



June 19, 2008

Get your team to work together by agreeing on goals, procedures

Ed Brenegar

Question: As the new manager of our office, I'm finding that the employees don't work well together. We aren't on the same page, and we don't have a way of talking about how to operate better without a stubborn standoff of opinions. What can we do?

Answer: At the heart of any healthy team is a set of values that state, "This is how we, together, are going to work."

Developing that shared perspective in the hustle and bustle of an average day in an office is tough. Here's one idea that I've discovered from readers of this column.

A few months ago I received an e-mail from a woman saying that her boss was posting my column in the office with a note asking employees to take note of it. A few weeks later, a local business leader told me he copies and distributes the column to the employees reporting to him. One reader wrote to ask if he could use the column with his sales team to focus on how to improve customer relations. Another local business took the series of columns I wrote last year on "hostmanship" and used them to redefine their approach to customers.

The column as it appears in the paper is a simple tool for conversation and team-building. Each column is built around a practical question about leadership and is intended to provide some basic ideas that can be used to enhance the workplace.

You can use the column this way, too. When you find an article that has a valuable idea, share it. At your next staff meeting, take five minutes to talk about it. Ask three simple questions:

n "What is the one idea that is worth remembering?" That one idea can lead to recognizing the values that unite your team.

n "What is the one question that this column raises that I want answered?" If we are open to new ideas, then we will have questions. Questions lead to new insight that can serve to unite a team. When you treat your team's questions with respect, the answers can become a new source of motivation to work well together.

n "What is the one action I need to take based on what I read in the column?" If we don't act on inspiring ideas, then their value is lost. Unity is not built on talk alone, but on doing things that build relationships.

This is a simple way to take a column and use it as a tool for team building: Share it, then ask for one idea, one question and one action.

There is one more step I'd like you to take. Send me your experiences in trying this out. I'll share the best ideas and stories in a future column. If there is a way to make this column more useful in helping office teams like yours work better together, share that idea. Here's your chance to make a difference in offices wherever the column is read.

This is the opinion of Ed Brenegar, president of the Community of Leadership, a leadership development and transition-planning consultancy. He writes the Leading Questions blog at <http://edbrenegar.typepad.com>. Send questions to him at ed@edbrenegar.com.