

## *Get Your Teams Started Right*

High performance teams don't just happen. Ask any organization that has jumped on the team bandwagon only to discover that their reality didn't live up to their expectations. According to Kay Hohn, an HR professional at Ameritech, "Everyone agreed that we needed to build teams. No one expected it to be so complex."

Teams can produce spectacular results if leaders are willing to work to do their part when they launch a team. It will require no less than looking at your organizational mindset, behaviors, and structures with a willingness to change those things that no longer work in a team environment. Where do you start? Here are five questions a leader needs to take seriously.

1. *Do both the team and the organization know why this particular team exists?* High performance teams always have a clear picture of their overall purpose and have agreed with their management on specific, measurable goals – unsuccessful teams usually have neither. Teams can't succeed if they don't know why they exist. Many organizations have learned that when a team's goal is clearly linked to the customer, there is an added sense of urgency and pride for the team as they work together.
2. *Does each team member have the basic skill set needed to be a member of a high performance team?* It would be foolish to go to a Doctor who didn't have proper medical training. It is just as foolish to put a group of people in a room and expect them to act like a team. It is fairly safe to assume that people in a successful organization chosen to be on a team will have most of the technical skills they'll need on a project. It isn't safe to assume that they have the people skills necessary to build a high performance team. Team members need a skill set that includes feedback, problem solving, creative thinking, decision making, conflict resolution, meeting management, and dealing with differences.
3. *Do both the team and the organization know that all team members are equally responsible for the success or failure of the team?* Everyone likes the "Let Mikey try it!" line in the commercial. We'd all like to be able to shift blame occasionally. High performance teams stand or fail together, so everyone needs equal opportunity for leading and following during the life of the team. In the real world there are reasons why someone may need to be designated team leader, but it should be an administratively important title only.
4. *Do managers understand their new roles in a team-based organization?* How well are your managers coaching? The one thing a coach can't do is run with the ball. They are relegated to the sidelines, calling in plays, lighting fires, delivering real time instructions, and dispensing pats on the back. These are very different actions than those that have traditionally been a part of the manager's skill set. Since most managers were promoted because they ran the ball well and were never taught anything else, it is no wonder that they fall back into that pattern. What are you doing to help them develop their new skill set?
5. *Are compensation systems tied to the team's performance rather than an individual's performance?* This is the toughest step to take. Understand that the organization's commitment to teams will, in large part, be half-hearted until their reward and recognition systems are based on the performance of the team. To change your existing compensation and reward system is a big job that will take time. Remember, doing something different, however small, will almost always be better than doing nothing until you've got it all figured out.

There's a lot to this business of building teams and it starts with the leaders. Teams cost – they cost time, energy, and resources. You might want to consider that launching teams without a commitment of time, energy, and resources from their leaders might be even more expensive.

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*Chris Clarke-Epstein, CSP is a speaker, consultant, and author who works with leaders who want to lead more than they manage and teams who want to have fun while they're learning to be more effective.*

Learn more about Chris at [www.ChrisClarke-Epstein.com](http://www.ChrisClarke-Epstein.com) or contact her at [Chris@chrisclarke-epstein.com](mailto:Chris@chrisclarke-epstein.com).