you will present the information accurately.

▶ Work with your team to develop a vision that defines its purpose and goals, and the team's role in achieving the success of the business. Include the following sections:

  ▷ A clear statement about the team's role and work in the organization.

  ▷ The goals of the team and how success will be measured.

  ▷ Team members' preferred approach to working with one another and others in the organization.

▶ Ensure that each employee has a clear set of objectives and expectations that tie in to the team's goals. Ask individuals to set some preliminary goals. Then meet with each person to review the goals and modify them if necessary.

▶ A few weeks after you introduce the vision, invite team members to describe the impact it has had on their actions. Are people having a hard time making the vision real? As a team, confirm that individual goals and priorities are aligned with the vision.

Invite people to watch an experienced leader facilitate a visioning session.

▶ Watch for cynicism about the vision. People may have seen visions come and go without having an impact on the organization, and they may be cynical about a vision's ability to move people. As a team, determine how you can make it different this time.

▶ Determine whether you could expand or alter the role your team plays within the organization. You may have a talented group that could take on a broader role, move into new areas, or accomplish more challenging goals.

Make the team's mission and strategies clear to others

Teams and people work together better when they know what to expect. As a team leader, you are responsible for ensuring that your team has the necessary amount of visibility in the organization and that other groups and individuals understand your team's mission and strategies. Consider the following suggestions:

Challenge people to list their team's top three strategies in 60 seconds.

- ▸ Identify the teams and people whose support you need, and those with whom you and your team need to interact well.

- ▸ Sit down with the leaders of these groups to talk about your team, its goals, the role it plays in the organization, and so on. Talk about the support you need from one another and about mutual expectations.

- ▸ Use real-life examples to communicate your team's mission and strategies. If you use a lot of buzzwords or jargon, people will just nod and wait for the meeting to be over. Make the strategies real so that people will start to understand exactly what your team is trying to accomplish.

- ▸ Use shared terminology within your team, and educate outside groups so that they understand you. Unclear language or jargon can hinder communication and cause confusion.

- ▸ Create an "elevator speech" that describes what you and your teams do. In addition, prepare a short presentation (one to three minutes) describing your team's mission and strategies. You never know when you'll need to advocate for your team, justify your work, or lobby for resources. When you have an opportunity, don't waste it by rambling.

- ▸ Anticipate questions that people may ask about your team. Think of a full range of questions, from basic to challenging, friendly to hostile. Prepare answers to each and practice them so you'll always be ready to respond.

Build collaboration by establishing, communicating, and reinforcing shared values and norms

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Behaviors that build trust, openness, and a sense of give-and-take are critical to a team's success. While you can't control how team members feel about each other, you can help them establish values and norms that guide how they behave toward one another. Consider the following suggestions:

Caution against overdoing team-building exercises. Team members continue to build relationships as they work together.

▸ Set aside time for team members to talk about how they want to work together and what they want as guiding values and team norms. Discuss and agree on a set of behaviors that guides how people will interact with each other, make decisions, and accomplish the team's goals.

▸ Ensure that team members have a shared understanding of what the values and norms mean. Occasionally revisit established values and norms to give the team a chance to modify or add to them. Also discuss them each time new people join the team.

▸ Keep team members focused on their shared purpose and their accountabilities to one another. If people don't live up to values and expectations, talk about it. Team members need to realize that their actions have consequences and impact.

▸ When the team faces a challenging situation, discuss responses that are consistent with the team's values and that will build trust and openness within the group.

▸ Set norms for conflict management. Conflict is inevitable for high-performing teams. Discuss how to address tough issues in productive ways.

▸ Foster a spirit of teamwork within the team—don't allow people to focus only on individual gain or contribution. Make it a priority to remind people why they are working as a team and help them see how cooperation helps them achieve goals faster and more effectively.

Promote teamwork among groups; discourage "us versus them" thinking

Many initiatives require the cooperation and combined effort of teams across the organization. Leaders need to address obstacles before they become serious impediments. Consider the following suggestions:

▶ Promote teamwork among different groups by showing respect for other functions and professions. Avoid labels, stereotypes, and disparaging remarks about other groups or units.

