



WHY TEAMING — WHY NOW?

By Deborah Mackin

The organization had existed for fifty years — somewhat like an old barge out in the Atlantic Ocean. Its management was used to waiting for its vision and direction from the corporate office. Employees did as they were told, expecting that job security would always be there. It was enough to make a somewhat good product with periodic piles of scrap and rework. And then a sister plant closed down due to production being moved overseas, and their world changed overnight.

What do you do with an old barge that must make a dramatic change to save its future, especially when the barge is paying for six layers of management overhead on every piece of product that goes out the door? Teaming provides both the culture and the structure to drive the change. Teaming can give the organization the 30 percent productivity improvement needed within nine months. But teaming must be done right; no silly games that insult people’s intelligence; no slapping on the label “teams” when everything underneath stays the same. The imperative is to totally redesign the organization in less than a year, while simultaneously delivering better results. Five crucial steps are needed to get started.

1. Create a design team to drive the change from the “as is” to the “to be.” A design team, composed of hourly and salaried employees (working intensely for four or six months), can lay-out the new structure for the organization and develop the team launch schedule. The Design Team determines the new organizational roles, like team coach and team sponsor, value stream manager, star point leaders, and subject matter experts. As the teams are launching, the Design Team continues to work on rewriting antiquated policies and procedures, examining the compensation and performance management systems, and bringing all component parts into alignment with a team culture.

2. Launch an in-house training team. The in-house training team includes hourly and salaried employees who have a passion to teach others how to function effectively in teams. The training team is taught adult learning theory and presentation skills and provided with scripted modules on topics such as effective

teams, meeting skills, and conflict resolution. Every team launched receives training beforehand to equip team members in their new roles; training team members do follow-ups to be certain the training tools and strategies are being applied.

3. Focus the leadership team on changing the status quo. Too often leadership teams focus on checking day-to-day operations in a “show-and-tell” approach that drives every-one nuts. Leadership meetings must be transformed to focus on strategic and operational planning, problem solving and decision making. Information sharing must be banned from the agenda. The leadership team has to define the organization’s dissatisfaction with the status quo – why will staying the same be deadly? Every leader must be held accountable for supporting and driving the change. Then the leadership has to shape a compelling vision of what the future needs to look like for the organization to thrive. Every leader must prepare his or her “elevator speech” that can be delivered in two or three minutes. During the time the design team is constructing the new design, the leadership team hits the floor, passionately communicating with every-one about the need to change, answering questions, and sharing business information.

4. Launch an in-house communication team to spread the word. The communication team should be reflective of the organization’s composition. Their role is to transform the “as is” communication into a completely dynamic, interactive communication system that keeps the entire organization informed of: a) all the team launches and their on-going results; b) why the change is imperative; c) what other organizations have done to be successful; d) an understanding of the larger, outside environmental pressures; and e) leadership’s commitment to change. Every vehicle of communication must be used to flood the organization with information.

5. Alert employees to the expectation their roles will change. A team-based organization where self-directed and cross-functional teams are implemented, no longer needs layers of group leaders, supervisors, and managers. Those roles will go away and the people will need help transitioning to their new roles. No longer will “watching people, watching people, watching people” be allowed. The new roles require different skills such as facilitating, coaching, empowering, and consensus decision making. The hardest part of teaming is for those previously in power to learn to let go. They imagine that teams will make horrible mistakes, much worse than the ones they ever made. When in truth, research shows that teams make fewer mistakes. Employees need to know that they will no longer be defined by specific jobs within departmental silos. The organization will maximize the use every skill and ability available within its walls regardless of job title.

Our American economy cannot afford to sustain old, organizational barges that refuse to change. Teaming provides a clear and effective method to transform them into sleek, flexible, productive entities that can adapt quickly to whatever change is required. These five steps will help you lift anchor and set sail.

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Deborah is also the author of the new *Team Building Tool Kit, Second Edition*, published by AMACOM Books. Go to www.NewDirectionsConsulting.com to order your copy today!