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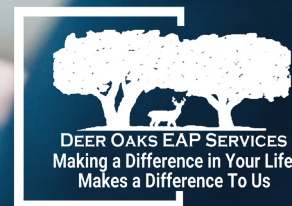
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This important session focuses on building awareness in managers of the attitudes, emotions, and behaviors that create barriers to a respectful and engaging workplace culture. The presentation will also provide self-management and interpersonal skills training that will lead to more openness, effective communication, greater collaboration, and better resolution of differences at the office.

Date/Time: November 1, 2021 1:00-2:00 PM CT

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Team Building Without Time Wasting

Teams are becoming more important. As the hierarchical school of leadership fades, a new focus on networked team leadership emerges. Leaders are now members of virtual teams, autonomous teams, cross-functional teams, and action-learning teams.

Many of today's leaders face a dilemma: As the need to build effective teams increases, available time and other resources to build these teams decreases. Most leaders have more work to do and fewer staff members to help them.

Focused feedback and follow-up increases leadership and customer service effectiveness. A parallel approach to team building helps leaders build teamwork without wasting time. While the approach is simple, it is not easy. Team members must have the courage to regularly ask for feedback and the discipline to develop a behavioral change strategy, to follow up, and to stick with it.

To implement this team-building process, the leader must assume the role of coach or facilitator, and fight the urge to be the boss of the project. Greater teamwork occurs when team members develop their own behavioral change strategy, as opposed to having one imposed on them. This process should not be implemented if the leader intends to fire or remove a team member.

Steps in the Process

1) Ask each member of the team to confidentially record their individual answers to two questions: a) "How well are we doing in terms of working together as a team?" and b) "How well do we need to be doing in terms of working together as a team?"

Before starting a team-building process, determine if the team feels that team building is both important and needed. Some groups report to the same manager but have little reason to work interactively as a team. Other groups may believe that teamwork is important but feel that the team is already functioning smoothly and that a team-building activity would be a waste of time.

2) Have a team member calculate the results. Discuss the results with team members. If they believe that the gap between current effectiveness and needed effectiveness indicates the need for team building, proceed to the next step.

In most cases, team members do believe that improved teamwork is both important and needed. Recent interviews involving members from several hundred teams in multinational corporations show that the average team member believes that his or her team is currently at a 5.8 level of effectiveness but needs to be at an 8.7.

3) Ask the team, "If every team member could change two key behaviors, which behaviors would help us close the gap between where we are and where we want to be, and which two behaviors should we all try to change?" Ask team members to record their selected behaviors on flip charts.

4) Help team members prioritize all the behaviors on the charts (many will be the same or similar). Determine the two most important behaviors to change for all team members.

5) Ask each team member to have a one-on-one dialogue with each other team member. During the dialogue, each member will request that his or her colleague suggest two areas for personal behavioral change (other than the two already agreed upon for every team member) that will help the team close the gap between "where we are" and "where we want to be."

These dialogues should occur simultaneously and take about 5 minutes each. For example, if there are seven team members, each team member will participate in six brief one-on-one dialogues.

2

6) Let each team member review his or her list of suggested behavioral changes and choose the two that seem to be the most important. Have all team members then announce their two key behaviors for personal change to the team.

7) Encourage each team member to ask for a brief (5-minute) monthly progress report. Each team member reports on their effectiveness in demonstrating the two key behaviors common to all team members and the two key personal behaviors. Specific suggestions for improvement can be solicited in areas where behavior does not match desired expectations.

8) Conduct a mini survey follow-up process in 4 months. In the mini survey, each team member receives confidential feedback from all other team members on his or her perceived change in effectiveness. This survey will include two common items, the two personal items, and an item that assesses how well the individual has followed up with the other team members.

9) Have an outside supplier calculate the results for each individual (on all items) and calculate the summary results for all team members (on the common team items). Each team member can then receive a confidential summary report indicating the degree to which colleagues see his or her effectiveness in demonstrating the desired behaviors. Each member receives a summary report on the team's progress on the items selected for all team members.

When team members regularly follow up with their colleagues, they increase their effectiveness in their individual areas for improvement and their effectiveness on the common team items. The mini survey summary report gives team members positive reinforcement for improvement and validates the importance of sticking with it and following up.

10) In a team meeting, have each team member discuss key learnings from their mini survey results and ask for further suggestions in a brief one-on-one dialogue with each other team member.

