

## **Team Building**

Your organization is ready to roll; your officers are enthusiastic about beginning the year, and your returning and/or newly recruited members are eager to contribute. The manner in which you successfully channel this collective group energy is important for your organization. Knowing the stages of group development coupled with the team building process can help you point your group in the right direction. There are two important steps to take before you just plunge into the year's activities - building your group into a team and determining your team goals for the year.

A team is an energetic group of diverse individuals committed to achieving common objectives that enjoy working together and produce quality results.

### **Characteristics of an effective team:**

- Common vision
- Clear objectives each member is committed to in order to accomplish the shared vision
- Open communication
- Specific roles each member assumes to accomplish the group objectives
- Energy and enthusiasm
- Distributed participation and leadership
- Appropriate and effective decision-making
- Trust, acceptance, and support among members
- Members who feel significant and are motivated
- Cohesion and comfort among members

### **What is Team Building:**

Team Building" is the process of molding many diverse individuals into a team. A team is a group of individuals that collectively share or agree on the following commonalities:

- A common vision or goal(s) of what they are working toward as a group.
- What objectives they are able to accomplish as a group to achieve their vision or goals.
- The specific roles in which each person will be working to accomplish those objectives.
- Open information flow and commitment to other group members.

In order for your team to work together effectively, they need to feel comfortable around each other. The more they know and appreciate each other not only as people but as contributors to the organization as well, the better they'll work together.

Much of this information and appreciation will evolve naturally over time. However, in order to prevent unnecessary misunderstandings or difficulties that may arise during the group development stages and since the school year is so short; it is very helpful to the organization to speed up the team building process. And it's easy to do!

### **Team Building Process:**

One of the most efficient and effective ways to build teams is to set aside a two or three hour block of time very early in the year. A comfortable, informal environment works best - someone's living room, a carpeted meeting room where you can all sit on the floor, a quiet lounge with comfortable furniture. Make team building your only agenda item.

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Your task is to share information with and about each other (e.g., who you are, what you think about the organization, how you expect you'll fit in). The following questions are examples of those you can ask to start the discussion and keep it on track. Make sure each person answers every question. The point is to listen to each other and look at the things that are different amongst you as well as what you have in common.

- The purpose of team building is to get members listening and discussing in order to mold them into a team
- Involves individuals sharing information about each other, including what you think of the organization, your expectations, and your role in the group.
- Set aside two or three hours of time at the beginning of the year to focus on team building.
- Consider taking that time to answer the following questions:
  - Why were you interested in becoming an officer/member?
  - What do you expect to learn from this experience?
  - What is the biggest asset you bring to this organization?
  - What is your biggest fear about what could happen during your term of office?
  - What is your own perception of yourself as a leader/member? Include costs and benefits - to yourself and to the organization.
  - What did you feel best about last term/year? What did you feel worst about?
  - Share any special interest areas, skills, areas of expertise. Also share areas you feel weak in and would like information about, support or training in.
  - What emotion is the most difficult to express?
  - What's going on in your life right now?
  - What do you want to see this organization do?

### **When to Utilize the Team Building Process:**

While team building is essential to newly formed groups or an organization with a large number of new members, there are other times it can be effective as well. You might find it helpful to use team building techniques when:

- Members seem bored or irritable
- Members appear to be going off in different directions or drifting away from the group
- There is a great deal of conflict or "infighting" (i.e., during the storming stage of group development)
- Members have been apart for a while (i.e., breaks, vacations, etc.)
- You want to take a break from the normal routine or boost team spirit

### **Assorted Team Building Exercises:**

Self-Disclosure/Relationship Building Exercises - helps break down barriers and allows members to get to know one another on a more "intimate" level. Very appropriate for groups where people will be working closely together and/or for groups where members will be together for a long period of time.

- **Intimate Interviews:** members pair off and interview one another for 5 minutes each. Partners introduce each other to the group speaking in the first person (using "I") as if

s/he were the person being introduced. They should be sure to include everything s/he can remember about their partner.

- **Personal Crest:** members make a personal coat of arms or crest in which they express important aspects about themselves through drawings or short phrases. Possible topics/questions to include in the crest: the most significant event in your life; how you react when upset; your primary goal for the year; where you would like to be in 5 years.

Trust Exercises - generally rely on some form of physical contact and have the added element of requiring participants to trust one another in order to complete the activity. These exercises are appropriate for most groups, but they can be physically dangerous if not handled properly.

Special attention or care needs to be given to those individuals who are really afraid to participate. It is important that they not be pressured into participating and that their decision of not to do the exercise be treated in the same manner and tone as those who are participating, especially during the processing of the exercise.

- **Trust Walks:** members take turns being blindfolded and led by another on a short walk.
- **Trust Falls:** members stand on a raised platform (a chair will suffice) and fall backwards in the arms of the other members. (Please have someone with experience facilitate the trust falls.)

Physical Exercises - helps eliminate tension and distance between people, makes them more relaxed and comfortable with one another. These exercises are appropriate for most groups, but beware of individual reactions to touching/ being touched.

- **Human Knot:** members stand in a circle and extend their right hands into the middle and clasp the hand of another. Repeat process using the left hand. (Do not hold the hand of the person standing next to you) Untangle the knot without unclasp hands.
- **Human Circle:** members form a circle by holding hands with the persons next to them. Without letting go of each other's hands try to turn the circle inside out.

Cooperation Exercises - helps people learn to work together. These exercises can give an indication about the roles group members will play in group situations (e.g., thinker, leader, organizer, dominator, follower, encourager) and are appropriate for any group, especially if the job tasks demand teamwork.

- **Perfect Square:** squares of construction paper of different colors are cut into odd shapes. Each member takes their piece (or odd shape) and then works with other group members with their odd shaped pieces of like color to form a perfect square. This exercise is better if it is done in silence with no verbal communication permitted. This collaborative exercise may also be placed within a competitive framework if more than one group is constructing perfect squares at the same time.

Actual Group Tasks (Instead of Contrived Activities or Exercises) - everyday tasks that must be accomplished by the group are done rather than contrived activities. This is a superb method for increasing member involvement and commitment in any group. Sometimes these tasks are a necessity if a group is to remain a group or team.

- **Brainstorming:** members are asked to contribute ideas regarding a specific problem/question facing the group. Ideas are recorded without judgment.
- **Group Goal-Setting:** members participate in reviewing and setting the group's goals and objectives. People are more committed to a course of action they actually help to choose.
- **Other Actual Tasks or Activities:** parties, potluck dinners or meals, and retreats done together as a group help to break the monotony of regular meetings and provide an

opportunity for members to get back in touch with each other on a social basis. These activities are appropriate anytime in any group, but are particularly helpful when motivation is lacking, morale is low, or members appear to be drifting apart.

After you have completed your team building exercise, it is necessary to spend time as a group discussing this experience. Part of any team building process is sharing what has been learned and experienced; what members liked and disliked; and, most importantly, how they felt while participating. Team building is hindered if inadequate time is allotted for discussion, or if individual feelings surface and are not addressed.