

The Stages Of Team Development.

One of the greatest challenges a coaching manager has is in moving his or her team through the various team development stages. If a manager has no or little experience of teams and team dynamics then taking over a team and then leading that team can be a very stressful experience. Every manager should know what the various growth stages are of a developing team and they should know how best to move the team through these stages with the minimum of fuss and stress. Unfortunately, many managers do not get the necessary training or coaching in this area of team development and as such teams go through a lot of stress and turmoil when perhaps this could be minimised quite considerably.

In the next couple of pages I will take you through a simple team development model, which I find the most useful of all the models I have studied. The names of each of the stages sum up perfectly what you can expect at each stage!

Psychologist, B.W Tuckman in the 1970s, developed this model and Tuckman suggests that there are four team development stages that teams have to go through in order to be productive. The four stages are:

Forming when the team meets and starts to work together for the first time.

Storming, when the members within the team start to “jockey” for position and when control struggles take place.

Norming when rules are finalised and accepted and when team rules start being adhered to.

Performing when the team starts to produce through effective and efficient working practices.

Some teams will go through the four stages fairly rapidly and move from forming through to performing in a relatively short space of time. A lot depends on the composition of the team, the capabilities of the individuals, the tasks at hand, and of course the leadership from management. One thing is certain – no team passes over the storming phase. All teams must be prepared to go through the difficult and stressful times as well as reaping the benefits of the

productive phases. The task of the coaching manager is to identify where along the path of team development his or her team is and then move it on to the next phase with the minimum of fuss and resistance.

Let's look at each of the stages in detail.

Forming:

This is a stressful phase when new teams come together. Everyone is a bit wary of each other, particularly if they do not know anyone and particularly if the manager is new. Even more stressful, if the rumours circulating about the manager are not favourable!

The first meeting is a nervous one and a good coaching manager will recognise this and make attempts to ensure the team is put at ease. As the forming stage is the stage where cliques can develop, the coaching manager should be aware of this and should be aware of the various alliances that will occur at this stage. Not all alliances will be counter-productive to the team's future success but it pays for the coaching manager to watch and observe the behaviours of potential cliques. The challenge for the coaching manager is basically to give an inert group of people who hardly know each the best start possible as a new team. The coaching manager should attempt to do the following in order to give the team the best possible start.

Outline specifically the task the team has to perform.

Be specific about each person's role in the team's task.

Outline how the team has come together and give reasons as to why the various team members have been brought together for inclusion within this team.

Be open about the way you operate as a manager – what are your strengths and weaknesses? Outline your expectations of both the team and the individuals within the team. In other words, start to contract with the team.

Encourage each team member to do likewise.

Ensure that the team has a set of rules and guidelines and that the team has an input into how these rules are formed and agreed.

Have a discussion about reward and recognition. How does the team want to celebrate its achievements?

How are the team going to make decisions ?

How are the team going to give feedback on each other's performance?

By having an open discussion right at the start of the team's task then people get the chance to air views, concerns and queries. The coaching manager will enable this to happen with the result that people feel they have been listened to; they have been able to contribute; they know the rules and regulations by which the team will operate and they now have a greater appreciation of the people they are working with.

Storming:

Storming is a challenging phase and the coaching manager who has led the team through the forming stage well and is starting to feel quite good about progress may have quite a rude awakening. Storming always seems to come as a surprise, no matter how well the coaching manager has prepared and led the team up till now. This is where the leadership qualities of the coaching manager are tested to the full. I have had the privilege of working with some managers who have handled this stage well and also have witnessed (and suffered) at the hands of managers who have had no idea of what to do to move the team forward.

Storming usually arises as a result of goals, roles and rules all becoming confused and unclear. No matter how clear the team was in relation to the goals, roles and rules during the forming stage it is very often the case that the individual team member interpretations of these roles and rules is somewhat different in reality. This results in confusion when different behaviours are evident and conflicts can arise with the potential for factions being created within the team.

It is during this stage that the coaching skills of the coaching manager should come to the fore. Both individuals and the team as a whole should be coached to enable and support them to ensure agreement as regards what specifically the goals, roles and rules are with respect to the team and what that means to each and every individual. Many managers get frustrated at this stage because they believe that they have already done the work at outlining the goals, roles and rules at the early stage of the formation of the team. I have seen managers go from a state of immense pride about the way they have guided their team through the early stages to a state of anger where they look to blame the team and its individual members. What is it they say, "Comes before a fall"?

