

THE EXCHANGE

DISPROVING THE #1 PROBLEM WITH TEAMS

By Kenneth E. Ebel, CQE, CQA, QSLA

In the mid-70s, Quality Circles began to be a topic of discussion in the US, and our first real taste of teams in business. From there we had improvement teams, work teams, self-managing teams, design teams, and leadership teams, just to mention a few. Through it all, there has been one main reason touted by senior managers against teams: THEY COST TOO MUCH!

To be sure, sometimes teams excessively waste resources. This is especially true before the people learn to function effectively on a team, and continues to be a weakness until the organization's systems and culture are changed to support a team environment. Consider that on a team of 10, each time a person is 30 minutes late or argues their position for 30 minutes, it costs the organization 5 hours of payroll plus opportunity costs, and creates interpersonal barriers that impede progress in the future. (Actually, based on my experience, this is the norm in most companies – even though TLC has been able and ready to provide permanent and positive change.)

However, to reach the conclusion that teams cost "Too Much" requires a comparison to the BENEFITS. Just as there has been one persistent obstacle, there has been one overriding benefit: Quality of Decision. Sure, there are other benefits such as enhanced employee satisfaction and reduced turn-over, and frequently, even enhanced, customer satisfaction and a reduction in the number of problems because effective teams have pride in their work and feel ownership of their process. But, the bottom line is that the Quality of



Decisions made in a business has a direct impact on profit.

Now for the tough part – proving that team decisions are superior to individual decisions. Of course we could cite Andrew Carnegie's team that was made famous by Hall in his book on the Master Mind, and the wealth that it created for each member of the team.

Unfortunately, abstract discussions and empirical data are great for enhancing knowledge, but tend to fail when combating an entrenched perception. No, we need a personal experience that provides significant professional reward and that provides the proof as a byproduct of the experience.

Consider becoming an examiner for the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award or your state's quality award. Besides experiencing what makes a business great, you will have an epiphany regarding the benefit of team decision-making (mine was provided by the Georgia Oglethorpe Award). The process produces the epiphany because each team member is required to evaluate the applicant individually against a set of questions, create detailed comments (usually over 130), and grade the applicant based on the comments. Then, the team meets and reaches consensus on the comments and the grade, prepares for and performs the onsite assessment, and reaches consensus on the final recommendations and detailed report.

During such an experience, even professional business evaluators and successful business leaders become stunned by the gap between his/her individual conclusions and the team's consensus based conclusions. Sure, the quality of the decision

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What Our Clients Are Saying

(Referring to Talk Is NOT Cheap)"One of the best looking books I've ever seen!"

Dave Sposito, Spokane WA

(Two years after training)"Every day I think about something I learned in this course."

Don Huffman, Chattanooga TN



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LOOKING AHEAD:

- ◆ The October issue of **The Exchange** will focus on improving your listening skills.
- ◆ Get those questions ready! Next month look for how you can contribute to our articles.
- ◆ Now is the time to plan your Fall Retreat! Call 1-888-BECAUSE or visit www.talklisten.com/retreat.



Think not that thy word
and thy word alone must
be right.

Sophocles

When you come to a fork
in the road, take it.

Yogi Berra



To learn more about
it, click here!

Disproving the #1 Problem with Teams, continued

is influenced by the process. However, by far the greatest impact comes from combining the experience, knowledge, and energy of the individuals to create synergy and produce enhanced understanding and creativity in each member.

Prove it to yourself.

"LET ME TALK THIS OVER WITH MY TEAM"

When this was spoken fifteen years ago, it was little more than a negotiating technique. It was often used as a ruse to giving a salesperson (called salesman back then) indirect rejection. We've come a long way. Now, corporate America is learning the benefits of getting employees involved in the decision making process. Just what are the benefits of talking it over with the team?

- Increased job satisfaction. With unemployment low, this can be important to keep good people.
- Increased quality in products and service. Who knows better than the people who perform the job daily?
- Decreased absenteeism. People who are happier come to work more often.
- Increased harmony between workers. Target Training International reports that 85% of firings and resignations are due to behavioral incompatibilities. When employees talk matters over and reach consensus, they learn to value each other.

So before you make that next decision, talk it over with the team. True success in business is more like football than golf – it takes a team.

Just a Reminder...

1998 was supposed to be a rebuilding year for the football team of The University of Tennessee. The team did not concur. They decided to be "a blue-collar team with no stars." They won all 13 games and became the national champs for the first time in over 4 decades.

A team of no stars makes for a group of people who rely on each other, communicate with each other, and encourage each other. No-stars becomes a galaxy of stars. Look at your team and envision hundreds of stars shimmering in the night sky. Now, don't make a wish; make a plan. Call TLC if you want your team to shine!



