

Building The Dream Team

REV UP YOUR WORK SQUAD THROUGH RELATIONSHIP ENRICHMENT

BY CARA MCLAUHLAN

What is the secret to building a top-notch team? According to Marcia Jackson, president and owner of Training Resources, a Charlotte-based training and management consulting business, teams that succeed are ones made up of people who know their colleagues beyond water-cooler talk.

“Great teams are all about the relationships,” Jackson explains, “and knowing each other on the business and the personal level. By knowing each other in an authentic way, we know what each person brings to the party, from both a strengths and weaknesses standpoint.

“When it comes to how teams work together,” she continues, “I like to encourage leaders to move past what they know as the ‘Golden Rule’ of ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,’ to the ‘Platinum Rule’ of ‘Do unto others as *they would have you do unto them.*’ My encouragement is to go deeper and learn what the person wants and needs to succeed. This means treating them how they want to be treated.”

Getting Technical

Creative uses of technology can be excellent tools for building up a

team whose members are scattered throughout different offices, states and even countries. For instance, Jackson speaks of one team member who annually compiled a book about the company’s colleagues. “The year-book included a photo, a personal history and stats about each person’s children, pets and interests. This was a great tool to connect the team when it wasn’t physically together all the time.”

Jackson emphasizes that something as simple as a conference call can be used to unite employees. She suggests conversations begin with good news and happy stories before the real work commences. “It’s important not to make it all about business,” she says.

Setting The Agenda

According to Debbie Rumke, senior human resources consultant with Charlotte-based Compass Career Management Solutions, in order to >

Go Team!

HAVE FUN BUILDING A BETTER WORK ATMOSPHERE

1. Break bread. Nothing brings people together better than food. Consider the cultures and preferences of employees for a regular team lunch date inside or outside the office.

2. Bring on the fun. Get out of the office and do something cool. Ideas include mini-golf, sandcastle building, family field days, drum lessons, video arcades, laser tag, go-carts and scavenger hunts.

3. Consider what is meaningful. What do your employees love? If you have an office full of sports fans, plan a group outing to the ballpark. Discover the passions of your people and build activities around them.

4. Celebrate everything. Don't miss an opportunity to celebrate, including birthdays, employment anniversaries, project milestones, new babies, graduations or personal achievements. People love to be celebrated, whether with simple congratulatory e-mails or formal recognition during meetings.

5. Surprise them. Everyone loves surprises. Once in a while, delight your team members with something you know they will enjoy. Fresh flowers, a coffee run, a smoothie party, chocolates, afternoon ice cream or even a note of encouragement are great ways to build each other up.

6. Give back together. Doing good is an easy way to connect on a deeper level. Consider supporting a cause that is important to the team, such as a charity walk/run, a canned food drive collection or a local community project.



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strengthen team relationships, it is vital to have collaborative objectives that everyone understands. "An effective team, whether it's an *ad hoc* group assembled for a specific purpose, or an intact work unit, needs clear, well-defined common goals," she says. "Without a common goal to which all members are committed, individuals tend to throw their energies toward bettering themselves rather than the team."

Rumke notes that teams tend to work better together when led by someone who understands the dynamics of team behaviors, and whose personal satisfaction is derived from the team's success rather than from her own individual achievement. Such a team leader, or captain, can help defuse touchy subjects and manage conflicting opinions, which Rumke encourages employers to view as a natural part of the creative process.

"Conflict, in and of itself, is not a bad thing," she says. "Too often leaders and members are fearful of conflict and just want to make it go away. Avoidance and suppression will not make it go away." Effective team leaders, she adds, create opportunities to discuss the conflict and work it out, viewing

the problem "as a necessary component of creativity."

Working And Playing

Beyond connections and collaborative goals, teams that click find ways to weave fun into their day planners. Play can be a powerful tool to keep work a happy place, and the more spontaneous the activity, the better. In general, relaxed social settings help employees get to know each other better, which allows them to build stronger bonds. The end result of enhanced personal and business relationships can only be good for the company and everyone on the team.

"I worked on a team that decided to spend one lunch hour a month bowling together," Rumke says. "Instead of competing against one another or creating sub-teams, we identified a total point goal to achieve. That way, all of our efforts went toward reaching a common goal. The positive team behaviors were very evident: stronger players coaching weaker ones in methods and techniques; everyone rooting for everyone else to succeed; a true feeling of 'We did it!' when the

goal was met — not to mention the exhilaration and enthusiasm carried back to the work environment.”

For Sara Garcés Roselli, founder of RED F Marketing in Charlotte, a full-service advertising and marketing business, fun team-building activities held at the Charlotte Bobcats arena yielded surprising business results. “We shot some hoops, got some work done and were able to enjoy the camaraderie of watching the game together,” Garcés says. “From a business perspective, it created the opportunity for individuals to share their expertise across the company. Many times, people can get silo-ed into their own area.”

Balancing Act

Building an environment that supports a dynamic team requires a skilled touch and a delicate balance. If the scales drop too far toward fun, quality can suffer. And yet, all work and no play tends to leave employees burned out, unhappy and less productive.

“It takes a balance to passionately deliver products for customers and still have fun at work,” Garcés says. “We have developed >

special teams to keep our company environment thriving. Our four teams — process, training, spirit and culture — are made up of company members who constantly assess these focus areas to be sure we continue to walk our talk.”

At RED F, keeping employees passionate means being intentional about priorities that are vital to the team, including doing *pro bono* community work and giving to charities that all members of the team find meaningful. In addition, RED F pays its employees to volunteer up to 20 hours a year with charities of their choice.

Looking To The Future

A focus on building up the team and growing its members for the future is critical to any team’s long-term success. According to Dr. Izzy Justice, CEO and founder of Charlotte-based online mentoring company EQ Mentor, approximately 39 percent of executives become dissatisfied in their work life due to a lack of personal growth. She notes that many leaders have successfully utilized mentoring to boost employees’ emotional intelligence quotient and create teams that have lasting impact.

“By building up an employee’s emotional intelligence through mentoring, you are creating the bedrock for the rest of the professional core competencies,” Justice explains. “Emotional intelligence is the most vital skill for a team’s success. By mastering the ability to manage her emotions, a team member can then develop better solutions for the future.

“When a team member is able to enhance her emotional intelligence and learn from a mentor who understands and appreciates her work situation, she is able to use all the tools in her toolbox,” Justice continues. “Meeting challenges, solving problems and creating solutions become so much easier because she is leveraging all of her assets.” **TCW**

Cara McLaughlan has collaborated with various corporations and executive groups to discover the best in people through team building, vision casting and long-term planning exercises. For information, visit www.crankymommies.com.