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Professional Development

Top 10 team qualities

During a recent Teleclass on team building, the course leader asked participants to list qualities we think make up a high performing team. Here are our Top 10. How many of these qualities does your team have?

Clear accountability and authority. It's vital that each team member understands his or her responsibilities and be held accountable for accomplishing them. Accountability should come from the team leader and the other team members. Self-accountability is most important. Team members must be given the authority to carry out their responsibilities in the way they think is best.

Excellent communications. This is crucial to the team's success and yet may be the hardest to achieve. How is it that we can say one thing and others hear something else? We all listen through our own filters based on our beliefs, values, and experiences. Practice really listening to others and repeating back what they've said for clarification. It will save a lot of grief, hurt feelings, and misdirection.

Clear goals and the motivation to achieve them. Of course your team has goals and wants to succeed. But if your goals are fuzzy, there's a higher chance for failure. Your team's goals should be written, clear, attainable, measurable, and in line with your values. The only way you can be motivated is if your team's goals reward your passions. If not, you may be on the wrong team.

Shared mission. Your team's mission is why you exist. Members must share their mission and vision and be enthusiastic about achieving them. It's important that each member contribute to defining the mission so they'll be invested in it.

Being connected to the heart, not just the head. Teamwork is not just about accomplishing tasks; it's more about interacting with other human beings and forming positive relationships. Love your work, make it an extension of who you are, and you'll achieve much more success and happiness individually and as a group.

Working agreements. Conflict among team members is inevitable. People don't always see things the same way and will disagree on what direction the team should take. Having working agreements will help avoid and resolve those conflicts.

Know best practices, set up guidelines in advance. Experienced team leaders and members know what works. Before embarking on a project, team members should

determine how they're going to proceed and agree to a set of guidelines. As the saying goes, "Fail to plan and you'll plan to fail."

Interdependence. Independent team members want to pass, catch, and carry the ball, go it alone, and do things their way. Dependent ones rely on the others to set the tone of their work. For teams to succeed, members must be interdependent. Each has their own responsibilities and yet all depend on each other to pull an equal share of the load.

Clear systems and procedures. It's important to have an action plan with procedures in place and steps to follow. Include the name of each person responsible for each task. This doesn't mean one can't be spontaneous and creative. It means being creative within a set of guidelines.

Trust. The most important quality a team can have. Team members must be able to trust the others to do their jobs, be honest, and have integrity. Trust must be earned by each individual. Those who put their own agendas first won't be trusted.

I once worked with an executive team having problems communicating. These men had founded their company together; so in that regard they were equals, even though each one had his own position.

The CEO was frustrated because he felt he had to run every decision by the other founders and couldn't run the company with the leadership and authority required of a CEO. During the course of our coaching, the other members learned this and agreed to give the CEO the authority he needed to lead.

Later some of them told me their relationships, communications, and results had improved and they wouldn't be the same company without this new understanding.

A team is made up of individuals with different values and ways of doing things. The best teams understand this and know how to adapt to each other's needs.

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Top 10 Team Failures

Last time I shared with you the Top 10 Team Qualities compiled by participants of a team building class. The same group created a list of 10 mistakes poorly functioning teams make. Here are some things your team may need to work on to improve your performance and results.

Egos get in the way. Once I heard Ken Blanchard speak at a conference. The author of *Raving Fans* told us that EGO stands for “Edging God Out.” I was pleased to hear such a spiritual statement at a business conference. When a team member puts his or her own priorities and status above other teammates, morale and productivity suffer. Lack of cooperation results in unnecessary conflict. Which brings us to the second mistake teams can make.

Not addressing conflict. Most people prefer to avoid conflict. Sometimes it’s necessary so that everyone can feel free to express his or her opinion. If small conflicts go unaddressed, however, they can build to larger problems that keep the team from achieving its goals. Better to bring the causes of conflict out in the open so business can move forward. Don’t ignore the elephant under the table.

Too many agendas. Good team members are creative and share their ideas. But this can lead to a lack of focus, which will slow progress. A high performing team has a clear vision and mission and doesn’t get bogged down trying to follow every suggestion.

Not having clear goals. Goals are steps to achieving the team’s mission. If a goal is fuzzy or doesn’t relate to the desired outcome, it should be scrapped. Goals should be specific, achievable, and measurable.

Personality conflicts. I have spent the last 13 years helping teams and individuals understand their own behavioral styles and values and those of team members who may be very different from them. This can only be done by assessing each team member and having them share their profiles with each other. The key to resolving this issue is learning to adapt to different styles and respecting each other’s differing values.

No buy-in or consensus by team members. If team members don’t agree on their mission and how to accomplish it, there will be little, if any, achievement. Everyone must feel she or he is an integral and important part of the group. One of the key responsibilities of the team leader is to make sure this happens.

Unrealistic expectations. If team members communicate effectively, this shouldn’t be a problem. If they set realistic goals, there shouldn’t be any confusion about the outcome. Optimism is good as long as it’s realistic.

Showboating. This can relate to ego or it can be caused by those who crave attention. One of the most deflating things that can happen in a meeting is when one person makes a suggestion and the group doesn’t respond. Then a few minutes later someone else makes the same statement and everyone applauds his or her great idea. Don’t do this and don’t let other team members get away with it.

Undefined roles. Everyone has strengths and limitations. Don’t force your outgoing “people-persons” to keep records. And don’t make the shy ones give the presentation. Match the roles to the strengths of the individuals and be sure they are clearly defined.

Lack of senior sponsorship and/or leadership. Not everyone is a leader. It can be disastrous for a team if the leader doesn’t understand his or her roles and responsibilities. Even with a great leader the team can’t function successfully if the company’s management isn’t solidly behind the group’s efforts. If this is the case with your team, address it before you take another step.

If you would like a free assessment to measure your team leadership skills, send me an email with the words “Leadership Survey” in the subject line.

Go, Team!

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