

Ask Tough Questions to Start *By Kristin Arnold*

Whenever you bring a group of people together to accomplish a specific objective, you can accelerate the team-building process by asking a few critical questions:

Open the File Drawer. "You've been on teams before. Tell us about a great team (any time a group of people came together to accomplish a specific objective) you have been a part of."

This allows team members to access specific memories, situations and feelings about being on a successful team. If they can't think of a great team, take the non-answer as a big warning sign: You need to develop their team skills.

Past Performance. "What did the team do that made it so successful?" Past behavior is a great indicator of future performance, so note their answers on a flipchart. This will become a great start for the team's ground rules. You may even want to follow up with another question such as "What were they doing that we should do on this team?" This will allow the team to affirm the key attributes of a successful team.

WIIFM. "What made that team so worthwhile that you stayed on the

team?" We have discussed the WIIFM (What's In It For Me) before. We need to tap into the underlying reasons why people will show up physically as well as mentally to our teams. They come prepared and willing to engage in the team's work because there is a tangible benefit for them. It takes the "hidden agenda" and makes it visible for all to see and to create alignment with the team's published agenda.

Ah Shucks. "If something could go wrong, what would it be?" Create the space for team members to voice their fears, issues and concerns about being part of the team. Simply note what's being said on a flipchart, and address their concerns as appropriate.

Who Else? "Is there someone else we need to have on this team in order to accomplish our goals?" You have tried to find the right people to be on the team, but maybe you forgot someone, or a key person is not available. One of the biggest failings of new teams is to have the wrong (or second-best) people on the team. You deserve the best, especially if everyone on the team agrees that you are missing a valuable person!

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Atmosphere is Everything *By Kristin Arnold*

When your team meets, what's the overall atmosphere of your meeting room? Does it invite participation or stifle creativity? Although a subtle contribution to team success, meeting room set up is an important, but often forgotten, element to team success. As you prepare for your next meeting, consider:

To Sit or Not to Sit. If you are having a quickie meeting (less than ten minutes), keep standing. If you sit down, arrange the chairs in a u-shape or semi-circle. Flipcharts can be placed at the opening so all members can focus on the task at hand.

Just Right. Have just enough space so team members aren't crowded *and* not too large that the empty space sucks all the energy out of the room.

Table It. Consider having a meeting with no tables or other barriers to communication - just people talking to people.

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Work Team Factoids

- 60% prefer to work in teams.
- 66% of women prefer teamwork.
- 54% of men prefer teamwork
- Adult workers spend 61% of time working in teams.
- 90% have exposure to teams; 50% receive team training.
- 72% say that working in teams makes the job less stressful.
- 67% say it makes them feel better about their jobs.
- 66% say it improves quality, productivity and profitability.

What makes teams successful?

- 33% - getting along
- 29% - listening
- 21% - setting priorities
- 6% - feeling recognized
- 6% - having everyone agree
- 4% - deciding who's in charge

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“Kristin’s professional and creative style of communication helped us to accomplish our objectives in record time.”

Sharon Eberman, Project Coordinator
 Baltimore Gas & Electric

Ask Tough Questions to Start *(cont'd from p. 1)*

Politics. “Is there someone we should involve in the process – keep them up to date on our progress – so there are no surprises at the end?” Every team has to deal with the company or organizational politics, whether they like it or not. So who needs to be kept informed or briefed on the team’s progress so we don’t suffer the rock phenomenon? (You know the rock phenomenon where the team charges off and does great work, brings it back to the big kahuna who takes one look at it, tosses it over the shoulder and says “wrong rock. Bring me another one.”).

Scapagoat. “Is there something we don’t have, but need in order to accomplish our goal?” Some teams moan and groan about the lack of “something” such as resources, training, skills, support, momentum, strategy, values, common goals. This

is a probing question to assert that they have what it takes to be successful. (And if you don’t, develop a plan to get it!) Anything else is just whining and an excuse.

The Final Question. “What can I do to be of service to you in any way whatsoever?” This question allows the team to voice their expectations of your role. After you listen to their responses, begin a dialogue to achieve agreement on your role as team leader, such as establish direction, develop the team, ensure participation, etc. It also helps create a discussion about your expectations of the team.

By bringing in past experiences, we acknowledge key characteristics for team success. These questions not only establish the framework for working together, but help create a sense of “team” – the softer side of team work.