The coaching manager must go over again the agreements made by the team during the forming stage and ensure that the understanding is uniform across the team. The earlier in the storming stage this is revisited the better and this is where the aware coaching manager comes into his or her own. The unaware

manager will tend to panic and blame and will be unable to control the behaviours of the team even though they may take a very authoritarian stance and start to order that people behave. All that achieves is compliance and team members will still have the same misunderstandings about what is going on. This is when a lot of talking goes on “behind the manager’s back” This is very unhealthy for a team.

Once the coaching manager has got his or her team through the storming phase they have to be aware of a challenge that can come out of the blue. And that is the challenge of a new member. No sooner has a coaching manager got their team through the “storm” then it is joined by a new member who then starts to question the ways of working and potentially starts to destabilise the team. All new members to the team must be made aware of the team goals, roles and rules before they join and they must be made aware of the process that is in place or the giving and receiving of feedback if they have any suggestions as to how they can improve the ways of working for the team. Again, this is an area where I have seen managers lose the progress that they have made with their team. Instead of taking time out to bring a new member up to speed with all the rules, roles and goals, the manager lets the new member join the team without much of a briefing. The result can be chaos. Beware.

You will find at times that there will be people who tend to hold back the storming process or perhaps prolong it. These people have a decision to make. Go with the majority or get out. Business has no place to let the odd individual hold things up. That may seem tough coming from a “coaching” manager but this is reality and in many cases management is a tough role. This is one of these instances.

Norming.

Do you remember what it is like when a real storm passes? The winds drop, the sky brightens, the birds sign again. Teamwork is like this also. There is a calm, a focus. Goals are clearly understood. Roles are clarified. The rules and regulations are being adhered to and people are working together positively. Relationships become stronger as people are more aware of each other. Strengths and weaknesses are realised and utilised accordingly. Norming is characterised by acceptance. Whereas in the storming stage, people were apt to rebel very quickly, this is now not the case and if someone has a grievance, complaint or suggestion then the proper processes are used and people tend to be listened to. The role of

the coaching manager in this stage is to ensure that this calm continues and that any behaviours that arise that may threaten the calm are channelled in the right direction. Also the coaching manager has an important role in conveying information particularly in relation to the successes that are starting to occur within the team. The coaching manager should be spending a lot of time with individual team members coaching them and supporting them to develop their capabilities that relate to the individual’s team role and the tasks that they have to perform in relation to the team goals.

Performing.

Not every team makes it to the performing stage. Many get stuck at Norming and although everything appears normal, there is a lack of momentum and motivation towards achieving the all important team goals. It is as though the team is comfortable in this stage and does not want to progress further for fear of returning to a storming stage, a stage that probably was very uncomfortable for most people.

It is at the performing stage where team members really concentrate on the team goals. They are determined to work towards them, as they know what rewards are available to them on completion. They are also aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the team, and they

appreciate these, and also works towards developing the weaknesses. This is a period of great personal growth among team members. There is a good deal of sharing of experiences, feelings and ideas together with the development of a fierce loyalty towards team members. There will be arguments, disagreements and disputes but these will be facilitated positively as the team will now live and die by its rules. The coaching manager at this stage will play very much a non-directive role, concentrating on strategy to plan the next way forward. The team will be in many ways, self-directing, perhaps even self-appraising with the manager taking very much a back-seat role. Again the manager's role will be to facilitate communication and ensure that the successes are communicated and rewarded.

In summary:

Forming. The successful coaching manager will ensure that the team meets and understands the team goals, the roles they have to take on and the rules by which they have to play. The coaching

manager will realise that although there may be a great deal of agreement and compliance about what is discussed many people will have different interpretations of what is agreed. One to ones help but inevitably there will start to be undercurrents of disagreement as to what has exactly been agreed.

Storming. Once the disagreements and blame start, get the team quickly together to thrash out what the concerns and disagreements are. The coaching manager at this stage is strong, directive but also fair. The team needs direction at this stage and perhaps people need to hear things that perhaps they don't want to hear. Get things out in the open. Let the team bleed a little and then begin the healing process by facilitating their coming together.

Norming. Lessen the direction and spend time with individuals starting to coach them in relation to their roles within the team and the tasks that they have to perform. At the same time the coaching manager will be challenging team members to take on extra capabilities in order to move the team on to the next stage.

Performing. Take a step back and allow the team to become self-directing. Be there for them and continue your coaching role with both team and individuals. Allow individuals to take on leadership roles and encourage rotation of roles. Communicate success and reward success accordingly.

This article was written by Performance Coach, Allan Mackintosh and was part of the March 2007 'Build A Successful Team' e-newsletter. It is also a chapter in his book 'The Successful Coaching Manager'. You can subscribe to the newsletter via www.teambuildersinternational.com and the book can be purchased from www.pmcscotland.com