

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

Building Powerful Teams – Part Two

In the last issue of the Executive Brief, we talked about the evolution of groups growing into productive teams and some of the things it takes to get there...

- Common Purpose
- Goals
- Skills
- Commitment
- Accountability

OK. So, let’s talk about geese for a minute.

One of the most common examples of team effectiveness can be seen on a cool day in the fall. You hear the familiar ‘honks’ and look up into the sky to see a flock of geese on their journey south for the winter.

The V formation in which they fly benefits each individual bird. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an updraft for the bird immediately behind it.

By flying in the V formation, the entire flock of geese can fly 71% further than any one individual bird can fly alone.

When the lead goose gets tired, he or she rotates back into the V and another goose flies the point. The geese honking from behind are believed to be cheering the point goose to keep going and maintain speed.

“We must all hang together, or assuredly, we shall all hang separately.”

Benjamin Franklin

If a goose falls out of the formation due to weakness or injury, two of the other geese will follow to help and provide protection. They will stay until the goose either recovers or dies. Then they set out on their own to catch up to the original flock or find another one.

People have the same advantages when they are part of a winning team – they work together from their collective strengths in support of each other – creating the momentum and trust to keep the project moving forward with the greatest chance of success. The collective power of the team is much greater than any one individual – be the geese.

“Talent wins games, but teamwork & intelligence win championships.”

Michael Jordan

So in addition to the V formation, what are some of the core elements of team success? According to Katzenbach and Smith, and the results of their research of high performing teams, these are the **Eight Keys to Team Performance**:

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- 1. Establish urgency, standards and direction
- 2. Select members for skill and skill potential
- 3. Pay particular attention to first meetings and actions
- 4. Set some clear rules of behaviors
- 5. Set immediate performance-oriented tasks and goals;
- 6. Challenge the group regularly
- 7. Spend lots of time together
- 8. Use positive feedback, recognition and reward

Emotional Intelligence In Teams

Now, we take a look at one of the most overlooked aspects of team effectiveness: Emotional Intelligence. Most of us are familiar with EI and its critical impact on individual effectiveness. But what about the impact of EI on teams?

A group’s EI isn’t simply the sum of its members’ individual competencies. Instead, it comes from the synergism of members’ capacities for awareness and regulation of emotions within and outside the team. These competencies build trust, group identity and a sense of group efficacy.



According to Katzenbach and Smith, authors of *The Wisdom of Teams* and *Teams at the Top*):

"A team's emotional intelligence may be even more important than individual emotional intelligence, since most work gets done in teams."

"The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don't play together, the club won't be worth a dime."

Babe Ruth

The Challenge of Working with Virtual Teams

An obvious case for paying attention to team emotional intelligence is immediately apparent with virtual teams. Deprived of most non-verbal and visual cues, communications can be a challenge. This often results in interpersonal relationships that are more problematic.

Exacerbating the problems inherent in any team is the fact that virtual team members are often from different parts of the company, different cultures and even different countries. Hence, the importance of communication skills and emotional intelligence competencies increases significantly with virtual teams. There is a great need for building cohesiveness and commitment to a shared purpose.

Every company faces specific performance challenges for which teams are the most practical and powerful vehicle at top management's disposal. The critical challenge for senior managers is how to obtain maximum performance and develop the kinds of teams that can deliver it.

"Teamwork does not tolerate the inconvenience of distance."

Unknown

Working with a team coach, both individually and with the whole team, can help define the team purpose, specific goals and mutual accountability and facilitate communications that lead to high performance results.

Teams have a unique potential to deliver results, and executives carry the responsibility to ensure their success. To that end, they need to...

- determine when a team is the best tool for the job;
- know when and how to deploy teams strategically;
- understand how to foster the basic discipline of teams to make them effective;
- recognize when and how to bring in a team coach to maximize the success of the team and its expected results.

By doing so, top management creates the kind of environment that enables individual and organizational performance.

Look for Part Three of Building Powerful Teams in the April issue of the ProLaureate Executive Brief

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*"Thoughts and action,
aligned fearlessly to purpose,
become crowning achievement."*