

Tips and techniques to improve the way your teams work

9-11 Impact on Teams

By Kristin Arnold

When I first heard the horrific news of the attack on the World Trade Center, our team (Donna, Neicy and I) was meeting to discuss several important projects. Within a few seconds of watching CNN, those projects suddenly became insignificant. In the big scheme of things, this tragedy is a “significant emotional event” for the country. Although the event occurred over a month ago, you can see how we are progressing and moving through this massive change in our lives:

Shock. For the rest of the day, our team was glued to the television. Voices were hushed and incredulous at the events. At first, we thought this had to be cruel joke akin to the “War of the Worlds.” Two Indian tenants remarked that they just couldn’t believe this would happen in “America, of all places!” We were walking around numb, shaking our heads, aghast at the world events. Alas, as we kept listening to the news, reading the newspapers, we had to acknowledge the facts.

Anger. Once the truth sank in, a flood of emotions grabbed us. Some suffered in silence, others ranted and raved, convinced that we should retaliate as soon as possible – even though we didn’t know for certain who or where! We were angry, and we just didn’t know where to focus our anger. For me, I uncharacteristically shouted at a team mate. Minutes later, I apologized for my bizarre behavior.

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Diagnose Your Team’s Sickness

By Kristin Arnold

Is something wrong with your team? Things aren’t going as well as you’d like, and you just can’t put your finger on what could be causing the problem. It’s similar to coming down with the flu. You know the symptoms all too well: a few aches and pains creep up, and then before you know it, you have a full-fledged fever!

Sick teams have symptoms that can help you diagnose the root cause of the problem. Rather than “band-aid” the symptom, treat the cause to help your team get healthy again. Watch for the following symptoms and potential prescriptions:

Confused. Team members appear bewildered and lost. They do weird things that don’t seem to contribute to the team’s success. When dazed and confused, create a conversation around the team’s “vision” or destination. Where does the team want to go? What’s the ultimate destination? Search for common agreement on the vision.

Ethically Challenged. Team members not only do weird things, but they do peculiar, questionable things that effect team success. Different individual values seem to influence team behavior. Consider having a frank discussion about what values are important to the team. Get agreement on explicit rules of behavior or “ground rules” on how to move

forward.

Scattered. If your team members are acting on their own accord, working at odds with each other, or in a haphazard fashion, you are lacking a clear strategy on how to move forward and be successful. Brainstorm different possible strategies, narrow down the list to the top three and then

discuss the “pros and cons” for each strategy. As a team, mutually agree on how to move forward.

Frustrated. Your team is annoyed by every little thing. Little things become big things. Team members may even start sniping at each other. It feels

like the team has quit smoking cigarettes and is going through nicotine withdraw! Chances are your team is suffering from a lack of resources. They just don’t have the tools to do the job. Ask the team, “What necessary resources (human talent, money, time, machinery, equipment, etc.) are we lacking? Develop a plan to access these vital resources.

Stalled. The team is moving at a snail’s pace. Rather than watch the snail writhe in a salt bath, ask each team member the “WIIFM” question (What’s In It For Me): “What would inspire you to act positively on behalf of the team?” Don’t settle for global, patronizing, motivational

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Bargain. Anger then turns into bargaining behavior in a vain effort to go back to the way things were. We want so desperately to return to our lives before the tragedy. Unfortunately, our lives will be forever altered and we must get used to increased security precautions, media coverage and other "inconveniences" that continue to remind us of September 11th.

Depression. When we realize that we can't bargain our way back to the status quo, then the grieving process kicks in. Many of us are in this phase right now. Energy is low, we aren't as productive as we once were, we spend lots of time rehashing events and possibilities. We call friends and family we haven't spoken to in years. Our minds wander. We have a hard time focusing. It seems harder to get up in the morning and even more difficult to get enthusiastic over a new project. The good news is this "fog" is necessary and normal. We must progress through this phase in order to finally accept the changes, both intellectually and emotionally.

So what does this have to do with teams? Lots. Take a look at your teams and recognize the phases each team member is going through. Dr. Ben Bissell, a leading expert in managing change and transition, believes it takes between eighteen months to two years for an individual

to work through the change cycle. So be patient and understanding of your team's emotions. Several team leaders have told me "I'm just so tired and I don't know why..." Your team may not even be aware how this catastrophe sucked the energy from an otherwise productive group.

Watch out for fellow team members who are "stuck" in denial, anger, bargaining or depression. You will be able to see the stress in a particular body part (e.g. neck and shoulders, stomach problems), breathing pace, eating pace and/or sleeping patterns.

