

8 Tips for High-Performance Team Success

Shaw Resources shares insights gained from years of working with teams of all types

Issaquah, WA – March 24, 2009: Organizations have been using teams for decades to implement improvements, yet many still find it to be a real challenge to get results using this approach. Most organizations realize that work crosses organizational boundaries, and that people from different divisions and departments must find a way to work together if the organization is to survive over the long term. Here are eight key tips to help you ensure your project teams succeed.

1. Invest in preplanning

Preplanning is a necessary condition to succeed. The work you do before the first meeting, such as addressing the tips shown below, can create the necessary conditions for success.

2. Create “crystal clear” team expectations

Provide written expectations that the team must achieve, including specific measurements to indicate progress. A team with a highly specific goal is much more likely to succeed than one with a vague objective.

3. Assign a senior management sponsor/leader

A manager with clout backing the team is vital to ensure the team gets the support it needs. Without management authority to reinforce the team, the organizational chart wins every time.

4. Choose the right team members

Choose team members with the key knowledge the team needs to get its job done. Make sure vital support like IT is included or assigned to help the team.

5. Get middle management buy-in

Get buy in from the managers of the team members to warrant that required time commitments can be made. Additionally, the managers of involved team members need to support the team's objective. An uncooperative manager can kill a team's efforts and poison the well for future team projects.

6. Review team progress

To ensure milestones are met in a timely manner, top management should review the team's progress at least quarterly and more often for a “fast track” project. This will assure that any “course corrections” for new data or discoveries by the team can be made before too much time passes and derails the project's success.

7. Assign a professional facilitator

Facilitating cross-functional teams takes skill and experience. A new or inexperienced facilitator will not have the “know how” that comes from familiarity and will result in a lot of wasted time and maybe a “failed team.” Make sure the facilitator has a deep “tool box” to maximize team resources. For example, a good facilitator knows that the team needs to have a set of meeting rules supported by all team members as well as a host of other team success tools.

8. Pick some low hanging fruit.

Nothing succeeds like success. Make sure the team picks some improvement target it can achieve

almost immediately so that they may report an early success. Sitting in a meeting that never accomplishes anything is de-motivating and can lead to team burn out. An example, set an initial goal to review and revise an out-of-date spec or procedure right away, like the first week, and have it ready for the following week's management review meeting.

There are many gains that result over and above the teams' project improvements. People may work together who have never met before and these connections can result in out-of-the-box solutions for persistent business problems. The team approach, involving people from different divisions or departments across the organization, may be the only way to make the improvements in customer service, quality and cost that you need to make in order to survive. If your competition makes these gains before you do, yours may not be the organization that survives.

About Shaw Resources:

Shaw Resources, founded in 1990 by James Shaw, uses teams to assist hospitals, other healthcare delivery/service organizations, and public sector entities to identify and implement operational improvements in quality and cost effectiveness utilizing a customer-focused analytical methodology. More than half of the Shaw clients have been healthcare providers, primarily large (200+ beds) California-based acute care hospitals. Shaw provides team and Baldrige-based consulting services and software to organizations using the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. James Shaw first became a member of the Baldrige Board of Examiners in 1994. During 1996/1997, he was a member of the Baldrige Healthcare Pilot team, and was first named a senior Baldrige Examiner in 1997. Shaw's Scorebook Navigator™ software is licensed to the Alliance for Performance Excellence and is used by many state and local Baldrige-based award programs via partnership with the Baldrige Foundation. More information is available online at www.ShawResources.com.