White Paper–
Go Team! Formulating a Winning Team

Human Resource
Solutions
aligning people assets with corporate goals

Effective teams are the cornerstones to any company's success. Organizations that excel in today's tumultuous economy recognize that the team is stronger than the individual. These companies understand that it is not enough to hire the best and brightest. You must take this talented group of people and formulate a winning team.

Why teamwork makes Sense

Companies whose star employees fly solo often find themselves with huge gaps when these individuals leave the company. The team approach ensures continuity in your organization, even when it is the leader who departs.

Effective teams make best use of individual skills and provide a supportive atmosphere for decision-making. The energy of team members is fused to create a sum, which is far greater than the parts.

When you have functional work teams, members often volunteer to pick up the slack when associates leave. Efficiencies are gained as team members collectively choose to absorb the recently vacated position rather than add a new member to the team.

Team Building

There is more to building a team than hiring and firing. Relationships need to be fostered and expectations need to be managed. Additionally, team building requires:

Building Trust– Trust is the backbone of effective teams. Developing a culture where trust flourishes requires dedication. This can be done in a number of ways.

> **Face to face communications–** Face to face communication is vital for trust building. Members of the team need time to get to know one another both on and off the playing field. Set aside specific times for team members to meet. This should be done on both a formal and an informal basis to ensure that team members have an opportunity to see one another as more than just people filling job titles.

> **Cohesiveness–** Each person comes to the team with different skill sets, experiences and values. To help these individuals work together as a team many organizations use team-building exercises. Organizations with in-house training and development departments may customize off-the-shelf team building programs to meet the specific needs of the organization. Some organizations choose to send their management team off-site to participate in team-building courses like the Ropes course, which is a series of supervised group challenges. Programs like the Ropes course provide participants with unique opportunities to work and play together as they work on problem-solving, group decision-making and positive risk-taking activities far away from the hustle and bustle of the office. The goal is to build trust among participants, who then take these skills back to the workplace.

> **Open communication–** Trust requires open and honest communication. It is difficult for a team to operate effectively if members are working in an environment where pieces of information seem to be frequently missing. If employees feel that information is being hidden, they begin to distrust management and their co-workers. This has a direct negative effect on team building. Share as much information as possible so everyone is operating with the same data.

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Building a mid-level management team that works hand-in-hand with senior management– For an organization to be successful, the middle management team needs to be operating smoothly in order to effectively carry out the initiatives of the senior team. Building a strong middle-management team requires:

Team empowerment– Teams must be empowered to make decisions without having to run to senior management for approval on everything. Set the guidelines up front and then turn the reigns over to the team.

Delegating downward– Employees closest to the work are usually in the best position to make sound decisions.

Establishing and communicating boundaries– Create clear guidelines so middle-management knows where authority begins and ends. For example, if top management wants to know about problems with major accounts tell the team exactly when senior management needs to be informed of a problem.

Clearly defining accountability– Make sure the lines of accountability are clearly defined and there is little or no overlap. If things go wrong, you will know where to go to fix them.

Tying teamwork to individual compensation– Part of each individual's compensation must be tied to how well the individual operates as part of the team. Use 360-degree feedback evaluations to allow team members to assess one another's performance.

Team Leadership

Simply because someone is appointed team leader doesn't mean he/she automatically knows how to perform the role. Invest in leadership training for your team leaders so they have the skills they need from the very beginning. Large organizations may have their own in-house leadership training programs. Organizations without a dedicated staff may bring in outside consultants to conduct on-site leadership training modules. You could also send members of your management team to public workshops like those offered by the American Management Association.

By providing leadership training, you let employees know that you are committed to making sure the team has strong leadership. Employees also see that they too may have a chance to move up in the organization.

Employee Understanding

Employees need to understand that teamwork means smart business. A team atmosphere relies on everyone—not just the leader—to initiate projects, generate ideas and produce the results that will move the company forward. Communicate company objectives and the goals of the management team with all members of the organization so that everyone is working towards a common end. Share team successes with all employees when they happen so that everyone can see the benefit of working together.

And remember that team building is not just a once-a-year off-site meeting. It is a continuous process that requires the commitment of senior management. You need to understand that, if your company is moving towards a team-based environment, you and all your employees are embarking on an entirely new way of life.

Resources:

American Management Association Leadership Training Programs
www.amanet.org/seminars/cmd2/Leadership.htm

Team Craft offers an array of team building programs, experiential meetings and seminars, organization development services and team learning resources.
www.teamcraft.com

The Learning Center provides team development workshops and one-on-one coaching to help organizations increase accountability, cross-functional coordination, performance, and earned trust.
www.learningcenter.net

Pro-Action Associates provides organizational development, team building, and team development training programs.
www.paateams.com