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E X T E N S I O N

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Building Teamwork and the Importance of Trust in a Business Environment[1]

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Introduction

Trust is a big issue in today's business world, since evidence suggests that trust between associates (employees) and employers has been waning. It is difficult, if not impossible, to have effective and productive working relationships without trust (Castro, 1994). Therefore, trust is critical for every business.

In the past, companies used teams only for special projects. Today, associates often work in teams on a daily basis. Teamwork involves trust among team members and between management and associates.

This article will discuss what trust is and why it is critical in business, why businesses need teamwork to survive, and tips for team building.

What Trust Is and Why It Is Critical in Business

Webster's Dictionary defines trust as the "assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something." Many managers believe that one of the main keys to the survival of a business is trust. Trust is a critical issue in any type of

relationship because a relationship without trust is not really a relationship at all. One of the problems that managers encounter when dealing with teams is that managers cannot automatically instill trust into their associates. Even with the appropriate individuals on a team, a team that does not build a trusting relationship is not an effective team. Research shows that trust is the basis for creating a healthy work environment. According to Heathfield (2002a), trust is the necessary precursor for the following:

- Feeling able to rely upon another person;

- Cooperating as a group;

- Taking thoughtful risks;

- Experiencing believable communication.

In other words, "trust forms the foundation for effective communication, associate retention, motivation, and contributions of discretionary energy" (Heathfield, 2002a).

Business Needs Teamwork to Survive

Many have heard the statement that there is "no 'I' in the word 'Team'." This is as true today as it has ever been. Businesses have found that the key to successfully completing and accomplishing projects is often through the development of teams. Whereas in the past, teamwork was used only for special projects, now it is often the norm (Castro, 1994). Teamwork has become an essential element for the success and survival of a business.

True collaboration, however, is a problem that plagues companies when trying to develop a teamwork environment. It becomes a problem because, in the "real" world, individuality is rewarded more often than team participation. Managers must be able to develop ways for associates to grow and develop as a team. Team building is not always the easiest task to accomplish, but with the five tips listed in this paper, effective teams can be built.

Tips for Team Building

John Castro (1994), CEO and President for Merrill Corporation, likens trust and teamwork to getting on a train: once on board, everyone who wants a seat should get one. Management is responsible for building trust and finding associates who want to participate as a successful team (Castro, 1994).

There are many ways that management can create and manage successful teams. Heathfield (2002b) offers five helpful tips on how this can be accomplished.

Tip 1: Form teams to solve real work issues and improve real work processes

The manager should provide the team with teamwork training beforehand on systematic methods of team work. The team should focus on accomplishing the project, not on how to work together as a team.

Tip 2: Hold departmental meetings to review projects and progress

It is the manager's responsibility to recognize when a group is not developing a healthy relationship. Departmental meetings give the manager the opportunity to examine the team's progress. If a team is falling behind, the manager should look to see if the team has personality issues or difficulties in agreeing on the best approach for the assignment.

Tip 3: Build fun and shared experiences into the organization's agenda

The manager should help the team think as a unit within a fun work environment so that everyone on the team feels involved and appreciated. For example, management could sponsor company dinners or business trips to sporting events or team retreats.

Tip 4: Use icebreakers and time-limited fun team-building exercises

The manager should use icebreakers and group activities at the beginning of meetings to promote interaction and camaraderie among team members. The bottom line is that icebreakers help associates to get to know each other on a more personal basis.

Tip 5: Celebrate group successes publicly

The manager should recognize the group as a whole for their accomplishments, not just individuals within the group. Constructive group praise is always the best policy.

Conclusion

Castro (1994) describes the process of trust, teamwork, and change as a journey. And although managers cannot force their associates to trust each other or to work as a team, they can provide associates with the needed resources to build trust. Once trust is established, managers have an better opportunity to accomplish the company's goals.

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