

June- For Managers

Healthy Teams

## Boost Your Team's Performance

**Successful teams don't just happen on their own.** To stimulate productivity in a work team, supervisors and managers need to provide continuous support. Leading effectively takes skillful observation and coordination of the many moving parts that comprise a working team.

Take the time to get to know each member of your team well. Make careful note of each person's strengths and weaknesses. Try to identify areas where skill development could help individuals move forward and benefit the team.

As you improve in matching individuals' unique skills with the work objectives, you'll effectively activate the talent that surrounds you. You'll learn to move the pieces of the personnel puzzle around in a fluid way until you've got the right alignment for each project. This can lead to better project outcomes that benefit your organization.

To help managers and supervisors with their leadership skills, this issue of *Your Source* looks at ways in which you can:

- Improve teamwork and the overall success of your group.
- Facilitate healthy communication within the group.
- Intervene and provide guidance to the team when conflicts arise.

Supporting a healthy team requires that you apply a range of leadership skills: planning, listening, coaching, monitoring, course correction, recognition of employees' efforts, and more.

## Successful Team Building

*Here are some keys to successful teamwork.*

- Make sure that the team's goals are clear, understood, and accepted by each team member.
- Be aware of your leadership style and techniques. Are they working? Evaluate yourself and find ways to continuously improve.
- Give performance feedback proactively and frequently. Don't wait until there is a problem before telling team members how they're doing.
- Encourage your team to take some risks through new ideas, innovations, and different viewpoints.
- Reassure your team that you are paying attention to their efforts. Genuine recognition goes a long way towards building loyalty and trust. Showing your respect and appreciation gives employees greater job satisfaction, and it inspires extra effort.

*There are many types of team-building exercises you can organize. Here are some tips on how to select the activities carefully:*

- Choose team-building activities that do not violate people’s dignity, privacy, or personal time.
- Remember that what is fun for some people might be uncomfortable for others. This could include things like athletic activities or public performances.
- Try to make sure the team-building exercises are relevant to the work people are there to do.

## Confront Conflict to Move the Team Forward

One of the tougher challenges a leader can face is when conflict arises within the work team. There can be disagreements over how to accomplish something. Or, simple personality clashes can flare up. Although you can't stop disagreements from happening, you *can* steer them in a positive direction. This can end up helping relationships and improving group performance. But in order to move the team forward, you should follow some basic rules of conflict management.

### Encourage open, safe forums

Encourage group members to be honest in their views of conflicts. This means that when they have differing views, they'll express those disagreements instead of remaining silent. You should encourage open forums where disagreement is freely expressed. Note, however, that if you seem insecure about opposing ideas being expressed, you can't expect much honesty from team members.

### Listen carefully and be sensitive to input

When disagreements occur, make sure to treat all participants with respect. Your words can affect listeners positively or negatively. So listen carefully in discussions, and be sensitive to others' input. Don't pass judgment on "brainstormed" suggestions.

### Be critical of ideas, not people

Don't allow personal attacks or name-calling to be part of the discussion. This will only escalate conflicts and cause people to choose sides. If you see conflicts becoming personal attacks, interrupt the conversation. Remind the group that such behavior is counterproductive. Ask them to restate their disagreements by focusing on the issues, not the people.

### Avoid being defensive

Try to avoid the reflex reaction of defending your positions. Be sure to listen very carefully to every person's remarks so you can pinpoint possible misunderstandings and clarify the issues. Ask questions of those who disagree with you—thus new ideas and suggestions might appear in the conversation. These can lead to creative solutions that hadn't been considered before.

## *Tips for Effective Communication*

***Listen actively.*** Wait until your team member is finished speaking. Put aside your views and really listen. Even if you disagree, give your full attention and try to understand other points of view.

***Validate team members' input.*** Show the speaker that you're listening to his or her point. Summarize aloud what you think the other person said, and ask if your summary is correct. Validating helps people feel confident in contributing their ideas.

***Be positive and assertive.*** If you disagree with someone's position, instead of not responding at all or responding aggressively, try some positive assertiveness. A response such as, "I understand your point, but..." helps to keep communication flowing.

***Taking the high road is better.*** Don't encourage gossip or negativity in your workgroup. Think and talk positively.

***Keep things light.*** Try injecting some tasteful humor into discussions as an icebreaker.