Enterprising Rural Families™

Team Building in Real Life

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I've rarely met someone who DOESN'T value team work. Have you?

How often have you listed "team player" as one of you admirable qualities on a resume or job application? When you asked your boss for a promotion to a management position, did you highlight all the experience you have in leading "teams"? As you describe the work you do on a board of directors or committee, do you talk about the "team work" it requires to accomplish your goals? The last time you hired someone, how much did you discuss how your top candidate would fit into your office's "team" environment?

There is a lot of talk of teamwork going on in our businesses and organizations. But SAYING we're part of a team and actually BEING a team are two different things. We all value teamwork. But, we often try to side-

Tip of the Month

Failure—A Learning Tool

Henry Ford said, "Failure is only the opportunity to begin again more intelligently." Fear of the leader's response to a failure can ensure an enterprise misses an opportunity to innovate. Great innovation, like great people, typically is not born, it is the result of trial and error.

John Maxwell writes the difference between average people and achieving people is their perception of and response to failure.

If an organization's employees are to help spot existing and pending failures and to learn from them, the leaders must make it safe to speak up. Only leaders can create and reinforce a culture that counteracts the blame game and makes people feel both comfortable with and responsible for surfacing and learning from failures.

Frame the work accurately. People need a shared understanding of the kinds of failures that can be expected to occur in a given work context (routine production, complex operations, or innovation) and why openness and collaboration are important for surfacing and learning from them. Accurate framing detoxifies failures.

Embrace Messengers. Those who come forward with bad news, ques-

tions, concerns, or mistakes should be heard and rewarded not shot. Celebrate and appreciate the value of the news first and then figure out how to fix the failure and learn from it.

Acknowledge Limits. Being open about what you, the leader, don't know, mistakes you've made, and what you can't get done alone will encourage others to do the same.

Invite Participation. Ask for observations and ideas and create opportunities for people to detect and analyze failures and promote intelligent experiments. Inviting participation helps defuse resistance and defensiveness.

Set Boundaries and Hold People Accountable. People feel psychologically safer when leaders are clear about what acts are blameworthy. And there must be consequences. But if someone is punished or fired, tell those directly and indirectly affected what happened and why it warranted the consequence.

In a productive failure, you don't achieve your objective, but you come away with new knowledge and understanding that will increase your chances of success on the next try. A non-productive success occurs when you achieve your objective, but you're not sure what it was you did right. You can build on productive failures. You can't build on a non-productive success.

Spotting big, painful expensive failure is easy.   Possible failures that are being overlooked, ignored or left for someone else to discover, need to be brought into the organization's conversations. The goal is to become an organization that approaches failure as a learning tool and a stepping stone to success.

step the team-building it requires to ACTUALLY be a team.

Team building is a phrase that might conjure up images of off-site retreats with campy games, bonding activities and forced-fun outings. While they may fill time and even be enjoyable for participants, it's often hard to see how they translate into tangible benefit to the organization. If you are like many other professionals, you think that team building has little to do with what goes on in the 'real world.'

Real team building is more than games or activities that mimic what a team could look like. Real-world team building isn't abstract, and isn't just talk. It actually puts the concept of being a team into action.

Team building means performing and practicing being a team in as close to real-world situations as possible. Team building involves resolving real, tangible issues to help your team perform better. Team-building requires addressing work processes and interpersonal dynamics that cause friction or gridlock. Team-building means developing and standardizing behaviors that create trust in the people you work alongside.

Would a football team go into a conference room and discuss next weekend's game as their sole source of preparation? Of course not – at least, not if they hope to win! They would get out on the field, run actual plays, take actual hits, and perform in the closest real-world situation possible.

Team building means practicing being a team and performing as a team in as-close-to-real-world-situations as possible. Each time a football team is practicing, they're team building. Our organizations and workplaces should follow the football team example. We can't sit inside a retreat center or listen to a speaker to become a better team; we have to get out there and practice how it's done.

Here are some ideas:
•   Do you know of a process in your business that constantly causes hang-ups? Get your team together and do a practice session, getting someone to 'role play' the client or customer. As you go through the steps, have everyone identify what creates problems or bottlenecks, and suggest what could be improved. Discuss suggestions and implement one or two

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--Ben Baldwin
Founder and Co-CEO of ClearFit

that seem viable. It may take some trial-and-error, but 'scrimmaging' through problems can do wonders to increase your overall efficiency.

• Is there a gap between the organization's goals, and what people are actually doing? Don't be surprised if team members are out of alignment with group goals or objectives. We often take for granted that everyone is 'using the same play book.' Instead, dedicate time at staff or board meetings to discuss the organization's mission, vision and goals, and have individuals list specific ways he or she upholds that mission in order to create alignment.

• Have you noticed interpersonal friction among team members? Interpersonal problems are one of the biggest barriers to success. Most coaches know that issues among teammates are never left in the locker room; they carry over to the field and sabotage the game. Instead of allowing friction to fester and grow, create accountability for behaviors that hurt team performance. Role model desired performance behaviors by addressing real situations in real time, setting standards for individual behaviors, offering feedback, and holding team members accountable. Effective team building doesn't require an off-site retreat, abstract activities, or inspirational speakers to accomplish these real-world goals. Instead, effective team building requires time and honesty to discuss relevant issues and practice actual solutions. These real-world team building sessions, when done consistently and intentionally, will certainly lead your team to a win!