DEVELOPING PRODUCTIVE TEAMS THROUGH MENTORING

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THE MENTOR COACH

OVERVIEW
What’s the difference between a good team and a team that Wows? The delta from an average team and one that excels in your organization is dependent on a number of factors. You may find yourself unable to control many of these, including your organization’s leadership philosophy, the level of management commitment to a team environment, or the level of resources allocated to team development. But there are some key factors within your control, those that encourage your team to excel.

Teams need a continuous stream of new ideas and tools to help them excel. You may have implemented a world-class system of problem solving or worked hard to form a self-directed team. Now, it is time to take the next step. Think of mentoring and coaching as part of the tools that really achieve excellence.

Keeping your team fresh, new charged and motivated can happen. Members who mentor and who in turn are mentored often find their level of interest and commitment increase.

INCREASING TEAM PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH MENTORING
Mentoring involves going above and beyond. It is a relationship in which a person with greater experience, expertise, and wisdom counsels, teaches, guides, and helps another person to develop personally and professionally. It is not a relationship of superior and subordinate. Anyone with the expertise, skills of transferring knowledge, and desire can be a mentor.

WHY MENTOR?
• To help individuals reach full potential
• To enhance competitive position
• To improve work group, organization productivity and effectiveness
• To advance the interests of special groups and populations
• To conserve and transfer special know-how
• To encourage protégé contributions
• To bring employees together in a new social/work environment
• To develop a more civil society

One of the foundations for organizations to successfully develop its employees is to create an environment that maximizes the full potential of people. Mentoring is key to achieving this.
A Team mentor or coach can help your team to:

- Overcome organizational obstacles by becoming your team champion
- Understand the correct “Players” in your organization that will support you
- Access a network of technical or organizational resources
- Identify the areas of greatest impact and visibility to focus the team’s efforts
- Achieve agreed upon milestones for success
- Increase its influence in the organization

There are a number of mentoring and coaching linkages that will help teams to be more successful.

**Creating Linkages™**

**Linkages™** are the ways we create connections to other people. A team linkage may be to someone who is our peer, a subordinate or someone higher in the organization.

**Reaching Up Linkage™**

The upward linkage is the connections a team creates when someone higher in the organization becomes the team’s coach.

**Reaching Across Linkage™**

The lateral linkage is created when you mentor or coach a direct or peer in another part of the organization. Or, your team’s mentor may be an individual that is considered a Subject Matter Expert (SME) on your team.

**Reaching Down Linkage™**

The downward linkage is reaching down into the organization to ask for coaching and mentoring from an individual who may offer your team interpersonal skills or technical expertise that will help your team achieve excellence.

We use these linkages all the time. Whenever we offer help or guidance to another person. We form a temporary linkage. The process here is to take that momentary connection and make it purposeful and permanent.
There are several ways to identify and create linkages. One method is through defining a Team Mentoring Model™.

CREATING A TEAM MENTOR MODEL™ THAT WORKS FOR YOU

Teams come in many sizes, styles and areas of expertise. Maybe your team is a process team and you control and manage a process from end to end. Or perhaps you are a functional work team that manages a specific function within a larger unit. You may be a service team or a cross-functional team. You see what kind of team you are makes a very real difference in how you approach team mentoring. The Team Mentor Model™ (TMM™) provides flexibility. Just as your team is unique to your organizational needs, the TMM™ is unique to your team.

The TMM™ is a picture representation that is designed by your team. What specific skills does your team need? Instead of an overall job skill area, you might identify the skills that each team member has and create a separate TMM™ for each skill area. If you are lacking expertise in an area, look to bring that experience when filling the next opening on the team. Or who else in the organization might be brought in to mentor team members in that area?

Define the steps the team will take in identifying who in the organization has the skills and knowledge needed to complete the team’s capabilities. These are the potential mentors for the team.

When the mentors are within the team, write action plans on how the knowledge is to be shared. Remember that not everyone who can do can teach. Mentors need the ability to coach and pass on knowledge.
When identifying if a potential mentor is ready to begin mentoring, the team might use a team mentor checklist. These lists are used to assess whether the potential mentor has the necessary skills to successfully share his/her knowledge.

**Potential Team Mentor Checklist**

Using an assessment can help individual members identify strengths and areas for development in being a mentor. Superior team mentors possess these skills and other characteristics that may be necessary for your team. This form is customized to fit the skills that will most benefit your team.

