

Article

Re-Focusing and Re-Energizing Teams

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How would you measure your efforts to involve the entire workforce in resolving problems that inhibit productivity and their ability to succeed? Although there are exceptions to every rule, it is a relatively safe hypothesis that most people want some control over how they perform their jobs each day. A key factor in the success of teams assembled to analyze problems and offer solutions is how management responds to those suggestions. If those suggestions are accepted and acted upon, this is often the catalyst for motivating the team to reach for, and achieve higher levels of quality.



In my experience, teams that are most successful and have the longest life span are those with the fewest layers of “leaders.” Each leader added into the mix represents opportunity to compromise the effectiveness of communication within the organization. On high performing teams, leadership is a shared role. All members are developed to take a leadership role as required. This structure increases the feeling of responsibility for all members.

Reviving excitement in a team is a considerable challenge that can be accomplished if the team can be convinced their efforts are important and will be rewarded. The first step is to understand the causes of the team’s loss of focus. Successful teams often “cool-off” or lose interest more frequently than those who are struggling. The reason for the loss of focus is often boredom. Teams need a reason to remain excited. Each team is different and will be excited and motivated by different things. Your challenge is to understand what will excite your teams and motivate them to see the value and pay-off for the projects you’re advocating.

Many organizations complain about not having enough time to get their products out, and the inability to meet delivery schedules. In this case, the paramount question becomes: How can these teams improve this situation? First, it becomes critical to understand why this is a persistent problem in order to move forward with attempting to refocus the teams. Is the pressure to meet schedules due to insufficient staff to handle the work, a need for better processes, or people not adhering to the processes?

If the perception is that team meetings will only take away time required to complete the work, it is going to be very difficult, if not impossible, to refocus the teams. This is a prime opportunity for the management team to evaluate the current situation, and solicit the help of the teams to reach viable solutions. If there are not enough people to complete the work, it is going to be difficult to address the problem through the efforts of the teams. However, if the problems can be addressed through process improvements, this is an excellent opportunity to return excitement to your teams by asking them to improve the processes. A reward could be offered for the best solutions. I have always found it necessary to know the members of a team at an individual level in order to achieve optimum results. Coaching the managers closest to the teams to attempt to understand what motivates each person, and rewarding the person accordingly, will help keep the teams focused. It is also important to demonstrate that their outputs are important. This means that meetings are treated as work. They must be scheduled the same as other tasks, and not made optional.

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