

# THE EXCHANGE

This issue's featured subject is "Teamwork."

## RISE AND BE RECOGNIZED!

Career advancement is an important result of doing your job well. If you aspire to be a leader, there are some things that you can do to rise and be recognized. Here are some tips from people who have become leaders:

1. **Make a habit of establishing clarity on expectations and outcomes.** It's a simple rule of economics and leadership; find out what is wanted and needed, and provide it. Ask confirming questions to establish expectations before you start working.
2. **Speak up.** According to Psychologist Oscar Bruce, social extroversion (the ability to speak up) is strongly associated with success in business. People will pay attention to others who demand it. Command attention by speaking up when it counts.
3. **Take responsibility.** Even if it means a temporary setback for you personally, taking responsibility for your own actions and mistakes is a respected part of the learning curve. Do not take responsibility for the mistakes of others in order to "smooth things over." Be accountable for your own actions and do it in a timely fashion.
4. **Be direct with non-performers.** Even when the message hurts, people with integrity respect others who hold them accountable. Do this in private and early enough so that the other person can still do their share. Encourage them to create a solution by asking questions or co-create solutions if your opinion is welcomed or invited.
5. **Run effective short meetings.** Respect time, resources, and people. Use them wisely and you'll be seen as someone who gets things done effectively.
6. **Loop communication above, beside, and below.** Keep others informed of timelines and developments. There is a fine line between informing and over-

informing, so determine how much information people want or need. Looping is part of follow-through.

7. **Avoid complaining and negativism.** Powerless people carp, condemn, and complain. Focus on facts and objective information, as well as solutions. Avoid the urge to vent in front of team members because they'll lose respect for you, even if they like to vent, too.
8. **Delegate effectively.** Get others to do appropriate parts of the overall task to maximize your efficiency and involve others. Leaders delegate, even when it might get done faster if they did it themselves. Learn how to motivate people to do things.
9. **Get "buy-in."** Make sure that others understand and agree with the process and tasks. You don't want to encounter difficulty because people drag their feet or otherwise sabotage the team effort. Interact with people to get buy-in. Talk with them. Ask questions. Listen. When appropriate, include their input in the action plans.
10. **Communicate with confidence.** Prepare in your mind to be in control and to know what you are doing. Be direct and inclusive. Use body language like eye contact, upright posture, a confident stride, a firm handshake, and good listening skills to send the right message. Avoid rambling or hesitantly thinking out loud. Be economical in your speech. Know what you need to say, say it, and shut up.
 

Leaders learn, in part, by making mistakes. You'll slip and forget some of the above pointers. Pay attention. If you want to lead, you have to be more aware of what you are doing. Learn from your mistakes and the mistakes of others. Be accountable, and when you rise to be recognized, share your success with others!



## NOVEMBER 2002

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### LOOKING AHEAD:

- ◆ The December issue of *The Exchange* will focus on Listening.

### LOOKING BACK:

- ◆ For previous editions of *The Exchange*, go to our [back issues](#).
- ◆ Re-read the [09/2000 edition: Making Decisions as a Team](#).

## What Our Clients Are Saying

"Thanks for a wonderful seminar. I have already heard A LOT of positive feedback. In fact, not ONE negative word!! From our crowd, that is a real compliment."

Ann Hale, Morristown TN



## KEEPING YOUR TEAM IN THE LOOP

At TLC, we decide as a team the themes for our monthly newsletters, including what topics will be covered within a theme. Two days before this issue of "Teambuilding" was to be sent to the editor, Melissa Smith, a very funny thing happened in our office.



Our three-story office building has a burglar alarm system. The last team member to leave and the first to arrive needs to set and release this alarm system. As with most machines, there are sometimes malfunctions. When this happens, the person needs to locate the key to the secure room and reset the system. This key is located in an adjacent room. Our CEO, Beverly, came to work one day last week at 6:00 a.m. and the alarm system malfunctioned, sending an ear-piercing noise into the semi-residential neighborhood. By the time she located the key and entered the secure room, the neighbors were awakened and she was deaf! Beverly made an executive decision to discreetly place the key in a closer location to the key pad. She noted to herself that she needed to inform the staff... but it was 6 a.m. and she is not a morning person.

Beverly is out of town a lot seeing clients and giving presentations. The system malfunctioned again, only this time the key to the secure room could not be found. The next day, Beverly happened to overhear the discussion about the possible mistake the cleaners had made by moving the key. She quickly admitted she had failed to inform everyone of the change she had made and insisted we use this as an example of the importance of keeping everyone in the loop.

Keeping everyone in the loop means that you send out information and confirm that it was received. In company-wide communications, the Step Loop System or the Accelerated Loop system can be utilized. An example of the Step Loop System is where the Plant Manager informs the Department Heads, who then inform the Supervisors, who in turn inform the Work Force. Then the Work Force responds to the Supervisors, who respond to the Department Heads, who finally respond to the

Plant Manager. The disadvantage is that these steps take time. The advantage is that you can determine where miscommunications occur.

The Accelerated Loop system is faster. An example would be the Plant Manager informs all employees and questions or comments come back directly to the Plant Manager. The disadvantage is that many employees who need to listen (or read, such as in a memo or newsletter) do not listen or ask questions.

