

Article

Team Trouble: Enhancing the Performance of a Non-Contributing Team Member

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As consultants, we are often asked to identify the elements that go into building a high performance team. They are many: committed competent individuals; clear goals and objectives; well defined roles and responsibilities; excellent communication, etc. But what happens when one member of the team is less conscientious than the rest? How do you effectively deal with this individual without harming group productivity and morale?



This is an interesting and challenging question that plagues many teams in a variety of organizations. The reality is that by not responding and allowing this person to perpetuate their lackadaisical behavior, you will do more damage to the team's productivity and morale than if you had addressed the problem head on.

Keep in mind that your team wants to succeed as individuals as well as collectively. A weak link will demoralize the collective culture and allow for rapid deterioration within the spirit of the team.

I recommend an aggressive, yet compassionate, approach to the resolution of the lackadaisical behavior. Try some of the following suggestions:

- Promote a performance measurement campaign that allows for visibility around collective expectations. This campaign should set measurable standards for work to be done. The core of this system can be built on schedules, work break down structures, and work packages on individual assignments.
- Speak openly in the team environment about each other's roles. Ensure that all individuals on the team understand their goals, mission and individual responsibilities. These conversations should be collaborative and constructive. Create an environment that fosters individual and collective accountability.
- Provide team members with a structure around the charter, goals, values and mission for the group. Each team meeting should include reflection upon the norms created by the aforementioned items.
- Remember, building an effective performance team takes time, and there may be instances along this path that cause friction for one or more members. Ensure that an open channel of communication, both formal and informal, is maintained among team members at all times.

If none of the above recommendations work to enhance the performance of this individual, more assertive and individual action must be taken. Begin an individual coaching and measurement process, which includes specific performance expectations. Meet with the team member and let him/her know about the problems their behavior is causing, and the potential negative impacts this will have on the team, project and organization. Agree on coaching goals in writing, and set dates for periodic performance reviews. Follow up aggressively to ensure the team member's training/coaching needs are met in a proactive manner.

If the individual does not respond to the personal attention, removal from the team will be necessary. Apprehension to do so will promote dissension within the team, and ultimately hurt the overall performance.

Throughout the experience, communication is critical. Do not allow speculation on performance issues. Deal with the situation directly, and although the team does not need to be privy to the details of any coaching or performance improvement techniques you may be employing, make sure they are aware that you, as a team leader, have addressed the situation and are working aggressively towards a resolution.

Although these types of situations are difficult, a team leader must rise to the occasion in order to preserve the integrity of the team and maintain morale.

For more information regarding this topic we can be contacted via phone or e-mail at info@amsconsulting.com