You can help your team mates by actively listening. Start each meeting with a "how's it going?" and provide the opportunity for people to share where they are coming from. Provide as much information as possible (e.g. will we be laying off people too? How does this affect the future of the company?) because in times of change, all perceptions are distorted. Provide opportunities to contribute such as blood drives, bake sales etc.

We have a long healing cycle ahead of us. So be patient with your team mates, but still expect a reasonable level of performance. Projects still need to get done, sales need to be made, products need to be manufactured. Americans are tough, and we are going to work through this together!

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Diagnose Your Team (cont'd from page 1)

balderdash. Probe for meaningful, specific, concrete ideas. Then figure out how to tap into these stated WIIFMs. Provide the jet fuel for the team to blast forward!

Tired. Sometimes, the team just doesn't have the right talent on the team. They don't have the skills or capabilities to accomplish the mission. You can see inability by the fatigue in their faces. They are tired of trying to push the rock up the hill, only to have it fall back to the original position. Or they don't even have the strength to try. Either provide appropriate skills training or recruit the additional talent on the team.

Doubt. The team is mired in the quicksand of doubt. Can they be successful? Will they be successful? Does management really care? Allow the team to vent their issues and concerns to the team sponsor, champion or big kahuna — someone up the food chain need to acknowledge the concerns, give meaningful and genuine feedback to the team, and resolve to remove any barriers facing the team.

"We [the Criminal Investigation Bureau Project Team] are honored to receive the very first Extraordinary Work Team Award. We agreed to donate the \$200 check to CASE (Committee to Aid State Employees). This non-profit organization assists state of Missouri employees who are facing catastrophic illness by providing financial grants."

Greg Clarkston, Team Facilitator
State of Missouri, Department of Revenue

What's New at QPC Inc.

I wish I could look into my crystal ball and assure you that the world will bounce back quickly from the September 11th terrorist attacks and subsequent events. Unfortunately, I don't believe the United States will ever be the same. Our nation has heard a strong wake-up call to be more vigilant and less complacent and to move forward united. The American flag and the Pledge of Allegiance has taken on a new meaning.

Since the infamous incident, I have traveled to Baltimore for Baltimore Gas & Electric, Peoria for Caterpillar, Jefferson City for the State of Missouri, Boston and Hurricane, WV for Sunbridge Healthcare and Newberry SC for McKechnie Vehicle Components. Ironically enough, air travel has never been more pleasant. Although I have to arrive much earlier than before, I have found people to be congenial, flights depart and arrive on time, and even the busiest airports are not congested at all!

Many of you know that I am serving my final year in the Coast Guard Reserve before I will (hopefully) be able to retire. Although there are no guarantees, I doubt if I will be recalled to active duty—unless the Homeland Security Council wants me to facilitate a war-strategy meeting!

I am also pleased to announce the publication of one of my practical team activities in the October issue of the American Society for Quality (ASQ) magazine *Quality Progress*. (It first appeared in this newsletter in Fall 1998).

Take care of yourself, your family and friends and extended families during these turbulent times — Kristin

Extraordinary Team Day!

December 4, 2001 is the Second Annual Extraordinary Work Team Recognition Day

This day celebrates those teams that consistently work extraordinarily well together to produce significant results for their companies or organizations.

Team leaders, members and management "champions" are encouraged to recognize exceptional team performance. Submit your stories for a chance to win a \$200 gift certificate for the team to spend as they wish—on dinner, a limo ride, concert tickets etc. The team's organization will also receive a commemorative plaque and letter notifying them of the honor.

Last year, the State of Missouri Criminal Investigation Bureau Project Team was recognized for their extraordinary work in streamlining the referral process within the Department of Revenue.

To nominate your team, call 800.589.4733 for a nomination form, download from our website at www.qpcteam.com or submit a letter with the following information:

1. Team Name, Members and Organization/Company
2. Team Results/Accomplishments
3. What Makes This Team "Extraordinary" (Tell us the story...)
4. Why People Like To Be On This Team
5. Point of Contact Information

Submit your nomination by November 30, 2001. The

Practical Team Activities: To Build a Bridge *By Kay Freidinger*

To Build A Bridge

To demonstrate the problem-solving process and the value of teamwork.