There can be variations of these systems. The information can be stepped down with people looping back to the original source. Or the information is given directly to everyone and then it is funneled back up through the chain of command. Sometimes just a friendly check to find out what questions or comments a person may have is highly rewarding. Send out information and develop a system to make sure the receiver got it. As Beverly discovered, not keeping your team in the loop can be alarming!

## ASK THE EXPERTS



### Dear TLC,

I am on a team with a major "slacker." This person does the minimum and no more. The rest of us want 'em kicked off the team. How do we communicate this?

### Dear Anti-Slacker,

We recommend that your team meets to re-establish the expectations and responsibilities. Get buy-in from everyone regarding what they will contribute. Then discuss what the consequences are for the team when tasks are not completed as expected. Agree upon a simple process to follow should this occur. Plan the work and then work the plan.

Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success.

Henry Ford

### Quick Tips:

- **Brainstorm do's and don'ts on team behavior at the first meeting.**
- **Call upon quieter team members to gather their input.**



To learn more about it, click here!

## CARRY THE BALL

How many times in a project or work assignment have you been given the task of "carrying the ball"? This idiom is relatively new, dating back to the 1940's. It was used originally in reference to American football.

In football, there are 22 players on the field and only one ball. At any given moment during the game, the person carrying the football is, in a sense, "carrying the team." Whatever that player does with the ball, whether advancing yardage, kicking a field goal, or scoring a touchdown, the entire team is affected. When a play is given to a specific player to "carry the ball," the coach is giving the go-ahead for that player to lead the team!

This saying became so popular that corporations began using it in their team meetings. Variations of "carry the ball" have also been adopted. In football, when a ball carrier fumbles, it means he dropped the football. When someone "drops the ball," the team is negatively affected. In companies and work teams, when someone "drops the ball" it means that key information or materials are not delivered or received, or that a 'player' has not followed through on a task or assignment.

In a football game, the ball can go through several players. Here is one possible scenario:

- 1) The center gives the ball to the quarterback.
- 2) The quarterback then hands the ball to the running back.
- 3) The running back then passes the ball to a wide receiver.
- 4) The wide receiver then laterals (a side toss) to the tight end.

If any ball carrier drops the ball it could mean the end of the play.

Being a member of any team, in the office or on the field, you may be asked to "carry the ball." Here are ways to support your teams at work:

- Get as much out of carrying the ball (your assignment) as you can.
- Remember to hand off the ball (assignment) at the appropriate time.
- Make sure that after handing of the ball (assignment) that you are blocking (providing additional support) for the ball carrier (other team members).
- Follow through on your individual responsibilities to ensure the team celebrates together.

For additional information about how to get



the most out of your team, give TLC a call at:

1-888-BECAUSE or visit our website at [www.talklisten.com](http://www.talklisten.com).

We can teach you to enjoy your team and have a ball!

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A TEAM?

By Vincent Phipps, B.S.

According to the Oxford American Dictionary, a team is simplistically defined as "two or more persons working together." This being the literal definition, what are the reasons so many teams find it difficult to work **"together"**?

In our personal lives, we choose our sweethearts and friends. Our choices are often based on some common interest and/or because they are like us.

In professional settings, we may not have a choice about those around us. We are often placed in positions when we have to work with someone who is very different from us. They think, talk, work, and look different than us, yet we must all work together.

The diversity and work culture of a team can be quite challenging. Although some teams are formed voluntarily, others are mandatory. So, what is the master plan behind all of this team building? Should teams be formed by grouping people together based on age, ethnic background, salary, or other common personal factors? Would that make a team? According to this Communication Coach, no.

Here is my definition of a team (no offense Mr. Oxford): "a diverse set of individuals comprised to work collectively on a single effort." The key word here is "diverse." Diversity in teams covers many areas. It pertains to a person's knowledge, experience, training, methods of communicating, gender, and even their culture.

We will often associate with people socially and professionally because it is comfortable to be around them. Because we don't have to adapt, there is little adjustment and even less growth. Diversity is an advantage for a team.

Strive to get the most out of your teams by capitalizing on what makes you different. Accept and respect the differences in others. Learn to maximize each person's unique strengths and compensate for his or her weaknesses. As each individual gets stronger, the team will too!



**People have been known to achieve more as a result of working with others than against them.**

Dr. Allan Fromme

### Remember to...

- **Get a new team to set expectations at the beginning.**
- **Verify that each team member is informed.**

**Individuals play the game, but teams win championships.**



## TOP TEAM PITFALLS

By Ben Cairns, M.A.

I worked for six years as a rehabilitation consultant. Because I interacted closely with people in crisis, I was privy to a lot of information regarding each client's life, including their family structure and dynamics. Their issues were often entwined in dysfunctional relationships.

Interestingly, dysfunction is a common feature of most family dynamics. At work, teams are sort of like our "work families." There, common dysfunctions are more public and failures are more likely to be blamed on others.

