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Follow formula to have success at team building

By BILL HOWATT Business Column

TEAMWORK is a critical factor for the success of many organizations.

Effective teamwork requires the alignment of a group of people to a common set of organizational and team objectives that also give each individual on the team the ability to realize personal goals. Unfortunately, many teams are far from effective, as many leaders do not have a team-building formula or skills to align their teams.

Teams are not born, they are developed. Leaders who are clear that teams are made up of people with individual needs, wants and dreams are on the right track.

Leaders face three challenges in getting the psychological contract that is the foundation for motivating individuals to contribute, collaborate and work as teams:

- Employees need knowledge and skills to gain a competitive advantage.
- Employers must provide resources and support so employees can be flexible.
- Employers must trust employees and give them authority to make decisions so they know what customers are thinking.

Getting a team to work together is similar to developing a chemistry formula: all the elements must first be understood before the result can be achieved.

A leader cannot decree that a group of people will work together productively and co-operatively. Words will never build a team; only action can do that.

Organizations need to be nimble and flexible to maintain their competitive advantage in today's global economy. More and more teams are being asked to do more with less, make a commitment to continuous improvement, be open to change and manage themselves under limited leadership and supervision.

The team building success formula is: Understanding Expectations + Understanding Differences + Understanding Individual Employee Needs + Understanding Interpersonal Reality = Successful Productivity.

Understanding Expectations: A team needs a clear mandate, target objectives, defined roles, accountabilities, progress metrics, measures of success, rewards and recognitions, defined leadership and resources. Managers cannot assume team members will know this without it being clearly defined and discussed. And as an organization's mission changes, managers must ensure expectations are clearly defined once again.

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Understanding Differences: Team members need a process or opportunity to discover and learn about personality differences. One effective way to understand differences is providing the team with an opportunity to discover and explore the different personalities, learning and communications styles, generation and diversity issues of team members and how these impact communications and relationships.

Understanding Individual Employee Needs: Each team member has his or her own personal and professional needs, short- and long-term goals and career and job expectations. Managers need to understand that teams are made up of individuals and that it is important to support each member to achieve their own goals as this will increase their commitment and motivation to contribute to organization and team objectives.

Understanding Interpersonal Reality: Managers need to help teams develop interpersonal platforms where members become comfortable and safe and learn to trust all members of the team. This provides the stability and security for team members to become open and honest, to act authentically, hold each other accountable, and make a commitment to each team member's success. These kinds of behaviours allow a team to evolve and develop to its potential. A positive and supportive environment provides employees with positive energy. This is the kind of energy where people are excited, and look forward to coming to work each day.

This formula provides four key components for a team to work effectively. There are no shortcuts.

Managers who do not have the skills to implement this formula will often fail. But the good news is many can learn the skills they need.

There is no more powerful contagion in a group of people than an openness and genuine commitment to each other's success.