Remember to . . .

If you are a current or previous client who has received individual coaching or small group training, remember to:

- ◆ Realize that introverts will be less likely to share ideas in a new team. Call upon them.
- ◆ Use brainstorming to gather a lot of ideas quickly
- ◆ Review the information on the roles team members play (Creator, Advancer, Refiner, and Executor)
- ◆ Call or send your trainer an email when you have a question. That is part of our pledge to bring you permanent and positive change.

WHEN NOT TO MAKE DECISIONS BY TEAM

Decision making via the team approach is not always recommended. Here are some times to avoid the "Let's talk it over and come to a general consensus":

- The fire alarm goes off without prior warning.
- You have a car full of hungry people and only 30 minutes to eat.
- A customer calls and says they have \$50,000.00 to spend but they need to be billed today and pay you tomorrow to meet their grant deadline.
- A one-hour meeting is in its fifth hour.
- The airline miraculously bumps your party of 4 to first class seating.
- You're on "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" and you are positive of your final answer.
- You answer the phone at work and a local radio station says you will win a free lunch for your entire office if you can name the first President of the United States in ten seconds.

Quick Tips:



- To speed the consensus process, make sure all members have the information they need to make a decision.
- Getting your people off location helps to reduce distractions that hinder group decisions.
- Do not take a vote. Team decisions are best when all can buy in. Spend the extra time and do it right.

OFF THE CUFF

By Vincent Ivan Phipps, B.S.



How many of your team's decisions are made by considering everyone's input? Behavioral style statistics show that 54% of the population is introverted. That means in a team of 10 people, 5 or 6 will remain

quiet while the others do all of the talking. In other words, only 5 people tend to make the decisions for a team of 10!

When a team meets, often it is made up of introverts and extroverts. The introverts mostly are the quiet ones doing the listening and taking notes while the extroverts are blabbering away making off the cuff remarks. "Off the cuff" is a term used when someone says something quickly, seemingly without thinking (of course no one in your office does that!).

The origin of "off the cuff" dates back to a method developed by Old English bartenders. At the end of a night of libations, large tabs were the norm. Bartenders in Old English taverns became noted for being able to calculate the totals instantly! Their secret was that the bartenders deliberately wore starched white shirts with wide cuffs (look at pictures of old pubs and you can still see the wide cuffed shirts!). Written on the cuffs were each patron's initials and their drink count. When a person asked, "So what do I owe you?", the bartender could immediately respond with the total simply by reading it off their cuff, or, for larger tabs, reading from their sleeve!

Although it seemed like the bartenders were just shouting out numbers, they took the time to accurately write them down! When making decisions as a team, resist the temptation to say off the cuff remarks. Take the time to pause and think before speaking. It can increase the effectiveness of your answer and eventually lead to better team decisions.

THE 12 FINDERS OF FACT

By Ben Cairns, M.A.

The other eleven jurors entered the room all talking at once. The case was an aggravated car jacking. "Hold on!" I said, "in order to give this man his fair trial, we need to follow a process beginning with electing a jury foreman!" It was my first time in a jury, and because I spoke up first, I found myself quickly elected foreman.

Several people felt very differently on some of the key points at the beginning of the deliberation. I facilitated the group dialogue throughout the exhaustive process of fairly examining and reaching a unanimous vote on each of the case elements. Our jury agreements included being open, a presumption of innocence, and respect for the process. We also agreed to be open-minded toward each other and to keep emotions on "cool." The evidence and testimony was discussed along with each juror's viewpoints and their reasoning. There was a lot of enlightenment that day, including how people from different segments of society are treated and perceived. In the end we reached a firm consensus.

When I stood to deliver the verdict, I looked squarely at the defendant knowing in my heart that he had a fair trial. Twelve reasonable people spent several intense hours discussing every aspect of his case. There was absolutely no doubt about his guilt.

About a month later I ran into one of the detectives who had testified in the case. He reported that the man we had sent to prison was also being prosecuted for several other serious crimes, including a brutal rape and murder. The jury made the right decision, so hearing about his other crimes brought no relief. I was just glad that we twelve jurors had followed the spirit and letter of the law and given that man his fair day in court.

The reason that our justice system uses a group of people to decide certain types of cases is that groups of people are often capable of making better decisions than individuals. The system has been developed to include agreements about how we interact and what presumptions we are allowed to bring into the discussion.

It is the same with your team. If you have a defined objective and some clear guidelines and rules about how you make decisions, you are capable of making better decisions. Groups usually take more time than individuals, and certainly cost more. Clarify if a group or an individual will make the best decision. If it's worth spending the time and money, make sure the process is productive!

