

## TEAM-BUILDING

“There can be no friendship without confidence, and no confidence without integrity.”

– Samuel Johnson

Just because you have a group of people in an organization does not necessarily mean you have a team. Team members are able to work together to reach common goals, support each other in their endeavors, and can do more as a group than alone. Building a team, then, involves more than simply gathering a group of people into the same room twice a month. It involves learning about each other, establishing common goals and developing the basic elements of trust, respect and understanding.

There are several programs designed to encourage team-building, such as ropes courses and challenge courses. These can be extremely beneficial in bringing your members together and establishing a sense of trust within the group, particularly if it is a new group of people or the beginning of your activity year. There are also ways you can build your team at any stage in your relationship within the confines of your meeting room. Read on for a few ideas:

- Be a visionary. That is, your entire group should be. Set a vision (goal) for the future together; one that everyone agrees on. Work together to create programs and events that support this vision. Each person should feel a sense of responsibility towards accomplishing it.
- Encourage communication. Everyone in your group should know what is going on. Offer an open forum in your meetings for members to discuss their progress on activities. Do not hide things from your group.
- Appreciate diversity. Help your team identify and benefit from the different ideas and resources a diverse team possesses. Having a diverse group can be one of the most beneficial aspects of your team.
- Generate a supportive environment. Be available to help your teammates when they need it. Do not focus only on what you are responsible for – if you help others, chances are they will help you when you need it.
- Set out a welcome mat. Help new members feel welcome and appreciated. Give them insight to the group and encourage them to participate in meetings and events. Find out what talents they can offer the group and what the group can offer them.
- Make a difference. Just having your name on the member listing does not mean you are “earning your keep.” Each member should make a commitment to contribute value to the group.

Be social. Do some social events to facilitate getting to know one another. When working together, sometimes people focus on the task at hand more than each other. It is difficult to have group trust if the members do not know each other.

- Establish ground rules. Work as a group to generate rules which apply to all members, such as not criticizing others, only agreeing to something if you believe in it (in other words, not just to make others happy), operating punctually, accepting and supporting the group vision.
- Carry your weight. Handle your responsibilities appropriately. Remember that what you do (or don't do) affects others. Be certain that each person is clear on what they need to do so they can uphold their duties as well.

Now that you know some ways to encourage a cohesive team, following are some characteristics of an effective team. How does your team measure up?

- Problem-solving is a group process. The team expends energy toward finding solutions to problems rather than arguing or competing.
- Respect is apparent. Members show interest in what their teammates say, listen when others speak and show genuine respect for each other.
- Mistakes are handled appropriately. Rather than placing blame, mistakes are viewed as learning experiences.
- Roles are balanced. Each member has as much accountability as the next. One person is not responsible for everything.
- Problems are not hidden. Members are not afraid to mention problems and request help when needed.
- Commitment. Members are willing to commit themselves to action and follow through on these commitments.

There are several books that provide exercises your team can perform to build trust and respect. The basic guidelines listed here should serve as your foundation and the exercises will enhance your relationships even further.

### **Reference:**

Pfeiffer, J.W. (1991). *The Encyclopedia of Team-Building Activities*. San Diego:

Pfeiffer & Company, Inc.

**Related Leader Readers:** Ice Breakers; Goal Setting

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