11) Review the summary results with the team. Facilitate a discussion on how the team is doing in terms of increasing its effectiveness in the two key behaviors selected for all team members. Provide the team with positive recognition for increased effectiveness in teamwork. Encourage team members to keep focused on increasing their effectiveness in demonstrating the behaviors that they are trying to improve.

12) Have each team member conduct their brief monthly progress-report sessions with each other team member. Re-administer the mini survey (in 4-month intervals) after 8 months from the beginning of the process and again after 1 year.

13) Conduct a summary session with the team 1 year after the process has started. Review the results of the final mini survey, and ask the team members to rate the team's effectiveness on "where we are" versus "where we need to be" in terms of working together as a team. Compare these ratings with the original ratings that were calculated 1 year earlier. If team members follow the process in a disciplined fashion, the team will see a dramatic improvement in teamwork. Recognize the team improvement in teamwork, and have each team member (in a brief one-on-one dialogue) recognize each of his or her colleagues for improvements in behavior that have occurred over the past year.

14) Ask the team if they believe that more work on team building will be needed in the upcoming year. If the team believes that more work would be beneficial, continue the process. If the team believes that more work is not needed, declare victory, and work on something else!

The process works because it is highly focused, includes disciplined feedback and follow-up, does not waste time, encourages participants to focus on self-improvement, and provides frequent feedback and reinforcement.

This article will close with a challenge to you as a team leader: Try it! The downside is low. The process takes little time, and the first mini survey will show quickly if progress is being made. The upside can be very high. As effective teamwork becomes more important, the modest time investment you make in this process may produce an exponential return for your team and organization.

Source: Goldsmith, M., & Morgan, H. (Revised 2006, April 17). Team building or time wasting? Retrieved October 29, 2018 from http://www.marshallgoldsmith.com/

Ask Your EAP!

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have regarding employee issues and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to the EAP for a management consultation.

Q. If an EAP referral is not a punitive program, why do employees become resistant to formal supervisor referral for job performance issues?

A. Although education and awareness about the EAP reduces the stigma associated with seeking help, understanding how employees react to constructive confrontations and referrals can help supervisors better manage resistance. When you confront an employee about job performance issues, a natural reaction is to deny or minimize the validity of your complaint. The complaint is viewed as criticism, and defensiveness is the response. Accepting the EAP referral is tantamount to agreeing with your complaint. Hence, the resistance. Employees may be defensive for other reasons, of course. These include fear that the program won't be confidential, fear of a permanent record of their participation, stigma, and experiencing anxiety over anticipated disclosure of a personal problem that the employee feels he or she can still resolve (alcoholism, etc.) To reduce defensiveness, discuss these issues early in your meeting. Like a salesperson, address the resistance issues up front in order to make the "sale."

Q. I supervise a diverse group of workers from around the world. Many, I think, would not visit the EAP for counseling help. How can I better motivate these workers, whose culture may discourage sharing personal problems with others, to consider using the EAP?

A. When correcting performance issues of employees or helping them resolve workplace problems that interfere with productivity, view the EAP as a resource, but avoid discussing clinical aspects of the EAP. Certainly, EAPs assess and may counsel on personal problems, but the business rationale for the program is not based on counseling. It is based on improving productivity and preserving human resources. Likewise, supervisor referrals are based on performance issues. So it is appropriate to focus on EAP strictly as a performance-enhancing resource. This will help resistant employees see the EAP as a more attractive resource. Ironically, this view of the EAP as a "productivity improvement program" may yield more referrals and help for "at-risk" employees. It's natural for employees to hesitate sharing personal information, but EA professionals are experts at working with clients at their pace and avoiding pressuring clients to disclose information they aren't ready to share.

Q. Can supervisors consult with the EAP about other things related to our role as a supervisor, even if the subject has nothing to do with managing a troubled employee?

A. Like any employee, the EAP is available to discuss and resolve problems you experience. This includes issues of supervision, your role, management principles, etc. If the EAP can't assist you because of a lack of its direct experience with the issue you bring to the program, it can still research and examine what resources can assist you. Note that all of us have manifest problems that appear in our lives. These roadblocks to other goals may be difficult to surmount because of our psychological issues, scripts, self-esteem problems, etc. These are the less visible but latent issues the EAP may help you spot and troubleshoot in your pursuit of the ultimate goal.

Information contained in this newsletter is for general information purposes only and is not intended to be specific guidance for any particular supervisor or human resource management concern. Some of it might not apply to your particular company policies and available programs. This information is proprietary and intended only for eligible EAP members. For specific guidance on handling individual employee problems, consult with Deer Oaks by calling the Helpline.