

Graduating “group effort” into “team effort.”

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There is a definite difference between groups and teams. Where groups have *concern* for a project or issue, teams have *ownership*. Executives in membership organizations can readily identify the two but may have a difficult time graduating a group into a true team.

Ownership is critical

The most effective teams have members that claim ownership in the vision and the mission of the organization. Leadership in most successful organizations offer a complete (understood) vision for each project or issue and a plan authored by the participating team members to fulfill it. The United States Chamber of Commerce Institute for Organization Management teaches time and again; “If they write it, they’ll underwrite it.” Only those members with ownership of a project or issue will take the time to understand the vision and then, create a plan with specific strategic areas of direction and achievable goals to hold one another accountable to fulfill the mission that fulfills the vision. That’s ownership.

Writing this article from Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, it is appropriate to use a golf metaphor to highlight the point. Imagine two foursomes in a local golf league. One group is there to have fun and if they win, great. But if they don’t, it’s not a big deal to them. The other four people however, are there for a purpose. They see themselves holding the trophy before they even begin and therefore proclaim it to be their goal throughout the year. They hold ownership in the vision and through their proclamation (mission statement) they have stated in unison, that they will do it. The first foursome is a group. The second foursome is a team.

Vision is *to be* and mission is *to do*

To graduate a group into a team is to first understand the difference between vision and mission. Simply stated, vision is what you want to be and mission is what you will do, ultimately to make the vision a reality.

The vision statement for the National Widget Manufacturers Association might read, *“To be the first and best resource for widget manufacturers nationwide.”* To fulfill this vision, it would require an operational mission statement that would be concise and focused on three or four strategies designed for the organization to remain focused on their purpose. *“It is our mission to serve, protect and promote the widget manufacturers of America.”* If a group suddenly sees the vision before they start and if they have the *courage* to say what they will do out loud, they will fast become a team.

Nothing to fear but fear itself

Courage is another critical element in graduating a group into a team. The best definition of courage may have come from an U.S. Army television commercial years ago when a young man asked his father, “What is courage?” The father replied, “Courage is setting your fears aside and doing your job.” In today’s world, the best examples of this statement are the pilots and flight attendants of all the U.S. airlines. Patriotism and courage are two different terms. It’s one thing to wave a flag but it’s another thing to get back on the plane.

A group member may have patriotism for the organization, but he or she will never be a team member until courage is exhibited. We can have a vision statement, a mission statement, a group hug and a rousing verse of Cumbya, but without the courage to speak up and publicly state our purpose we will remain a group of good people with good intentions ultimately doing no good.

Compare team size to job descriptions

Logistics are the next focal point in graduating from a group to a team. Does size really matter? Yes and no. Size only matters to the specific group you are focusing on at the time. In my career, there have been times when a “Committee of one” was the most effective, efficient and productive way to go. However, this is a very rare example of successful management in a membership organization.

An insightful member in my organization once offered, “If there are more than six in a meeting, you have a gathering, not a meeting.” If you select a team of six people for a project and only three have the ownership required to be successful, their productivity will be cut in half, not because the top three couldn’t do it by themselves, but because the three “resume’ fillers” were simply in the way. To be proactive in preventing this problem, identify the individual job descriptions needed to support the mission first, then put the right number of people in the right number of jobs.

Location, Location, Location

Some say you are what you eat. In organization management, it may be said you are how you meet. Groups meet because the meeting is scheduled. Teams meet when they need to meet. Groups will fill a one-hour meeting because the meeting was scheduled for; you guessed it, one hour! Teams will be prepared and be very happy to leave twenty minutes later.

Groups will meet in a basement or a secondary (low price) restaurant confirming their limited “buy in” to the issue or project. Teams on the other hand, understand the philosophy of “you are how you meet” and strong organizations make it a priority to provide meeting space and logistics that will give stature to the participants and the mission at hand.

Organizations that don’t invest in a Team’s surroundings are missing a bet.

Have rules to play by

Groups are usually happy to carry dead weight. The “*Oh its O.K. if you miss a few meetings*” type of comment is commonly heard here. Groups that have become teams will have a strong orientation. This orientation will offer well-defined job descriptions, expected responsibilities and automatic dismissal or disciplinary actions for behaviors negatively affecting *the Team*. We are taught

that eighty percent of a board members job is simply showing up. The same holds true for any of the teams we create.

Expectation, evaluation and recognition

The Alpha and Omega in team development begins with expectation and ends with evaluation. To motivate (excite) other people you should consider what they expect first. If your mission and their expectations of the program or project match up, you will have a great start. If they don't, don't start yet. The final evaluation is equally critical. Final evaluations recognize strengths and weaknesses not only in the project or program, but in the people that made up the team. If formal evaluation is left out or minimized, you have cheated yourself and your organization of the effort's full value.

With evaluation comes recognition and the Ken Blanchard's and Peter Drucker's of the world will remind you that the number one rule in management is "you get what you reward." If you believe this to be true, then don't reward all of the team members unless all of the team members deserve it. Yes, it is easier said than done but you too, need to exhibit courage. The people that were on a team in name only may complain or even drop their membership if you don't recognize them with those that did do the work, but think ahead! What will you really lose if they do go away? It is not fair to give awards and recognition to people who do a great job if the same award or recognition is given to a slacker.

Abraham Maslow clarified our human need for recognition. Therefore, don't be fooled when someone says, "I don't need any awards." If they are actually saying it out loud, they are getting what they say they don't want. (It's similar to honesty. Honesty should go without saying and when someone has to say, "I'm honest," perk up and pay close attention.) People, especially team members want and need recognition. Give it accordingly so your team(s) don't become groups again.

Enthusiasm is the #1 emotion

In the final analysis in graduating a group to a team, all of the components discussed are critical; ownership, vision, mission, expectations, evaluation and recognition will help an association executive build a team from a group. But, without passion, a group that does all the things a team is supposed to do, is still a group. Passion, real passion with all of the exciting enthusiasm you can muster for a vision and the mission to fulfill it is the final key to *activate*, not just motivate, a group into a true team. It is recommended to look for people that work as hard as they play and play as hard as they work.

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