

Building up the work team

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We need to get our people working together. We've spent the last year getting everyone clear on who does what. Now they need to get back to helping each other. I know that with the challenges facing us this coming year, none of us can do it alone. We have to be in this together, individually responsible, but backing each other up at the same time. Thanks for your suggestions.

How do you keep the place from erupting into chaos as each department fights for what it needs, and competes for the boss' attention?

Look at the overall goals and values of the company. Reevaluate assignments to strong departments and leaders, to insure all areas of the business are well represented. Educate people who seem to miss the mark. Make sure that rewards go to those individuals who back the company overall. Don't let people hide behind excuses.

We often talk about The 5 Sisters of a well run business: finance, sales, operations, marketing and human resources. Of course there are other important areas that fall under these 5 departments, including IT, legal, and research and development. In most companies, some of these areas end up being headed by strong, influential individuals, who take to heart the need to meet department goals. These individuals often become the leaders of the organization, advocating for the recognition and resources they believe their individual departments deserve.

Forming teams across the various disciplines of the business can be a challenge. It is important to have individuals and departments be clear about their goals. Unfortunately, sometimes in the process of pursuing individual goals, departments come to work at cross purposes.

For example, the sales department wants to hit goals of increased revenue and a specific number of accounts sold. Operations may want jobs that are easy to implement, have enough margin for error, are in a specific geography, etc., some or all of which may be in conflict with sales goals. Human resources may be charged with providing training and upgrading resources, which is in conflict with Finance who has been told to slash costs.

What does the company value? Many entrepreneurial companies say they want teams, but spend most of their time recognizing the performance of individual superstars. It's important to have individual goals, so that people know what they're to be measured on. You then have to add up the individual goals to make the company's goals – or work backwards from company's goals to individual assignments.

If you want to get everyone working together, set up team goals and make individual compensation partially dependent on fulfilling those team goals. For example, reward sales with 1/3 of their bonus, only if the operations department hits their goal as well, and vice versa. Don't forget to recognize and reward the administrative staff of the company – often the unsung heroes and heroines who make things happen behind the scenes. Consider profit sharing to develop pools in which everyone shares if the company hits its overall goals.

Build a recognition system that insures your team role models are acknowledged. There are lots of ways to recognize efforts - via newsletter, company meeting announcements, letters home to the individual, a regular luncheon for top contributors, etc. Insist on group awards.

Establish cross department cooperation awards. Ask people to sit on cross department teams and give them extra recognition for their efforts. Look at the special projects your company will have to tackle this coming year – from finding new markets, to designing new products or services, to identifying cost reductions and developing IT system requirements from a user point of view. Use these cross department teams to give people practice working together.

When you find that one or more individuals miss the point and continue to work for their own purposes, take them aside. Explain your views on the problem. Set up consequences, up to and including loss of bonus, suspension without pay and loss of job.

Remember that while it may seem like the company can't live without superstars, no one is really indispensable. And the company is stronger when people pull together than when they pull apart. Head off problems by making it clear you won't tolerate individuals who are looking out for themselves.

Finally, don't tolerate excuses. Some people may come forward, when you point out their individual vs. group activity, saying they are only doing what they think is best for the company. Don't accept that. Demand that they get on board with personal accountability for both individual and group goals. Remember that as the owner, you set the tone, and you are the one who allows, or dis-allows the behavior of the organization.

Looking for a good book? Try *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork Workbook: Embrace Them and Empower Your Team*, by John C. Maxwell.

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