

# TEAM BUILDING

## **I. What is Team Building?**

Team building is a planned process that enables a group with common organizational goals to analyze and improve its effectiveness. Building a productive work team will allow your organization to efficiently meet increased service demands, and develop solutions to specific work problems.

The purpose of a team building process is to assess the group's strengths and weaknesses, and to improve their working relationship. This process includes developing better communication and decision-making skills; identifying and clarifying goals; improving problem-solving abilities, and designing an action plan for removing obstacles to higher morale and productivity. Our program also includes a subsequent evaluation process for examining the results of the team building process.

## **II. What Will the Outcome Be?**

It is important to look at team building as a process, not an event. The actual team building sessions should lay the foundation for continued development within the team. The components of that foundation will vary depending upon the team and the purpose of the team building process. However, the following list encompasses some potential results:

- A. Agreement and commitment on team goals and objectives.
- B. A clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of the team members, including the team leader.
- C. The agreement of norms for:
  - communication/feedback
  - resolving differences
  - making decisions
  - expected levels of cooperation and commitment
- D. Laying the groundwork for building trust, support and respect among the team.

## **III. Where and When is Team Building Done?**

The length of time and location of the team building session will vary depending upon what the goal is and who the team is.

Generally, sessions run anywhere from one to three days. Multiple day sessions may be done sequentially or spread over time. However, because the goal is to establish a sense of unity among the members, it is important to keep the sessions fairly close together. Some companies have opted to break up the sessions into half day segments--anywhere from two to four consecutive Friday afternoons.

The most critical aspect of the location is that it be off-site without interruptions or distractions related to daily work responsibilities. This is imperative if the group is to stay focused on the team building process. Successful team building sessions have been held in a variety of locations, including function or meeting rooms, private homes, or in hotels.

**IV. What is the Role of the Facilitator? How Does the Process Work?**

The primary goal in the team building process is to establish a feeling of cohesiveness within the group. As a result, it can be counter productive for any member of the team to pull him/herself out of the unit to lead or direct the session. For this reason, the use of a good facilitator can greatly increase the chances of success in the team building process.

In the planning stages, the facilitator will work with the team leader (and other members, if appropriate) to identify the purpose of the process and to establish the goals for the session. Once these are clarified, the facilitator will develop the agenda for the session.

As part of the preparation for the process, the facilitator may develop some pre-work assignments for the team members to complete before the session begins. The purpose of this is to give the participants time to focus their thoughts on some of the key issues that will be discussed with the whole team.

During the sessions, the facilitator acts to guide the group through the process without entering in as a team member. A trained facilitator will work to insure that the discussion stays open, yet constructive, and that major areas of concern are addressed and resolved. At the close of a session, a good facilitator will have led the group in developing an action plan to ensure that the team building process continues long after the session has been completed.

In most team building sessions, it is advisable to have a brief follow-up meeting six to twelve weeks after the completion of the process. This time is used to review the key points agreed upon, assess the success in following through on the individual and team action plans, and to make modifications in these plan, where necessary.

In summary, committing to the team building process means a long term commitment to building a more productive, cohesive work group. Taking the lead to begin the process will enable the group to develop principles for working together, which will increase the team's effectiveness and level of accomplishment.

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