If you would like to create a team in your workplace that makes more effective decisions, look into TLC's **Meetings That Matter** training module. During the one-day training your team will recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses, define meeting roles and responsibilities, learn how to save time in meetings, and complete the process of establishing guidelines and rules specific to your team.



Take time to deliberate; but when the time for action arrives, stop thinking and go in.

Andrew Jackson

Make every decision as if you owned the whole company.

Robert Townsend

When the van pulled into the only remaining vacant campsite, everyone jumped out and began to work at a feverish pace.

After completely unloading the vehicle and setting up the tent, two kids rushed off to gather firewood while the other two set up the camp and stove and began setting out the ingredients for dinner.

"Gee" commented a fellow at the neighboring campsite, "you sure get some teamwork out of your family. I never saw anything like it."

"I have a system," the father confided. "No one gets to go to the bathroom until camp is set up."



When nobody around you seems to measure up, it's time to check your yardstick.

Bill Lemley

TLC establishes long-term relationships with our clients. If we have helped you or if you believe our approach to change would work for someone you know, please communicate with us by email [tlc@talklisten.com] or phone [1-888-232-2873]. We work with individuals and groups on the following subject areas: attitude, listening, body language, voice, leadership, compliments and corrections, behavioral style, teamwork, effective meetings, public speaking, accent reduction and much more!

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CONSENSUS IS NOT A PRETTY WORD

By Beverly Inman-Ebel, CEO

I'm sure it has a lot to do with my educational background in Speech Pathology because some words just don't sound good. Take the word, "consensus." It has far too many sibilant sounds. Trust me. You would not want to pronounce this word over a microphone. Try saying it ten times quickly....See what I mean?

I guess words are like people. Sometimes the beauty is inside. Consensus is an all-inclusive word. It means no one is ignored or left out. Everyone is heard and has a chance to be included on the decision. My definition of consensus is that everyone can and will support the decision. Consensus is a team builder.

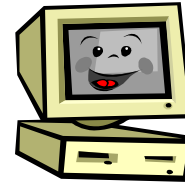
It works great because one does not have to be ecstatic about the decision; there just needs to be enough discussion that you can live with it cheerfully. It teaches people to more wisely choose their battles. It fosters patience and open mindedness. Consensus is cohesion.

Consensus is not compromise. It is not caving in or giving up. Rather, it is staying in the loop to ensure you understand and that others understand your concerns. The result is most often a blending of ideas, that make for a stronger and wiser decision. Consensus builds confidence.

How does one achieve consensus? At the beginning of a meeting, let everyone know that the decision will need to be supported by all. Inform them that decision by consensus means they have to be able to live with it cheerfully. After a thorough discussion, ask who is unable to support this decision as it stands. Each person objecting must state their concern(s) and then the group is asked to discuss and find solutions or alterations/additions to the decision. No one leaves until consensus is reached.

Just like it was tough to repeat the word ten times rapidly in succession, achieving consensus takes time. Most worthwhile things do. If you don't have the resources to fix a poor decision, invest in the right decision. Consensus, it may not be a pretty word, yet it is a pretty great idea. Include others in your decisions, and live your dreams.

E-COMMUNICATION



One of the key hallmarks of communicatively competent people is their ability to anticipate how the other person is likely to perceive and react to their communication. This is true in person, on the telephone, and with email.

The two dimensions of communication are content and relation. The content dimension is *what* is said, and the relation dimension is *how* it is said. When you say "that is a great idea," the relational dimension lets the other person know if you are serious, excited, or sarcastic.

In person it's easy to see the body language, hear the intonations and accentuation in the voice, and to ask questions if there is any uncertainty. On the telephone, the ability to read body language is lost. At least the communication receiver can listen to *how* the message is delivered, and can ask questions before reacting.

Even though email is instantaneous, it is stripped almost completely of the relational aspect. There is no body language, the accents normally added so easily with the voice are replaced by punctuation. However, as any regular email user knows, many people omit most of the punctuation. Questions can be asked, but it may be a while before an answer is received.

The bottom line with email is that you are sending a variety of implicit messages even if you do not mean to. If the receiver thinks that you meant to be sarcastic when you said "that is a great idea," that's how they will take it. The person they forward the message to may have a different reaction. You cannot defend or revise email once it is gone.

Here is some advice. Send only messages you would be willing to have forwarded. For important messages, place them in hold for at least an hour. Reread them after emotions have cooled or have someone you trust proof them. Hit "send" only when you're sure. If the content is too hot for other eyes, or if it could possibly be misunderstood, a telephone call or better yet a personal meeting will more effectively convey your intended message, and will avoid misunderstanding.

Remember to build teamwork with C.A.R.E. by sending effective email communications. Sometimes it is so easy to sting another person with a barbed email. Resist the temptation and take the higher road. The view is always better there.