▶ With other team leaders, discuss how to help your teams work together effectively. If you decide to bring teams together to discuss expectations and how to work together, involve the leaders of all teams.

▶ Meet periodically with other team leaders to discuss ongoing issues, and plan together. Effective teamwork requires interaction. If you are in several locations, use communication technology such as videoconferencing to enable people to see each other.

▶ Watch for "us versus them" thinking and discussions. Check yourself and caution others when they talk in those terms.

Talk about the effect that speaking negatively about other groups can have on a team.

▶ Make sure that teams who need to work together have shared expectations. For example, have teams involved in a project meet to discuss their part of the work or the value chain. Discuss what each team needs from the other to be successful. Your goals for this meeting are to ensure that the teams understand each other's worlds, that they know what others need from them, and that they agree about what each team will do.

▶ Periodically meet with teams that need to work together to discuss what is working and what could be improved. Put together improvement plans so that you are continually making progress.

▶ Encourage people to focus on mutual goals.

▶ Openly discuss the obstacles that people face as they work with teams across the organization. Are the obstacles systemic, interpersonal, or situational? Form a task force to analyze the issues and make recommendations. Hold yourself and other leaders accountable for making meaningful changes.

- Create "ambassadors" who serve on more than one team. Because they will be familiar with issues and challenges in several areas, they can provide a broader perspective and break down barriers between teams.

- Invite your team to exchange ideas and best practices with other groups. Guarding against the "not invented here" trap will help all groups improve their effectiveness.

- Challenge people to think of the big picture when they negotiate for resources. Encourage them to discuss how they can optimize the success of the organization by working together instead of merely trying to increase resources for their own areas.

Facilitate the development of teams through the stages of team growth and maturity

A group of people is not the same thing as a team. Teams are created, and there are regular stages in their development. Leaders play an important role in growing and supporting teams through each stage of growth. If you know which stage your team is in, you can manage expectations about its performance and deepen your understanding of people's behavior. Consider the following suggestions:

Forming the team

In this phase, a group of individuals comes together. They may begin to see themselves as a team if the individuals recognize that they are dependent upon one another for the success of a goal or project. Your role is to:

- Ensure that the team has a clear charter that outlines its purpose, scope of responsibilities, goals, and boundaries of authority.

- Assist the team in selecting its members and assigning roles and responsibilities.

- Ensure that team members believe that they need to work together to achieve a particular goal. Unless team members are mutually dependent, there will be little incentive to work as a team.

- Create opportunities for team members to get better acquainted and build rapport.

Establishing norms and operating practices

In this phase, a team typically goes through a period of conflict and disagreement. This is not an indicator that the team is in trouble. Instead, it is the normal clarification of roles, learning what can and cannot be expected from one another, adapting to the needs of the team, and clarifying acceptable team behavior. For example, a team member may have committed to a certain amount of work for the team but has discovered, along with the team, that he or she is not able to follow through on that commitment. This person is not a bad team member; he or she is a person with a priority-balancing problem that needs to be addressed before the team can be successful.

During this stage, the team sorts out issues that keep it from coming together as a coherent, high-performing unit. In this phase, you can help the team in several ways:

Discuss the type of support a team needs at different stages of development.

▸ Further clarify roles and responsibilities.

▸ Provide time for team members to work out differences in perspectives and approaches.

▸ Recognize that this stage is normal and help team members to work through differences without judging people. Solve the problems; don't make people the problem.

▸ Identify conflicts and facilitate discussions to reach productive solutions.

▸ Manage the tendency of subgroups to form coalitions and compete against each other.

▸ Provide opportunities for team members to have fun together and build camaraderie.

Focusing on productive team performance

In this stage, the team works well together. It meets regularly, demonstrates progress, and makes decisions together. Team members are optimistic about the team's success and are comfortable with one another.

