

Turning People On to Teamwork

Part Six of Six

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This is the last article in the series on teams. The first five articles explored what it means to be a team, the five levels of teamwork, how to build performance, the four major team player types, and the four stages of team development.

It's important that leaders set the proper context – the atmosphere – for teamwork. Remember, team work is not an end to itself. It is built around the need to accomplish something. A common purpose, mutual accountability, interdependence, and trust serve as the foundation to building a strong team.

In building a strong team, it's vital that in the early stage that people learn about themselves. They need to understand their own strengths and weaknesses and what they need to do to respond to the latter. They must develop their own personal visions of what they want to achieve in their lives and how they're going to realize this. And a key component of this is people taking responsibility for their personal growth and development. This is achieved best by adopting a lifelong learning philosophy, one in which the team member strives to continually improve himself or herself.

Following this approach will enable a team's members to transcend to *team learning*. In essence, this is not just about sharing information. More importantly, it's about the existing boundaries among team members. Interpersonal learning takes place when the members must depend on one another for their own rewards. Of course, this raises such issues as resolving conflict effectively, solving problems collaboratively, and running productive meetings.

Turning people on to teamwork means creating those conditions that allow people to meet their personal needs by performing the work themselves. Instead of motivation, what drives people forward is *commitment*, in which their energy is directed towards a goal. To build commitment is less a matter of changing the person as it is creating the right conditions.

The team leader requires special skills if he or she is to be successful in fostering team learning and in setting boundaries for the team. These essential skills include: leading the team towards creating a common vision and team goals, communicating clearly and concisely, running productive meetings, and solving problems quickly, as well as anticipating them.

A great deal has been written on leadership, to the point where it is used loosely without a clear understanding. The distinction between a leader and a manager can be explained this way: One is *given* management responsibilities – power and control over people and things. Leadership, on the other hand, must be *earned*.

In a team setting, this requirement to *earn* the privilege of being the team leader cannot be overstated. The leader's purpose is to *inspire* and *mobilize* the team to higher levels of performance. The leader achieves this by *enabling* the team's members. And this can only be done if the leader gives up *control*. This is one of the most difficult challenges many managers will experience in their careers. Yet it is essential if the members of a team are to assume greater responsibility and ownership for their work.

Abraham Maslow made this poignant comment on control and authority and one that should be heeded: *When the only tool I have is a hammer, I tend to treat everyone like a nail.*

Don't forget that an effective team isn't just concerned with getting work done but also with *how* it gets done. *Process* (how decisions are made) is critical. Strong teams with solid leaders don't compromise or vote. They operate by consensus, guided by their common vision and purpose.