

Building Your Team

The notion that a League leader can “do it all” or “go it alone” is false. In order for individuals to be fulfilled and for the League to build itself for the future, we must work in groups or teams. To date, one of the keys to the successful implementation of the Membership Leadership Development program has been the establishment of League teams at the local, state and national levels. These individuals are brought together around a common goal, they have a variety of skills, and they share the workload.



As we move further into the 21st century, the League will need to better accommodate the ever-busier volunteers by expecting less from each individual and more out of the team effort. That is why it is so crucial for League leaders to understand how to effectively work as a team.

Lessons Learned about Teams

Significant performance challenges energize teams regardless of where they are in an organization. No team arises without a performance challenge that is meaningful to those involved. A common set of demanding performance goals, that a group considers important to achieve, will lead, most of the time, to both performance and team. Performance, however, is the primary objective while a team remains the means, not the end.

Organizational leaders can foster team performance best by building a strong performance ethic rather than by establishing a team-promoting environment alone.

Real teams always find ways for each individual to contribute and thereby gain distinction. Indeed, when harnessed to a common team purpose and goals, our need to distinguish ourselves as individuals becomes a powerful engine for team performance.

Discipline-both within the team and across the organization-creates the conditions for team performance. For organizational leaders, this entails making clear and consistent demands that reflect the needs of customers, shareholders, and employees, and then holding themselves and the organization relentlessly accountable.*

Team Basics

While teams will vary from League to League, all teams have certain qualities.

- Teams should be small enough in number, so they can convene and communicate easily and frequently. Discussions should be open and interactive for all members. Each member understands the other's roles and skills.
- The team's purpose constitutes a broader, deeper aspiration than just near term goals. All team members understand and articulate the purpose the same way. Members



define the purpose in discussion with outsiders. The purpose contains themes that are particularly meaningful and memorable. Members feel the purpose is important, if not exciting.

- There are team goals versus broader organizational goals versus just one individual's goals. Goals are clear, simple, and measurable. If they are not measurable, can their achievement be determined? Goals are realistic as well as ambitious.
- The approach is concrete, clear, and really understood and agreed to by everybody. It requires all members to contribute equivalent amounts of real work. It provides for open interaction, fact-based problem solving, and result-based evaluation. The approach provides for modification and improvement over time. Fresh input and perspective is systematically sought and added, for example, through information and analysis, new members, and sponsors.
- There is a sense of mutual accountability.*

Six Things Necessary to Good Team Leadership

1. Keep the purpose, goals, and approach relevant and meaningful. All teams must shape their own common purpose, performance goals and approach. While a leader must be a full working member of the team who can and should contribute to these, he or she also stands apart from the team by virtue of his or her selection as leader. Teams expect their leaders to use that perspective and distance to help the teams clarify and commit to their mission, goals, and approach.

2. Build commitment and confidence. Team leaders should work to build the commitment and confidence of each individual as well as the team as a whole.

3. Strengthen the mix and level of skills. Effective team leaders are vigilant about skills. Their goal is clear: ultimately, the flexible and top-performing teams consist of people with all the technical, functional, problem-solving, decision-making, interpersonal, and teamwork skills the team needs to perform. To get there, team leaders encourage people to take the risks needed for growth and development. They also continually challenge team members by shifting assignments and role patterns.

4. Manage relationships with outsiders, including removing obstacles. Team leaders are expected, by people outside as well as inside the team to manage much of the team's contacts and relationships with the rest of the organization. This calls on team leaders to communicate effectively the team's purpose, goals, and approach to anyone who might help or hinder it. They also must have the courage to intercede on the team's behalf when obstacles that might cripple or demoralize the team get placed in their way.

5. Create opportunities for others. Team performance is not possible if the leader grabs all the best opportunities, assignments, and credit. Indeed, the crux of the leader's challenge is to provide performance opportunities to the team and the people on it.

6. Do real work. Everyone on a real team, including the leader, does real work in roughly equivalent amounts. Team leaders do have a certain distance from the team by virtue of their position, but they do not use that distance "just to sit back and make decision." Team leaders must contribute in whatever way the team needs, just like any other member. Moreover, team leaders do not delegate the nasty jobs to others. Where personal risks are high or "dirty work" is required, the team leader should step forward.*

**From J. Katzenbach & D. Smith "The Wisdom of Teams" Harvard Business School Press, 1993.*

Getting a Team off to a Good Start

There are some key elements to setting up and starting out a team well – on a path to success. These include:

Find the right people. It is critically important that we get the right number and mix (in terms of skill sets) on a team. If we aren't tooled to reach our goals, we never will.

Set clear goals. If a team doesn't understand its purpose, then how can it succeed? Team members need to understand what they are being asked to do and how it fits with the broader goals of the organization. This will not only help them delineate what needs to be done, but it will provide them with the motivation to join the team and do the work.

Develop ground rules. What are the common expectations among team members? How will we communicate? How will we work through conflict? How will we share the workload? Without these norms, team members can grow frustrated with the process and goals may not be met.

Building a Team

It is important to build bonds between members of a team. This may occur naturally as team members work together, or it can be "facilitated" through team building exercises. Simple activities that help take your board/team beyond your usual conversations to strengthen your personal bonds can assist in the overall goal of building and strengthening your League team for successful work together. Below are some sample exercises that can be used when a team is first forming or as a "refresher" to help "kick start" or further a team's goals/work.



Check out the "Tools You Can Use" section at the back of the manual for team building exercises to use with your League board or committees!



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