

Turn your committees into team

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You need focus, synergy, emotion and coaching

Moving from committee-based involvement to team-based success is a challenge that many organizations like yours are facing.

Real teams have a common vision, a well-defined mission, they work through processes, they have the resources to make important decisions on their own, and they have coaches to help guide them.

In contrast, committees don't often have the resources to move forward on their own, they don't have coaches, and they don't work autonomously on a regular basis.

And what some call teams may simply be groups of people working together for a common purpose — like a short-term project. Outside of the end goal, little holds these people together — there are no team dynamics that catapult them to new levels of success, which in turn benefits broader aspects of their organizations. At best, you might refer to these arrangements as “quasi-teams.”

Getting started

Here are a few thoughts that can help you begin to think about transforming your groups and committees into true teams.

Establish the right climate: It's up to you and your leaders to set the right tone to begin your transformation into high-performance safety teams. That means establishing a high degree of trust where opinions are valued — especially by your senior leaders. Every person and their diverse skills need to be valued to the best extent possible.

Know what actions will get you there: You need to know what actions will help you to create the right climate. Does your middle management need to spend more time within the operations? Do your senior leaders need to increase safety-related resources? Do your supervisors and group leaders need to be more effective coaches? And what measurable goals are being used as a yardstick to align peoples' actions with your vision for safety excellence? Your organization needs to measure what you want to see and hold people accountable to reach those same goals.

Think your transformation through: Keep in mind two different starting points. First, know which committees or groups can be kept and begin to transform them into high-performance teams. Secondly, have some good ideas about the kinds of “new teams” you believe will make a big difference. Teams for ergonomics and hazard abatement may have the potential for larger kinds of impact. These two starting points can lead to a great deal of success for future positive changes in safety.

Teams can make a real difference in your own success. But don’t hurry them along. Your organization has to be ready and well-prepared to make the change. Teams can’t flourish and succeed without the right support and knowledge.

Elements of true teams

1. **True team dynamics** — Whether it’s an ergonomic team or a hazard abatement team — the dynamics of the group is the foundation for greater outcomes in terms of productivity and reduction of losses. True teams: a) have clear objectives and clear work tasks to complete; b) have well-defined boundaries for their work; and c) have been given the authority to operate as a team. All of these facets move the group in a direction that helps them to become self-managing, self-sufficient, and increasingly self-sustaining.
2. **Emotionally driven** — Teams also have to be given clear direction that connects the head and heart. People have to believe in their minds that what they’re doing is important and worthwhile, but they also have to believe it in their hearts. Members have to be driven emotionally — they have to be excited about possibilities, the cause, and about working with others who have the same goals.
3. **Synergy and balance** — Each group has to have the appropriate number of people and the right mix of skills. A good number to start with is roughly seven to 12 people. If the teams are too large it is difficult to move through tough decisions, but if they are too small the diversity of views and talents is not there. These same people have to work well together, complement each other, and push each other to make the most of their abilities. Some workers may have great technical knowledge, say in electricity, and others may have great communications skills when it comes to written and verbal forms.
4. **Organizational support** — Teams work in a larger arena than what they may readily understand — they work within their own companies and their own organizations. Work teams are made up of individuals who need to be recognized for their particular safety-

related efforts and achievements. And at times, your own safety teams need to be rewarded based on their distinct accomplishments. Recognition and rewards also need to be appropriate for your culture and must be aligned with the vision for safety.

5. **Great coaching** — The best of players on the best of teams need great coaching to meet their goals. Great coaching requires that everyone contribute to the team's cause. It requires honesty and openness regarding the team's direction and focus. It also necessitates that team members be pushed outside of their comfort zones, to take risks that offer greater rewards relative to safety achievements. Great coaches are patient yet persistent — pushing their team to new levels of success — not allowing them to give up.

How about it?

Teams can make a big difference — but you have to have the right culture and right team dynamics in place. Safety teams can move your organization to another level of achievement but their assembly, development, and ongoing performance has to be based on the key elements addressed above or your teams will not reach their desired level of success or they may fail completely.

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