Atmosphere is Everything *(cont'd from p. 1)*

Seats, Everyone. If your meeting will last over an hour, take a look at the chairs. Wheels on chairs are nice, armrests are good, extra padding is great. Otherwise, schedule breaks often!

Something to Drink?. Water on the tables is a nice touch and costs nothing. Coffee and juice in the morning and sodas in the afternoon as well as snacks are a real treat. Donuts are a classic meeting food but include healthy alternatives such as bagels or bran muffins. In the afternoon, try cookies, cheese and crackers, or a vegetable tray.

Location, Location, Location. Have the meeting centrally located, so that no participant is inconvenienced. The room should be close to the restrooms and a public phone. Entrance/exit doors should be at the back of the “U” to minimize interruptions.

Paraphernalia. Flipcharts, pens, pencils, markers, note pads, post-it™ notes are useful during most meetings. If you can, use your company’s imprinted items - they boost morale and remind everyone of the organization’s common goal.

Lighting and Temperature. Know how to adjust the lights and temperature. If you know the room is usually at Ice Station Zebra, advise participants to bring a sweater.

Technology. Overhead projectors, LCD panels, copyboards, and notebook computers are being used more and more frequently. Will someone need technology on site? Who will bring it, does it work, and is there electrical and internet access? Do a dry run because Murphy’s Law prevails: What can go wrong, will go wrong!

Visit the room prior to the event. Make sure it is the best possible environment. Run through the agenda and ask yourself, “Is there anything I can do which will enhance the team members’ contributions?”

Attention to these small details can make the difference between a dull, unproductive meeting and one that is upbeat, enthusiastic, and really gets results.

A newsletter designed to facilitate discussion and share tips and techniques to help your teams to be extraordinary.

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"I have never been to a training where I have used so much information so quickly back on the job! Thanks for the wonderful training!"

Sandi Biagini, Team Facilitator
Caterpillar, Inc.

What's New at QPC Inc.

I am so excited about my upcoming trip to the National Speakers Association (NSA) Western Workshop in Honolulu, Hawaii. I was asked to organize a "chat room" - using fifteen professional facilitators to guide the discussions of several hundred professional speakers on specific topical areas of interest and best practices. Pretty Cool!

In addition, I will be facilitating a concurrent session at NSA's Western and Eastern Workshop in Atlanta entitled **Voicing Your Vision**. It's a highly interactive, mastermind session to share your vision of your preferred future and to get some great ideas on how to achieve that vision! (By the way, I was the only speaker asked to do the same program at both workshops!).

If you have called the office recently, you might have heard my latest flight of fancy: music for teams. I commissioned Chris Anthony, a gifted musician, to create some background music for teams. In addition, we created an "Extraordinary Team" theme song and reproduced Jana Stanfield's "We've Started a Conversation." It's a pretty addictive tune...and well... the whole album was a lot of fun to produce and even better to use with my teams! For more info, you can check out our website at www.qpcteam.com.

We have had the good fortune of continuing to work with some fabulous companies and associations, despite the tragedy of 9-11. My thoughts and prayers are with you for a safe and wonderful winter and spring season. Kristin

An Extraordinary Team

Congratulations to the

Williams Employee Learning & Development Team

Among ten keen challengers, the Williams Employee Learning & Development Team (ELDT) won a \$200 gift certificate as well as a marble plaque to present to the leadership at Williams.

The ELDT consists of fifteen people who demonstrate an incredible commitment to their mission and to each other. In all the teams I interviewed, this team truly practices what it preaches. From hiring diverse team members with the same values and core beliefs, providing systems that support their work (even while working in remote locations) and measuring performance and value to the business.

I talked with/mailed several of the team members who were positively "gushy" about being part of the team. Even though the "business" had been through a radical realignment, the team was absolutely upbeat about their role as a business partner. "We have faced a lot of change and criticism...and we have risen above them all by being able to rely on one another.

The team leader, Michelle Boyes is described as a "phenomenal servant leader" who inspires a participative, team environment. She wraps the work around the people with talent and desire to succeed."

For more information on the ELDT, check out our website at www.qpcteam.com/ELDT.html.

Practical Team Activities: Where Are We Going?

Where Are We Going?

To creatively demonstrate the power of a collective vision.

Time: 5 minutes

Nr. of Participants: any

Materials Required:

- ◆ Easel paper and marking pen

Ask the team to close their eyes. Then ask the team "Where are we going? Please point your finger to where you think we are going."

After everyone has pointed somewhere, ask the team to open their eyes. Many fingers might be pointed in the same general direction, but there are probably many fingers pointed all over

the room.