In this phase, you can build on the team's success in the following ways:

- Help people see how well the team is working together.
- Point out how people are working through issues so that they learn which behaviors are making them successful as a team.
- Foster creativity, innovation, and new ways of thinking.
- Seek new ways to raise the bar of team performance.
- Convey appreciation for each member's contributions.
- Recognize positive outcomes and progress on goals, and reward team spirit.

Renewing the team

In this phase, some aspect of the team changes, requiring the team to reconfigure and rebuild. For example, new people might join the team, the leadership might change, or the team might have a new goal. When this happens, the team needs to spend time together to revisit goals, roles, responsibilities, and plans. Many of the activities you did in the forming stage can also be helpful in this stage.

Your role may include:

- Clarifying the team's mission and goals, or redefining the team's mission.
- Facilitating team members' interactions as they reestablish goals and agreements regarding team behavior, especially when team membership has changed significantly.
- Encouraging the mutual support and involvement of all members in renewing the team and exploring alternatives.

Provide clear direction and define priorities for the team

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Team members can waste valuable time if they don't have clear direction for their work. In the worst cases, they may produce results that bear little or no resemblance to the desired outcome. To provide clear direction and define priorities, consider these suggestions:

- Work with the team to define the project or work. Include the following:
  - ▷ Purpose and goal of the project.
  - ▷ Deadlines and deliverables that have already been determined.
  - ▷ Instructions and guidelines, as appropriate.
  - ▷ Who will make decisions, how they will be made, and the level of authority for the decision makers.
  - ▷ Required reports and communication.

Find opportunities to observe people's facilitation skills.

- Discuss the project with the team and invite people to ask questions. Don't end the discussion until you're certain that the team fully understands the scope of the project and your expectations.

- Check in with the team during the project to show support, troubleshoot, answer questions, and run interference. People need to know that you're involved and interested in their progress.

- Keep track of areas in which you gave unclear or inadequate direction. Figure out where and why misunderstanding took place so that you can be clearer next time.

Clarify roles and responsibilities with team members

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Team members work best when they know what is expected of them and they know what they can expect from others. Lack of role clarity is one of the chief barriers to effective teamwork. Often "personality conflicts" are simply a lack of clarity in roles.

- Ensure that each employee has a clear set of objectives and expectations that clarify the role he or she plays in achieving team goals. It usually works best for employees to identify their perceptions of their roles and set their own goals with input from you. You as the leader can then review these; modify or add to them only when necessary.

- Whenever you begin a new team project, meet as a group to discuss roles and expectations with one another.

- During team projects, hold update meetings at which each person talks about what he or she is working on. This will help you clarify or refine roles. Also consider recommending that team members describe what

help they need from one another. This could include tangible help, such as producing data for a report, or developmental help, such as ideas about how the person could more effectively influence another team.

▶ Convey your expectation that team members will collaborate with and support one another. Intervene when it is clear that a team member is interested only in his or her personal success. Ensure that the person understands that he or she will not be successful without being collaborative.

▶ When team members disagree about role expectations, ask them to meet with you to work through the issues.

   ▷ Find uninterrupted time for the team to meet.

   ▷ Ask an objective person to facilitate the meeting if emotions are heightened or if you believe you cannot be objective.

   ▷ Have each team member state specific expectations of other team members. If it seems helpful, structure this discussion by having people describe what they would like others to do more or less of.

   ▷ Use the discussion as a catalyst to clear the air and develop new working agreements.

Connect people with expert role models who regularly form successful teams.

▶ Periodically meet with team members to learn about their perceptions of their roles and their job expectations. Discuss similarities with and differences from your expectations.

▶ Work with your unit to identify voids in responsibilities and find ways to fill them. When consensus is not possible or appropriate, make a decision and let the group know the rationale for your decision.

▶ Clarify each team member's role and how she or he contributes to attaining the goals and mission of the team. Also help team members understand how their efforts and performance affect the overall results of the organization.

▶ Capitalize on opportunities to regularly communicate priorities and responsibilities to the team.