Once you have determined your areas of strength and development needs, share the information with other team members. If you have strengths in an area and another team member has scored him/herself as needing development in that area, pair up and help each other.

Document training and development for mentoring skills just as you would any team development process.

**Turning Subject Matter Experts (SME’s) into Mentors**

You know the person. He or she is technically superior to others on your team. They know what they are doing but may not take a leadership role on the team. They can offer a wealth of knowledge and new ideas but they may be holding back. You have determined that they have some of these qualities that good mentors and coaches demonstrate. They are:

- Willing to assume and visibly demonstrate leadership
- Demonstrating People-oriented behavior
- Successful in the organization
- Willing to assume responsibility and accountability as a mentor
- Knowledgeable about the firm’s goals, policies, functions, communication channels, training programs, etc.
- Willing to help set development goals, coach, and give feedback
- Aware of resources available within and outside the organization
- Committed to the excellence of the team
- Willing to share personal experiences to help the team

Setting up a personal development model for these SME’s is an important process that will give your team the added strength of a committed person, a knowledge individual and one that will be loyal to your success. We use the Team Mentor Model™ to determine the most appropriate mentor coach for your team. This mentor may be one of your own SME’s, or another individual in your organization.
COACHING AND MENTORING FOR THE TEAM AND THE LEADER

Leaders are fashioned by a combination of innate skills, personal development processes, positive reinforcement and access to personal development tools. The team leader should enjoy excellent technical skills, team process knowledge and highly developed interpersonal skills. But to be an excellent coach or mentor, there are skills that must be developed to enable a team member to grow professionally and personally. A good coach forms interpersonal relationships that focus on:

- Truth and personal introspection
- Achieving breakthroughs in personal performance
- Setting personal goals
- Creating collaborative relationships to achieve goals
- Changing how one sees oneself and one’s abilities
- Achieving results

Coaching is something you must do regularly and with sincerity. Coaching produces commitment and motivation in both the coach and the protégé.

THE ROLE OF THE TEAM LEADER AS COACH/MENTOR

What does a good coach do?
- Helps the team member to develop their technical and interpersonal skills
- Makes the job look easy
- Makes the team member look good
- Has fun

Think about successful coaches. How do we measure their success? Those coaches that are considered to be most successful have winning teams. They are the coaches that win against all odds. It is the performance of the team and their achievements that make coaches successful.

Many good team leaders have innate coaching skills. They have developed these skills as part of their leadership style. However, coaching is like any skill the more you practice and stretch yourself the greater the skill level

Great team coaches:
- Help the team member explore his/her performance
- Concentrate on the success of the team, not themselves
- Create “Coachable Moments” to reinforce immediate success
- Teach by adjusting personal style to the learning style of the team member
- Help the team member to make a plan for success
COACHING SKILLS

Coaching provides immediate feedback to the team member about specific behaviors, skills and job performance. In your coaching sessions, state what is going well and what needs to be improved.

- Be specific about what you have observed.
- State what works well–how did the protégé’s actions or behaviors meet or exceed an objective standard or goal?
- As a mentor, the more you know about the team member’s interest, the more you can help him/her achieve his/her goals.
- Use this time as a chance to build new skills or improve the team members’ current skills.
- If you do not have the background to coach him/her to improve a competency, be honest and suggest other ways to develop the skill.

Approach the coaching session as an opportunity to provide motivation for the team leader.

- If the team member senses your commitment and enthusiasm to improving performance, he/she is much more likely to be committed.
- Even the best mentors find times when they are not able to fully commit to the relationship. Other work or personal commitments can interfere.
  1. You may need to spend time re-aligning your priorities or recharging.
  2. The team member will always sense when you are being sincere.

Coaching sessions are times where you focus your attention on the performance of the team member.

- These may be scheduled in advance. For long-distance mentoring relationships, it is important to plan some time together every month.
- They may be more informal, spur of the moment

Coaching should be tied to the goals of the Team Agreement. Once you create meaningful linkages through either a Team Mentoring Model™ or other models, and you have developed the necessary skills in the mentors, there is still much to work to do.

The team needs to address other issues:
- The relationship between mentors and protégés
- Building credibility for team mentoring in the organization
- Tying team success to organizational initiatives
- Using rewards and recognition to build team mentoring
- Measuring the success of team mentoring
- Evaluating the value of the mentoring experience

The greatest success for a team will come from planning and executing a complete team development process.