Ask, "What would need to happen to have everyone pointing their fingers in the same direction?"

Capture this list on an easel chart. From the list, ask the team, "What actions are you willing to take to be 'in alignment' with the vision?"

Summarize by commenting on the power of a common vision and teams. All we have to do is share the vision and our team members will know what we need to do.

If you like, continue this activity by demonstrating the power of communicating a common vision. "I envision this team needs to

go to Los Angeles next Tuesday to deliver a presentation at 10 am to the media about a specific project." Repeat the statement. Let it sink in.

Ask, "What are you thinking? What needs to be done in order to be successful in Los Angeles?" Quickly go around the room and ask what is on the top of their minds (e.g. plane tickets, putting together the presentation, what are we going to do in L.A.? etc.).

Emphasize the point that people are naturally goal-seeking, and once given a vision of the future, can figure out how to get there.

“The very idea that we should think of teamwork as an individual responsibility and an individual skill set violates decades of teaching about teams...I, of course, maintain that you should take responsibility for the whole team being successful.”

Christopher M. Avery

Author, Teamwork is an Individual Skill

From the Bookshelf



For years, I have resisted the popular notion of “there is no ‘I’ in “teamwork” because teams are a collection of individuals working toward a common goal. Each of us brings our own values and skill sets to the table. It is our choice to work together (or not) as a team.

Christopher M. Avery has captured this idea and more in his latest book, *Teamwork is an Individual Skill: Getting Work Done When Sharing Responsibility* (ISBN 1-57675-155-4). Chris suggests that individuals take responsibility for team success versus blame others. He challenges the reader to be proactive and work through team issues rather than avoid or accommodate others.

This is a perfect book for team members who have been on teams before. It will validate good team behaviors and point out areas to upgrade...in a gentle and non-threatening way. The book is easy to read with lots of stories and examples to highlight the key points.

If I Were a Carpenter *By Dakota Livesay*

After living next to each other for over 30 years, two neighboring farmers had a serious disagreement. It was a small one that grew into a major fight.

A short time later, a stranger carrying a toolbox knocked on the door of one of the neighbors. He asked, “Is there any carpentry that needs to be done on your farm?”

“As a matter of fact, there is,” replied the farmer. “My neighbor just took his tractor and dug a canal from the river along the meadow between our farms. He did it to express his anger. I’m going to do him one better. I want you to take that wood next to my barn, and build an 8-foot high fence between our farms. That way I won’t have to see him anymore.”

The farmer had to go to town, so he left the carpenter alone to do his job. When he came home that evening, the carpenter had finished the job.

To the farmer’s amazement, the carpenter hadn’t built a fence as he was instructed, but a bridge spanning the canal built by the neighbor. As the farmer approached the bridge to chastise the carpenter, his neighbor was walking across the bridge with his hand outstretched.

When the two men reached each other, the neighbor said, “You are a real friend to build a bridge after all that I have done.”

The farmer turned to thank the carpenter and saw that he had picked up his toolbox, and was walking away.

“No, wait. Come back. I have other jobs for you to do,” yelled the farmer to the carpenter.

The carpenter merely turned his head as he continued walking. “I would love to stay, but I have more bridges to build.” Build bridges, not fences.

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The Right Team Size

In larger groups, discussion is generally dominated by just a few people. “In a group of ten, typically two people won’t open their mouths,” says study leader Simon Garrod of Glasgow University. “Three people could really drive a decision through... Team members are most influenced by the dominant speakers.” Conversely, in smaller groups, team members are most influenced by those with whom they interact in the discussion.

In the study published by the American Psychological Society (Vol. 11, No 6, November 2000), Garrod and colleagues asked 150 subjects to read an article about student plagiarism, and then write their initial impressions in a questionnaire. Participants were then divided into groups of five to 10 people and asked to discuss the article before giving their opinions again.

In the smaller groups, all five people contributed to the discussion, interrupting others to have their say. But in larger groups small cliques took over, dominating discussion with long monologues. Participants in these groups were most affected by the views of these dominant few.

Garrod asserts the study results point to two different modes of communication: Small groups make decisions by establishing consensus among pairs of communicators. Large groups tend to broadcast information to all.

A facilitator [like me, Kristin Arnold] could make larger groups—such as 10 “plus”-member teams—more interactive and effective, says Garrod.

Adapted from “No consensus in big groups,” The Week, September 21, 2001.

