

Building Strong Team Leadership

Eight Tactics That Build Strong Team Leadership

1. "Enhance the team's knowledge of itself
2. Allow teams to gel
3. Measure the team against collective goals
4. Create team commitments
5. Establish a clear decision-making process
6. Identify mutual expectations and interdependencies
7. Use coaching to drive team performance
8. Manage team conflict (Weiss & Molinaro, 2005, p. 171.)"

Reference: Weiss, D.S.; & Molinaro, V. (2005). *The leadership gap: building leadership capacity for competitive advantage*. Mississauga, Ontario: John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd.

Let's face it... the idea of working in teams or groups is going nowhere! Whether you find yourself working in a group at school, or you are working in an interdisciplinary team in your job, teams are just about everywhere. It is important to know as leaders then, how we can best build our skills to provide strong team leadership. Weiss and Molinaro (2005) have provided us with a great 8 step plan to accomplish this goal. Let's examine these steps more deeply and consider how they might be applied.

First, a leader must enhance the team's knowledge of itself. When we work with youth, we come with the knowledge that they are inquisitive beings with a naturally curious nature. After all, if you spend any time with children you know that their thirst for knowledge is often manifested in their rapid fire questions. As a leader, we must foster inquisitiveness within our teams. In doing so we promote a culture of self discovery that allows team members to evaluate themselves as members, the team leader, and the team as a whole. This knowledge can plant the seed of flexibility and promote an "adjust on the fly" mentality that will help keep the processes the team uses, as well as, the products it produces fresh and efficient.

As leadership educators, we acknowledge the importance of team development. As people, we know how difficult it is to go into a new situation and feel immediately comfortable with the individuals involved or the situation in general. Think back to a team in which you participated, and at the first meeting you walked into a room where you might not have known anyone or maybe only a few people. You may have approached a single person, or small group of people, just to get your feet wet before jumping right into the situation. Maybe you sat back and observed for awhile before approaching someone. Or maybe you jumped right in and found a large group to talk with and felt immediately at ease. In teams, we might be leading people that cover all of these different approaches. So, in our role as team leaders, we must allow our teams to come together and form their own identity, at a reasonable pace. While this process might involve some growing pains, it is the growing pains and the process of working through them that develop strong long-lasting partnerships. Influencing positive work situations within a team provides for a better work environment and product.

Are you someone that keeps a list of short or long term goals to remind yourself what you are working towards, or do you know anyone who does? — They could be retirement goals, or work related goals, or

personal goals to which an individual aspires. Setting team goals is the first process a team should undertake. This step provides a road map for team members and keeps people on the same page, establishing each team member's role and defining the end product. By establishing team goals, each member understands that they are to commit to accomplishing the goals, and in turn, the goals serve as a benchmark that these teams can be measured against. Using goals as evaluation criteria keeps the evaluation process transparent and unwanted extraneous criteria to a minimum. In close relationship to what we just discussed, is the next tenant of strong team leadership, creating team commitments. Throughout the process of goal setting, by definition those goals become mini team commitments. However, some teams may want to take that a step farther and develop additional items about which they feel strongly. Those can be an array of different types of things including rules or norms for working as a group, team environment, communication processes, etc. Some teams even use commitments to develop a social contract that involves a team mission and/or vision statement. By encouraging the creation of these commitments, as leaders, we keep all members vested in our products and processes, and improve team cohesion.

Have you ever turned on the television and come across a program being broadcast in a language that you can't understand? You probably felt pretty lost. Maybe you tried to figure out what was going on by the backgrounds and non verbal cues provided by the actors. Or maybe you just got frustrated and ultimately changed the channel. This is the best analogy for what happens within teams when the decision making process is not clear. Team members cannot be expected to fully participate in a process which they do not understand and cannot be a part. By keeping your decision making process clear, all team members are offered a chance to participate, thusly increasing your idea pool and your chances of finding new, innovative solutions to problems on which you're working.

I've talked a lot about the need for transparency within teams. Transparency allows a team leader to engage all team members in a process in which there are no "hidden doors". Another component of this transparency occurs when team leaders encourage their teams to identify mutual expectations. Mutual expectations, much like goals, keep people on the same proverbial page. Many people are probably familiar with needing to identify expectations to which they will be held, maybe by a supervisor. However within teams, leaders must not only identify those expectations to which they will hold the members, but must also work with their members to identify expectations to which they will be held accountable. In that way both leader and member have a road map for success, and no surprises will be waiting around a corner.

Has anyone ever heard that you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar? That used to be one of my grandma's favorite sayings. When I would hear that I always knew it was her way of telling someone, usually my grandpa that he needed to change his tone. I think of this oft used phrase when I hear the next tenant of good team leadership, and that is to use coaching as a way to drive performance of your team. No one likes to feel as though they are constantly being told what to do. When you adopt a coaching style, you not only guide your team, but you also offer constructive criticism and, more importantly, encouragement and praise. Your team will thank you for it!

The last key to strong team leadership is to manage conflict. No one ever said that conflict is easy to deal with, or that you should jump right in and be excited about it. However, in openly recognizing conflict within the team setting, you are opening the doors to a clear communication channel and eventual

resolution. Team leaders should become well versed in a variety of proven conflict management and resolution techniques to help mentor team members through conflict situations. Recognizing and resolving conflict are key in keeping team cohesion.

Eight simple techniques that can improve team leadership. How can you take these eight principles and apply them to your own leadership situation?