Time: 10-15 minutes

Nr. of Participants: 4-8 per team

Materials Required:

- ◆ newspaper
- ◆ masking tape
- ◆ candy bowl/disposable bowl

Introduce the exercise by explaining that the state or local transportation department needs a new bridge design and the group has been assigned the task! The only available materials are newspa-

per and masking tape. Explain to the teams that a successful bridge must fulfill three characteristics:

1. Be able to stand up on its own
2. Be wide enough at the base for the bowl of candy to slide through (like a boat going under a bridge)
3. Be strong enough to support the weight of the bowl of candy (like a car traveling over the bridge)

Once the bridge is built, the team can share the candy!

Allow the team five to ten minutes to build their bridges. When done, compare each bridge to

each measure for success. (Have some fun with this part!)

Debrief what worked and what could have worked better.

- ◆ What process, if any, did you use to "design" the bridge?
- ◆ Who emerged as the group leader (s)? What characteristics did the leader(s) display?
- ◆ Did everyone participate? If not, why not?
- ◆ Describe the group dynamic.

Tie the comments into how the team might be able to apply the learnings to the team's work.

*"This book is not about personality quirks;
it's about spirit, attitude, and enthusiasm."*

Jim Miller

The Corporate Coach

From the Bookshelf



I confess. I like to hang out at Barnes and Noble, sipping a Mocha Grande and perusing the business book section. Every once in a while, I stumble upon a hidden treasure in the bargain book section. *The Corporate Coach* (ISBN 0-312-09262-8) is truly a gift to anyone who has to "coach" or lead a team.

Even though I am not a big fan of the sports team analogy, author and CEO of Miller Business Systems, Jim Miller shares his insights, stories and practical advice on how to inspire teamwork. Jim has built a hugely successful company through teamwork, emphasizing customer service, empowerment and good ol' common sense.

In a "down-to-earth" style, Jim shares oodles and oodles of great, easy-to-implement ideas to create and sustain extraordinary teams. I kept marking page after page with post-it flags to tab one great idea after another. At the end of each chapter, Jim summarizes his key points with a "coach's checklist." For example, at the end of the "Create Small Wins" chapter:

- ◆ Encourage employees to believe in themselves. Do everything in your power to publicize their successes.
- ◆ Let everyone recognize good work. Every single employee at your company should be able to praise—in some kind of formal way—all of the other people he or she works with.
- ◆ Have the boss give the award, whenever possible. Praise from a peer is good; recognition from top management is better.
- ◆ Praise them at home, too. Make employees heroes at home by sending letters, flowers, tickets to a ball game, or other presents to the house.

Team Player of the Week

Imagine a small group of people clapping, singing and strutting down the halls of a nursing facility in Hurricane, West Virginia. Nurses, assistants, housekeepers, dieticians and staff personnel join the parade until a swarm of employees descend on the "Team Players of the Week." The noise crescendos to a version of the "Chi-Chi's Birthday Song":

We're all here to thank you for a job well done.

For all the special things you do, every day at Sun!

Team players are presented with balloons and a Wal-Mart gift card while photographed with the facility administrator, Rodney Hannah.

What makes these team players so special? At Sun-Bridge Healthcare of Putnam, the Recruitment, Selection and Retention (RSR) team wanted to honor those employees who go above and beyond on the job. Each week, they honor anyone (the eventual goal is everyone) who 1) doesn't "call off" to be unable to work their designated shift 2) works extra shifts when needed, 3) is flexible with their work assignments, 4) helps outside their work assignment, 5) works a double shift as needed and 6) doesn't "BMG" (Bitch, Moan, or Groan) without bringing up a solution.

It's an interesting phenomenon: what gets measured gets done. At Sunbridge, each week, the number of team players is increasing. Teamwork is improving. More solutions are being brought to the table. Rodney emphasized that "cutting out the BMGs goes a long way to improving everybody's attitude."

Handicaps or Assets? *By Dakota Livesay*

A young boy who had lost his left arm in an accident decided to study judo in spite of his missing arm. He took lessons from an old Japanese Judo instructor. During three months of training the master only taught him one move.

"Sensei," the boy asked, "Shouldn't I learn more moves?"

"This is the only move you will ever need to know," replied the sensei.

Several months later, the sensei entered the boy in his first tournament. Even though some of the matches were difficult, the boy, using that one move, won the tournament.

On the way home, the boy and the sensei reviewed each match of the tournament. Finally the boy asked the question that had been on his mind since he won the championship match. "Sensei, how did I win the tournament with only one move?"

"You won for two reasons," answered the sensei. "First, you have mastered one of the most difficult throws in all of judo. And second, the only known defense for that move is for your opponent to grab your left arm."

We all have handicaps. Some are greater than others. Look for ways to shift your handicaps in to assets.

