

Do You Work as a Group or a Team?

In today's world of instant communication and rapid change driven by improvements in technology, is it essential to have people work as a team? After all, with new and better information systems in all areas of the organization that provide data for better decision making, why do experts in performance improvement talk about the importance of teamwork? Well the answer is simple. Whatever decisions are made to improve how things are done or to create new products or processes, it is people who need to implement those decisions and make things happen. The better people work together, the more potential there is to realize the efficiencies that new technologies and systems promise.

Teamwork is even more important in complex organizations where collaboration needs to happen between departments and perhaps remotely. Even small organizations may have multiple locations where goods are either developed or produced. There are two reasons for this, one is the fact that it may be cost effective to outsource certain aspects of operations or development and also because specialized talent is often required to create new products or services and may not be found locally. It is quite common today for people to work from a distance and the latest studies show that contrary to previous beliefs, working from home is more productive and less stressful.

One organization that proves that teamwork pays off is Toyota who is famous for the slogan the "Toyota Way". This great organization learned how to continuously improve their processes and products, which has led them to become the world's leading seller of automobiles, surpassing the giant General Motors who recently announced billions of dollars in losses. Over the years Toyota invested heavily in Kai-zen or continuous improvement. But they did this the "Toyota Way", by developing teamwork and a participative management style. The outcome today is positively clear when you compare them to GM or most of the North American car manufacturers.

Many aspects of our leadership and team development training programs contain the same principles of participative management that Toyota is famous for. Can these principles and methods that drive continuous improvement and teamwork be applied to all organizations, big and small? Absolutely! In fact it is better to understand these principles and develop the appropriate leadership attitude and behaviour when you are a small organization because your leadership and business strategy will be driven by them. And these attitudes will dictate how well and fast you are able to grow your business.

One principle of participative management is to involve your team members in important decisions that have a direct impact on the work they do. By doing this people will feel empowered and be motivated to back the decision and do what is needed to support it. If you make most of the decisions without involving the team, they may feel things are being imposed on them and resist the change that the decision imposes.

So this brings me back to my subject question, what is the difference between and group and a team? We ask this question in our "**Styles of Leadership**" and "**My Team and I**" training programs. The usual answers are teams have clearer goals, are more motivated, have clearer responsibilities, etc. etc. But these things also can and do exist in most groups. The real difference is that in a team, members know, trust and are willing to help each other to achieve the mission or goals of the team. They have learned to understand themselves and each other and may not like all their team members, but are willing to accept them, deal with their differences and work together. This may sound simplistic and subtle but it is also a very powerful concept and not obvious to implement. It requires self-development; first on the part of the leaders of the organization and then by all team members. This means people need to discover why different types of people see things differently and to tolerate and embrace these differences. It does not mean tolerating negative attitudes and behaviours.

Fritz Glaus, author of "CrazyZoo, Know-Thyself Made Easy" (available at www.Lulu.com) has also created the "**Styles of Leadership**" and "**My Team and I**" training programs that incorporate a simple approach to know oneself and others. This knowledge is incorporated throughout the training program so that people learn to collaborate based on the types of people they work with, while learning to apply the principles of participative management and teamwork that has driven Toyota and many other great organizations to world class excellence.

Many organizations attempt to develop teamwork by once a year involving everyone or selective departments in team building activities, or the occasional social activity. While these well-organized activities are fun and different and usually produce short term enthusiasm, real team development is an ongoing process that requires understanding, a strategy and determination backed by top leadership commitment. It does not come easy, but the payoff is worth it. Toyota proved it!

For more information on how to develop real teamwork and continuous improvement in your organization, contact us today.

Stephen Goldberg, sgoldberg@optimusperformance.ca