Acting Like a Team

I called the software company with my fingers crossed. My computer had reacted to the impending deadline by crashing – repeatedly. Call after call hadn't gotten me the help I needed, but one of the technology guys suggested that I call the software company for a patch. "Please," I said with desperation in my voice, "can't you find someone who can help me?" The receptionist replied, "Oh, I just answer the phone. How would I know?" I hope they don't call themselves a team-based organization.

More companies talk teams than build teams. Individual behavior needs to change in a team environment but most people don't seem to know why or how. Workplace behavior started in pre-school and was reinforced through business school – teaching us a system that consistently rewarded individual achievement. Whether it was the gold star or the corner office, we all knew that only one person was going to win. Miss Congeniality wasn't usually crowned Miss America and the quarterback got the most press. Being a team player, in many organizations, has come to mean not rocking the boat or deciding to go along with the prevailing view. No wonder our teams don't accomplish all we've hoped.

If you want real team players in your organization, you need to discover what **real** team players do. Here are five behaviors that you'll want to encourage on your teams.

1. *Team players understand the need for ground rules.* All groups of people have working ground rules but not many groups are aware that they do. Behavior in families, teams, churches, and organizations is defined, limited, and rewarded by these rules. High performance teams bring their rules out into the open. They discuss and agree on how they will work together. Ground rules most often cover areas such as use of resources, roles and responsibilities, time, participation, division of work, and evaluation. Ground rules aren't complete until a team decides what they will do if all team members aren't following the team's ground rules.
2. *Team players understand the need to stop regularly for evaluation.* The value of feedback is lost if it is given too late in the process. Just as a yearly performance evaluation does little to correct a problem that occurred nine months ago, a team that waits until their task is completed to evaluate their work can't make corrections until the next task starts.
3. *Team players know how to use outside resources.* Even a high performance team can't have all it needs to succeed within the team itself. They may need project-related expertise, people-problem advice, or just a shot of enthusiasm. A high performance team knows how to access the support they need, when they need it. They also know how to use those outside resources effectively – being clear about their needs and expectations.
4. *Team players measure their success on both what they accomplish and how they accomplish it.* Getting a job done does not ensure future success for an organization. In order to build on one success, a team needs to take the time to discover what worked and what didn't work. They explore those areas where their interpersonal strengths aided the process and where their collective blindspots caused them trouble. This analysis, which goes beyond the task, allows the team to learn, self-correct, and re-charge. Leaders need to insist on this team soul searching before the team runs headlong into their next project.
5. *Team players have fun!* High performance teams quickly learn to be serious about their fun. They play with their problems, find ways to laugh at their fears together, and celebrate the lessons they've learned. They wear their team hats and shirts proudly, quote their team motto frequently, and share their latest story with any one who will listen. And by doing all that, they spread their energy, skills, and wisdom throughout the organization.

If your team players don't exhibit these behaviors, what are you waiting for? Figuring out a training plan should be pretty easy.

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 or contact her at Chris@chrisclarke-epstein.com.