▶ Sometimes teams start to rely more heavily on one or two highly productive team members. Remind everyone (including yourself) to contribute his or her fair share of effort, and periodically ask people if they are feeling overburdened.

Use a team approach to solve problems when it is appropriate

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When team members are involved in problem solving and decision making, they are more likely to accept decisions and to feel ownership and shared responsibility for the goal. Consider the following suggestions:

Discuss the types of decisions that should be made by a team and those that should be made by an individual.

- ▶ Determine when and to what degree to use a team approach for problem solving. In general, the higher the level of commitment and buy-in your team members show, and the more creative, varied, and informative the input and opinions they offer, the more important a team approach for solving problems becomes.

- ▶ A team approach to problem solving and decision making tends to work best when:

  - ▷ Full acceptance of the decision is necessary for effective implementation.

  - ▷ Information from more than one person is required to make the decision.

  - ▷ A high-quality result is desired.

  - ▷ A creative solution or a new approach is needed.

  - ▷ The decision does not need to be made quickly.

- ▶ Make a list of all the decisions you made in the past month. Assess the quality and the acceptance of your decisions. Would your final outcome have benefited from a team approach? Look for trends, such as avoiding team involvement on certain kinds of problems or decisions.

- ▶ Seek feedback from your team, your manager, and your peers. Ask for their perceptions of when you have effectively used a team approach to solve problems and when you have missed opportunities to do so.

- ▶ Identify other managers who effectively use a team approach to solve problems. Use them as role models. Observe what they do that makes them effective and ask them for tips on how you might improve your own approach.

Involve others in shaping plans and decisions that affect them

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Leaders need to involve the right people at the right time. When you make plans, involve the people, teams, and groups that are needed for success, and those who care about or will be affected by the plan, the process, or the outcome. Consider the following suggestions:

▶ Identify all the individuals and groups who have a stake in an issue. Check with your team and colleagues to make sure that you have all the necessary people and teams. At a minimum, involve people within the value chain. While you may choose not to involve all who think they should be involved, you do need to address their perceived need to be involved. For example, make sure a team member personally tells them about the plan and the rationale rather than expecting them to ferret out the information for themselves.

▶ Decide how and when to involve specific people and teams. For example, you may want to involve some individuals in the total planning process and ask others to provide input before the planning begins. Meet with people either one-on-one or in a team.

▶ When you meet with people, give them the big picture and clarify what you want from them. For example, you may want them to:

   ▷ Define a problem or opportunity.

   ▷ Help develop options for addressing a problem.

   ▷ Choose a course of action.

Remind people that team decisions are often challenging, even with a good process.

▶ Conduct the meeting so that you get the input you need and the individuals feel involved in the process. Once people feel invested, your objective will become a shared objective.

▶ As a group, decide who should take responsibility for carrying out each element of the proposed plan.

▶ Develop a communication plan to keep people informed.

Invite and build upon the ideas and input of others

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Because ideas drive business and solve problems, it's important to make it clear that you want input and ideas from all team members. Consider the following suggestions:

▶ Make it clear that you expect people to contribute ideas and help solve problems. Stress that you value all ideas.

▶ Create the expectation that people will build on the ideas of others rather than criticize them. Also communicate that you don't want people to try to one-up each other.

▶ Be clear about your purpose for soliciting ideas. For example, specify whether you are looking for many ideas or whether you want an individual's best recommendation.

Have people practice building on others' ideas.

▶ Agree on ground rules for brainstorming and idea sessions. For example:

▷ Generate as many ideas as possible.

▷ Build on the ideas of others.

▷ Save critiques for later.

▷ Stay within the time limit.

▷ Capture ideas, not a word-by-word transcription.

▷ Ignore implementation constraints for now.

▶ Help people build on ideas by encouraging them to say and instead of but when they respond to suggestions.

▶ Be a role model for building on the comments of others. Expand on what others say by stating what you heard and then adding your ideas to it. Look for natural, positive connections between your ideas.