What causes teams to fall apart? Over the years I have carefully observed and analyzed teams of all types. Here are some of the causes and some solutions:

- 1. Not Looping.** Looping is keeping all members informed regarding anything that affects the group. People are often left out of the loop because they are not directly responsible for an action item or duty. Much of the time, knowing what is going on matters. Keep everyone informed on a timely basis.
- 2. Making assumptions.** Avoid assuming that someone will do something or that they have the same target date that you do. Ask questions to get information and to confirm who will do what by when and how they will do it.
- 3. Lack of clear purpose or objectives.** If you want to go on vacation on the only week you have off in the summer, you don't usually just get in the car and drive. You pick a destination (mountains, beach, city, theme park, etc.) and plan it all out in advance. Many teams are formed and charged with a general task, only to fall apart because they don't know where they are going. Define your goals and objectives as specifically as possible.
- 4. Lack of clarity of roles.** Who is responsible and accountable for which functions? Make sure these are defined and assigned. Look for gaps and overlaps. Fill in the gaps and carve a division of labor in the overlaps. Confirm agreement by asking questions.



**5. Not speaking up.** Detail-oriented people often possess key information about why something will not work or why it will encounter obstacles downstream. They can be intimidated by the role-power of the group leader or the extroverts who dominate meetings and conversations.

Create an atmosphere where all members can offer input and surface any doubts - before trouble occurs and it's too late to save time and resources. Get input from everyone.

- 6. Time conflicts.** Overburdening human resources is common in these days of downsizing and restructuring. Be careful when giving assignments by checking schedules to make sure that enough time can be allocated. If that resource can't find the time, don't expect him/her to accomplish deliverables "on time."
  - 7. Sniper in the group.** Many teams have a sniper- someone who shoots at other team members with the intent of making them uncomfortable or look foolish. The actual "bullets" they shoot are usually not the real point. There is something behind all of that anger that needs to be resolved. Disarm the sniper by dealing with the underlying issue/issues, or take that person out of the team.
  - 8. Mission Creep.** The Vietnam War began with a handful of military advisors. The initial goals and objectives got lost in the step-by-step escalation of involvement, and we ended up with an unmanageable goal that we never achieved. Teams can face the same escalation by the simple addition of "just one more thing" here and there. Define the parameters of what you will and will not do. Let others know your limits.
- These are some of the same dynamics that I observed in families and now observe in work teams. Improve your communication and avoid the pitfalls; attain your objectives more smoothly without falling apart.

**Two stonecutters, working on the same task, were asked what they were doing. The first said, "I'm cutting this darned stone into blocks." The second replied, "I'm on a team that's building a cathedral."**

**Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a civilization work.**

Vince Lombardi

## CEO CORNER: "Being In Tune With Your Team"

By Beverly Inman-Ebel, MA, CCC-SLP



Last August I participated in my first concert. I was mildly anxious because I don't have a strong musical background and I am relatively new to playing the harp.

My large Celtic harp was only three weeks old when I began practicing with a group of musicians. My strings needed daily, and sometimes hourly, tuning. On each of the five days preceding the performance, I would tune my harp only to be out of tune with the rest of the group of seven harpists. Sitting in a circle, we would tune our instruments together while we listened carefully to each other.

Our group was comprised of a professional harpist with numerous CD's, harp therapists, a composer, a professional storyteller, a few who played for their church, and me, not yet out of the musical closet. Even though I had less to offer musically, they made me feel welcome and praised me for my willingness to work. Keeping up with them was challenging, so I played chords instead of the individual notes on some of the faster songs. While they could have valued me less because of my lesser talent, they chose to encourage me. They even selected a song that I knew by heart to be included in our medley of tunes. Their behavior made me truly feel part of the group.

During the concert, I could have ruined an otherwise lovely performance by being out of tune or pulling the wrong string. Fortunately, because my team supported me during our jam sessions, I was more confident and played without errors.

Think about a group of people that you are currently working with to accomplish a goal. Do you circle up and closely listen to one another? What might you learn if you did? It's easy to hear when someone is a little flat or sharp. It stands out. There are bound to be members who are out of tune with the group because they are new or have different skills or experiences. The team is only as

strong as its weakest member. Are you letting them "chord" until they can get up to speed?

Variety on a team creates rhythm. It keeps the group moving together like a metronome. Ideally, your team would have extroverts, introverts, task and people-focused individuals. Broad life experiences help to hear a different drummer. Different voices can create either noise or harmony.

I am very grateful to have experienced being a lesser member of a team. It taught me humility and compassion. Listen to your team. Reach out to those whom seem different. What you consider a minor act of kindness may be a major benefit to them. Listen. Respond. Live your dreams!

## FEATURED SERVICE: Team Training

TLC offers numerous options for building your teams. These include:

- **A fun-filled day** of team activities combined with interactive conversations.
- **"Meetings That Matter"** helps you use your team's time more effectively.
- **"Success Over Stress"** allows highly stressed team members to recharge.
- **"Teams That CARE"** gives insight to the natural talents of individual team members and how to balance the team with talent and abilities.



**Many hands make light work.**

**John Heywood**

**It is amazing what can be accomplished when nobody cares who gets the credit.**

Robert Yates

**The nice thing about teamwork is that you always have others on your side.**

Margaret Carty

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