

Bringing Departments Together.

One of the most challenging aspects of any business unit is to ensure that all the various departments of that unit are working together harmoniously towards a common goal. Too often however the various departments within the unit can concentrate solely on their own tasks and goals and thus create what I term 'silo' working. This 'silo' mentality can work against the whole unit as there is little shared understanding, no shared learning and no mutual support. This can mean that some projects take longer than anticipated and can cause heartache along the way.

One of the business units I am working with at present is composed of four functions. Sales, Marketing, Medical Information and Admin Support. I have been lucky in that I have been involved with the unit since it was formed so I don't really have to work with any present dysfunction between the functions although one has to remember that they all have been used to working a particular way historically - the 'silo' mentality way! Here's what we have done so far.

Firstly we had to get the whole department of 25 people together to talk through what the Business Unit has to achieve. We needed to get the total buy-in from everyone in that although each Function had particular goals it was important that everyone knew exactly how these goals fitted into the 'big picture'. The aim of this session was to ensure full understanding of the outputs that needed to be achieved by the Unit and the part of each function played in achieving these. We then had the whole unit working on a Mission Statement that encapsulated what they were there to achieve and how they were going to achieve it. These sessions can be quite lengthy as you will never get 100% agreement from everyone in terms of the actual words used but if you can support them to come up with a statement that captures the main needs of everyone then you will have done well. A good emotive mission statement can work wonders in bringing people together.

Our next step was for each of the functions to go and review the Mission Statement and then work on what values and behaviours they would like to see demonstrated in everyday work. Firstly they worked on what values they needed to see exhibited (e.g. honesty) and then against each value, they were asked to highlight what actual everyday behaviours everyone should demonstrate. (e.g. a behaviour put against honesty was that of highlighting to the team when things weren't going well). Once the four functions had done this then everyone compared notes and 'lo and behold' there was very little difference between them! A short time later the Unit had a mission statement and a series of core values and behaviours that the Unit members would aspire to demonstrate wherever possible.

It is important at this stage to keep the momentum and the understanding going. To do this it is imperative that the level of understanding of the each function's goals, processes and challenges is high. In this situation we asked each function to present to the other functions the following information:

What their actual goals and targets are.
What their key processes are.
Who their major stakeholders are.
What their main challenges are.
How specifically could the other functions support them.

By getting each function to highlight this information the Unit was able to get a better understanding of each function and thus strengthen the bond between them. The fact that 'dependencies' between the functions were highlighted meant that each function now knows how they can support each other.

The next stage in the development process is to let this Unit set about their tasks but build in a performance review process that allows the Unit to track not only how the overall performance of the Unit is doing against the goals and targets but also to check how the mission statement is standing up, and how well the team members are demonstrating the agreed values and behaviours.

I will write about the progress of this particular unit in a alter edition of 'Build A Successful Team'.

This article was written by Performance Coach, Allan Mackintosh and was part of the June 2007 'Build A Successful Team' e-newsletter. You can subscribe to the newsletter via www.teambuildersinternational.com