▶ Encourage people to share their ideas, even if they are fragments rather than fully thought out plans. A single idea often starts a chain reaction.

▶ When someone evaluates an idea during a brainstorming session, quickly say, "We're just brainstorming now—no critiquing" and move on. Repeat this phrase each time people critique ideas until the team learns this norm.

> ▸ Tell people ahead of time that you will want their ideas about a topic. Creative ideas are not typically produced on demand. People need time to think and let their ideas brew.

Value the contributions of all team members

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All team members are important to the success of the organization. As a leader, you can foster an environment where people value each other and recognize the importance of each role on the team. Consider the following suggestions:

> ▸ Examine whether you genuinely value the work of each individual on your team. Some people believe particular roles are more important to business success, and others value work only if it is intellectually complex. Your team will function more smoothly if you demonstrate that you value each person.

> ▸ Listen to all team members' ideas and opinions, and thank them for their input, whether or not you agree with their point of view. Listening will show that you take them seriously and that you value their ideas.

> ▸ People often feel valued when they are included. Include team members at all levels in as much planning, decision making, and problem solving as possible. When direct involvement is not appropriate, make sure you discuss plans and decisions with the team, and give people time to react and plan their next steps.

Give suggestions on how to coach individuals who have a difficult time collaborating.

> ▸ Be a positive role model for valuing others' contributions. Take interest in what people are working on, thank them for their work, and give them specific feedback about their value to your team and the organization.

> ▸ Check whether individuals feel valued by seeking input on the ways that people on your team either value or devalue others' work. You may want to ask people to send you written examples instead of asking them to speak up in a group setting.

▶ Give your staff feedback if you see any of them devaluing members of the team. If you ignore their behavior (hoping it will go away), they will take that as tacit approval of their behavior.

▶ Ask for advice from others. People feel valued when "the boss" asks for their help.

Credit others for their contributions and accomplishments

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Remind people who are reluctant to share credit with a team that shared credit doesn't minimize an individual's contributions.

People want to be appreciated and valued for their contributions. As a leader, you are a role model. People are especially interested in whether you give people proper credit for their ideas and accomplishments. As you work with individuals and teams, consider the following suggestions:

▶ Monitor how you talk about successful efforts. For example, consider how often you use the word I instead of we when you're referring to a team effort. Also consider whether you share credit with others when you are recognized for individual success.

▶ When you acknowledge the success of a project, make sure you recognize the efforts of all team members involved, no matter how small their role or contributions.

▶ Solicit feedback on whether you share credit when you talk about team successes. You may find that you are willing to give credit when you're talking to your team but take all the credit when you talk with people outside of your group.

▶ Ask a team that recently completed a successful project or initiative to share its learning and experience with other teams or departments. This is a good way to acknowledge team members' success as well as help others learn from it.

▶ Frequently tell your team members that you appreciate their contributions. Be specific about what they have done well.

Acknowledge and celebrate team accomplishments

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Acknowledging and celebrating team accomplishments is a powerful way to reinforce the importance of teams and their contributions, recognize team efforts, and keep motivation and momentum going. Consider the following suggestions:

▸ Recognize and reward team performance, not just individual performance. Set specific team goals and recognize when people achieve them.

Challenge people to find at least three new ways to recognize individuals and teams.

▸ If teamwork and teams are important to getting work accomplished in the organization, include the contribution that individuals make to teams as a part of individual goal-setting and rewards programs. Consider holding back individual rewards unless there is also strong evidence of team cooperation.

▸ Look for opportunities to make team accomplishments or contributions more visible to the organization. For example, talk about them when you speak to other leaders in the organization. Write about successful team projects in the company newsletter or blog. E-mail others in the company when you are celebrating important accomplishments, especially when people throughout the company have been following the team's progress.

▸ Celebrate team accomplishments. Choose milestones that you want to celebrate, put them on your calendar, and schedule an event.

▸ Acknowledge and reward teams immediately when they accomplish an objective or overcome difficult obstacles. Research shows that the sooner the reward is delivered, the more impact it will have.