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Five essential guidelines for successful teamwork

When Ernie Els recapped his win at the British Open on July 22 he said, “Thanks to my caddie Ricci Roberts ... I couldn’t have done this without him.” Els went on to say how his win was, in part, due to all the support and assistance he has around him. Even in a solo performance sport such as golf, we need a team to help us become successful.

In today’s workplace, we continue to hear management talk about working as a team, building a team and leading a high performing team. When a workgroup or project team is operating as a cohesive unit, we know there are many benefits — increased productivity, higher employee morale, greater job satisfaction, improved customer service and the accomplishment of the organization’s strategic goals.

Susan M. Heathfield, author of “12 Tips for Team Building: How to Build Successful Work Teams,” writes, “In a team-oriented environment, you contribute to the overall success of the organization. You work with fellow members of the organization to produce these results. Even though you have a specific job function and you belong to a specific department, you are unified with other organization members to accomplish the overall objectives. The bigger picture drives your actions; your function exists to serve the bigger picture.”

Over the years, I have been fortunate to see on a firsthand basis what can make the difference between successful teams and unsuccessful ones.

Here are five guidelines that, when implemented and executed on a consistent basis, can lead to the development and ongoing success of high performing teams.

1. *Establish common goals and vision.* According to professional speaker, author, TV show host and Made for Success President and Founder Chris Widener, effective goals and vision have three aspects — short, simple and clear. Can the team members state the goals and vision in 30 seconds? Do the team members understand them? Does the team all know what they are working together for? If not, why not?

Several years ago when I was conducting a training session on team building, the company I was consulting with had given each employee a wallet-sized, laminated card with the mission and vision on one side and the goals/objectives on the other. I got a bit tickled when I asked if anyone in the class could tell me the company’s mission and vision, and the person who responded simply pulled the card from his wallet and read it.

2. *You must communicate, communicate, communicate.* Open, honest and frequent communication is a must. Team members need to know/communicate about what progress is being made; any issues, concerns or changes; milestones achieved; and expectations in moving forward.

3. *Commit to excellence.* Successful teams are those that are committed to excellence in all they do. Their goal is to achieve at the highest level. This commitment should be consistently

encouraged and held throughout the entire team.

4. *Emphasize team effort.* Have you ever watched a sports team play? If you have, you’ve probably noticed they are talking to each other most of the time — helping each other, encouraging each other, praising each other and sharing tactics on how to improve. These same strategies are true of successful teams in the workplace.

5. *Utilize the power of praise.* Successful teams appreciate their members and show it in a variety of ways. The leader applauds the team members and the team members commend each other. As Patty Hendrickson, author of “The Toolbox for Teams,” points out, “We must look for every opportunity to applaud others for every effort from the minuscule to the magnificent.”

In the book “Teams at Work: 7 Keys to Success,” Dr. Suzanne Willis Zoglio talks about the importance of addressing the “rules” of team spirit — value the individual, develop team trust, communicate openly, manage differences, share successes and welcome new members. Spending time and attention on developing an effective work team can lead to both individual, team and organization success. Or, as Henry Ford once said, “Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success.”

For more information on Dr. White’s programs and publications, visit www.successimages.com or call (225) 769-2307. ●