

All for one and one for all

Building and managing teams successfully is part art, part science and absolutely fundamental to a managerial career.

KAREN LEWIS provides some key tips on how to go about it.

In the retail industry most people work in groups. Even those who spend long periods of time away from the group contribute to its success through their individual efforts. Working as a leader of a single team or as a manager of several, team leading is an essential part of the modern manager's role. As traditional hierarchical structures have given way to flatter, multi-skilled, matrix structures, it is ever more imperative that groups of people work as a team to maximise their results and efficiency. Whether a group operates as a team or not depends largely on how they are led. The following is a practical guide for any manager who wants to lead their team with expertise.

What makes a good team?

A true team is a dynamic, constantly changing force in which a number of people come together to work. Team members discuss objectives, ideas, make decisions and work towards achieving success together. A team that is successful fundamentally demonstrates the following features:

- Strong and effective leadership
- A strong, shared sense of common purpose
- The establishment of precise objectives and targets
- The ability to make, and act upon, informed decisions quickly
- Strong, open and honest communication
- A high level of mutual support
- A complete understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the team.

Are these features apparent in your team? If so, how are these demonstrated?

General tips for building an effective team

The following provides some general guidelines for what a manager needs to have in place to create and maintain an effective team. Analyse the following points and make an assessment of what you have in place now and what you may need to do to move your team forward:

- Recruit the right people for the team. Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each individual in the team and be aware of any gaps you may need to plug, either through development or recruitment.
- As often as you can, agree objectives with your team rather than set them yourself. Members of the team feeling that they have had an involvement in the direction of the work or task will be bought-in and more committed to its successful delivery.
- Ensure each member of the team understands and accepts their responsibility for the objective and their task – clarification



CareerSkills (cont'd)

early on saves an awful lot of time later should someone have grasped the proverbial 'wrong end of the stick'.

- Ensure each member of the team understands the performances expected of them and the standards to be attained.
- Establish processes where communication is able to flow freely between members.
- Discourage cliques and factions developing within the team and be highly aware of problems. Encourage informal meetings to resolve these issues quickly.
- Try to group tasks as much as possible in order to demonstrate the benefits of cooperation between team members. In addition, rotate jobs as much as possible so that team members identify with the overall objectives rather than just their own tasks.

Team roles

In an effective team, each member knows their role thoroughly. Whilst knowing their own skills and strengths they also know the roles, strengths and shortfalls of colleagues. A good leader looks to recruit and develop a team that

takes on specific roles to be able to tackle all elements of a task or objective. Extensive research conducted over a period of nine years by Dr. R. Meredith Belbin at the Henley Management College identified nine team roles and the contributions and 'allowable' weaknesses of each. A team role, according to Belbin is:

"A tendency to behave, contribute and interrelate with others in a particular way."

Belbin team roles describe a pattern of behaviour that characterises one person's behaviour in relationship to another in facilitating the progress of a team. The value of Belbin team-role theory lies in enabling an individual or team to benefit from self-knowledge and adjust according to the demands being made by the external situation. The table below summarises the roles as defined by Belbin. Which of these roles are apparent in your team? Which do you need to encourage, develop or recruit for?

Recruiting a team

To create an effective team it is important to find the right mix of experience, behaviour and skills. The

Belbin information below is a good first step to understanding what roles people should play in a team and thus identifying any gaps that could require filling. When recruiting, think long term as well as short term – remember to look for growth and development potential in a candidate, not just enough of the right stuff to sort the problem for now.

Also remember the general rule – recruit the talent, develop the skill. Finding people with a good level of personal skill and behaviour and then developing them by giving them the technical skills and knowledge will be a lot easier and less time consuming than taking on a brilliantly skilled person who just does not apply themselves or have the right attitude. There is an equation that says 85% of performance is attributable to attitude and behaviour and 15% to skills and knowledge. If you focus on recruiting only for the 15% you will have to spend a lot more of your time and effort getting to peak performance than if you make sure the 85% is there in the first place.

