



The Well-Practiced Manager

Professional Development
Resource for
Boston College Managers
and Supervisors

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From The Director

Managers get work done through others.

The Employee Development Office is a resource for managers who want to exert the greatest positive influence on their teams. Admittedly, being a manager is a challenging job and takes a great deal of know-how and patience. Let us know some of your management issues or concerns so we can provide training and support – and summarize key points on the topic here in future issues of *The Well-Practiced Manager*.

In this issue, we look at some elements you can examine and address to make improvements to the team you lead. Your team may be dealing with constantly changing and challenging priorities and/or with repeating cycles tied to the academic calendar – whatever the work, there are stresses and strains connected with it that you can effectively manage. We've included some composite stories that will provide practical help and inspiration.

May you have a Happy and Productive New Year!

Bernie O'Kane

Bernie O'Kane

Director, Employee Development
2-3332
okane@bc.edu

Employee Development Office

Department of Human Resources
More Hall 315
617.552.8532
employee.development@bc.edu
www.bc.edu/ed

Effective Teams



Teams are not alike. Think about the team you now lead and how it contrasts with other teams you know. Let's look at a few of the variables:

- ✓ The kind of work the team does
- ✓ The size of the team and the attributes of individual team members
- ✓ Your style of leadership
- ✓ Your work environment

These factors and several others contribute to the culture of the team – or, its unique “personality.” We start with the premise that effective teams need purpose and focus; they need to communicate well and collaborate; they need a strong leader; and they need to embody resilience, respect, and trust.



Effective teams have a purpose and focus

- *There is a clear mission and vision for the team*
- *Performance standards are known and upheld*
- *The team is knit together by common goals*

Joan was promoted into a management position and found she had a “feisty” team to lead. There did not seem to be common goals or a clear vision.

To establish herself as their new leader she created a challenge for her team members. She gave them a week to write their individual versions of a combined mission/vision statement for the team. Joan asked them to make it inspiring, compelling, and descriptive of what this team was all about – and it had to be short enough to “fit inside a fortune cookie.” At the next team meeting, there were six energetic entries for the team to vote on. A winning statement emerged amidst lots of camaraderie and this mission/vision statement focused the team on shared goals. To help make it memorable, Joan had a plateful of fortune cookies on the meeting table.

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Effective teams find a way to effectively communicate

- Ideas and views are shared
- Disagreement is not a catastrophe
- Listening skills are used

Greg's team meetings were boring. No one looked forward to them. He wanted his meetings to energize people and tap into their collected knowledge and expertise. Instead, he had a few individuals who dominated the conversation with negative comments and others who were silent and withdrawn. Greg wanted to ensure that all voices were heard and the potential for synergy was fulfilled. He instituted a "Structured Go-Around" at each team meeting, rather than have an open discussion period. The "Structured Go-Around" ensured that everyone gets equal mike-time and everyone contributes their thoughts and comments on the topic. This simple change helped his team meetings to move from largely negative to mostly positive – and to send a strong message to his team that their full participation is required.

Effective teams work in collaboration

- Willing to work for the good of the whole team
- Personal agendas are set aside
- Individual strengths are confirmed

Cherise had several high achievers and no natural collaborators on her team. She saw this as a potential problem, because critical information was not easily shared with others. Cherise believed that strengthening collaborative skills on her team would increase the knowledge, expertise, and capability of

the whole team. She asked three members of her team to work collaboratively on an upcoming six-month project. Cherise explained the results she wanted at the end of six months. One of her success measures for the six-month project was evidence that the three people had successfully collaborated throughout the project. She did not select a project leader, but did ask for a work plan that would show how they would work together over the next six-month period. Cherise reviewed their plan, gave her approval, and delegated the responsibility to the team, confident that they now could use their collaborative skills more effectively.

Effective teams have strong leadership

- Define a clear path for moving forward
- Encourage others
- Show you are capable, self-confident, and honest

Jim's time was taken up with phone calls and meetings with people outside of his department. This left little time for quality conversations with members of his own team. In truth, he spent little time managing others. He managed workflow (or so he thought) but not people. Jim believed that hiring good people relieved him of the day-to-day work of managing them. He would say, "I step back and let people do the job they were hired to do." When a serious performance problem emerged on his team, Jim was the last to know. He hadn't been paying attention to what individuals did or the quality or timeliness of their work. He was busy elsewhere. The situation escalated into a very big problem that finally got Jim's

attention and the attention of his own manager who told Jim that "This needs to be corrected and corrected fast." Jim learned a tough lesson – but he learned it in

time to change his behavior and – over time – became a strong leader. He realized that time spent talking with members of his team was not only useful, it was essential. He began the habit of scheduling time with individuals and for team meetings BEFORE he filled his day with other meetings and tasks. The situation turned around, just in time.



Effective teams are resilient, respectful, and trusting

- Hardiness and flexibility are demonstrated
- Courteous behavior and friendly interactions are valued
- Belief in one another is evident

Lori was frustrated that one of the people on her team had a habit of making sarcastic remarks about her peers and others. The comments were borderline – not quite rude, but not complimentary. These remarks usually got a laugh from others, but Lori recognized the potential danger. She took direct action. She talked privately to the employee and said that sarcasm was unwelcome and unacceptable. At her next team meeting, Lori led the group in a discussion about "Group Guidelines" for working together. Lori invited members of the team to suggest ground rules for keeping the workplace friendly and respectful and wrote them on the white board. To go further, Lori added her own suggestion to the list. She wrote: "Make this a sarcasm-free zone." Lori explained to the team the importance of that guideline. The "Group Guidelines" were turned into a poster that now hangs in the team's meeting room, reminding everyone of their standards for interactions.

Remember:

Teams are not the universal answer to getting work done. There are many tasks and responsibilities that are best done solo or with limited input from others. It's important to distinguish the difference.



Editorial Services provided by
Nancy Sartanowicz, Workplace Strategies,
www.yourstrategies.com

Graphic Design by
Tania Fine Helhoski, BirdDesign,
www.birddesignstudio.com