Finally, at the opposite end of recruitment, do not be afraid to take

Team type	Contributions	Allowable weaknesses
1. Plant	Creative, imaginative, unorthodox. Solves difficult problems.	Ignores incidentals, too preoccupied to communicate effectively.
2. Co-ordinator	Mature, confident, a good chairperson. Clarifies goals, promotes decision-making, delegates well.	Can often be seen as manipulative. Offloads personal work.
3. Monitor-Evaluator	Sober, strategic and discerning. Sees all options. Judges accurately.	Lacks drive and ability to inspire others.
4. Implementer	Disciplined, reliable, conservative and efficient. Turns ideas into practical actions.	Somewhat inflexible. Slow to respond to new possibilities.
5. Completer-Finisher	Painstaking, conscientious, anxious. Searches out errors and omissions. Delivers on time.	Inclined to worry unduly. Reluctant to delegate.
6. Resource-Investigator	Extrovert, enthusiastic, communicative. Explores opportunities. Develops contacts.	Over-optimistic. Loses interest once initial enthusiasm has passed.
7. Shaper	Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure. The drive and courage to overcome obstacles.	Prone to provocation. Offends people's feelings.
8. Teamworker	Co-operative, mild, perceptive and diplomatic. Listens, builds, averts friction.	Indecisive in crunch situations.
9. Specialist	Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated. Provides knowledge and skills in rare supply.	Contributes only on a narrow front. Dwells on technicalities.

people out of the team if they are not performing. Managers can be too afraid to take prompt action where there is a performance issue, but not nipping a problem in the bud creates more issues within the team and more problems ultimately for a manager to try to resolve.

Maximising peak performance

To make a team work effectively together, each individual should take personal responsibility for the successful achievement of their own objectives and take ownership of the collective achievement of the team objectives. They have to ensure they contribute to the 'togetherness' of the team. It is the role of the manager to ensure this happens and this is generally down to leadership capabilities. A manager should generally adopt a situational or flexible management style. This means that they have access to a range of management styles (for example: authoritative, consultative, democratic, directive, coaching etc.) and adapt their natural style to the one most needed to yield the best results in a particular situation. A successful team will generally need a manager to allow the team a degree of independence. The manager must balance this with remaining attuned to the team's needs, providing help, support or guidance when required.

A manager should also be checking that the required support systems are in place and the team has all the resources they need for success. Think carefully about any specific support your team needs e.g. admin, IT, HR, consultancy expertise, access to sponsors etc. and discuss the options for acquiring it with all team members.

Some other considerations for maximising team performance:

- Each team member should be able to cover the role of at least one other team member
- Team members should be empowered and given total accountability for their objectives and allowed the freedom to act upon their own initiative
- Team members need to be encouraged to find their own best way of working
- Team members need to be made fully aware of where their responsibilities



start and end and how this interacts with the responsibilities of others.

Leading the team

The leader of the team is required to undertake several roles. They are there to facilitate the making of decisions, inspire creative thinking and problem solving, motivate and direct and implement decisions made by the team. The general performance of any team depends on the ability of the leader to create a positive environment to allow work to progress; an environment free of jealousy, destructive competition and egos. Teamwork also does not thrive where the manager constantly makes the decisions before others have had the chance to contribute. A truly great team leader will facilitate, inspire and implement rather than control.

The main task and function of a manager is to achieve objectives through his or her team. The following processes can help a manager ensure their objectives are achieved:

- Plan roles to be filled and recruit the right individuals for the right tasks/jobs
- Take the lead in team meetings, starting with a discussion about team values and objectives
- Analyse performances and correct failures quickly
- Celebrate successes enthusiastically

- Represent the team loyally to others both inside and outside the organisation.

In summary

Don't expect immediate success; building a successful team is a long term process and requires both patience and perseverance. If you have an important project or critical tasks, spending time recruiting the right team and getting them to work effectively together will pay dividends later and your return on investment will be high. Think about being in the position of being able to give the team a goal to achieve, trusting that they will carry out tasks to achieve the goals as they see fit. Furthermore, in an optimally managed team, this really could be achieved with limited intervention from the manager whilst satisfying the sponsor or customer completely – is that not a vision worth spending a little time achieving? ■

Further info:

If you wish to find out more about Belbin's team roles, a good first port of call is the website: <http://www.belbin.com/belbin-team-roles.htm>.

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