

Successful Supervisor Part 88

Better Team Building

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

Much has been written about the various Team Building methods. Different consultants have their favorite exercises for helping groups of people work better together. A common technique is to take a group off their normal site to do some outdoor experiential activities, like rock climbing or zip lining. These event-based team building exercises do get the attention of people, but I believe there is a better experiential activity that does a better job of knitting a team together.

Carve out some time to work on a strategic framework as a team. I had a whole section in my first book, *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, where I described the process of taking a group of people through a strategy process so everyone on the team had a hand in designing the future.

For this short blog article, I will not describe the entire process, but I will outline and define the major parts of a strategy process and give some tips I have learned from facilitating numerous groups through the process of developing a strategy. Note, the order of the parts is important. The exercise has a kind of flow to it that helps the team bond.

Values – Start the process by documenting a set of values for the group. Everyone can suggest a few key values, so use an affinity process to distill down a list of 4-6 key values for the entire group.

Vision – Identify where the group intends to end up. As Stephen Covey stated, you need to begin with the end in mind to have a workable plan.

Mission – This is a *short* and very specific statement of what the group is trying to achieve right now. Avoid long lists of items, or management speak; keep it to the central idea of the group.

Behaviors – This step is frequently left out, and that is a big mistake. Identify specific behaviors that the team agrees to abide by. This helps when holding people accountable if they fail to live by the behaviors. Two examples of team behaviors might be 1) We will act like adults at all times, and 2) When we disagree, we will do it without being disagreeable.

SWOT – Brainstorm a list of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats for the group. The first two items are like looking at the group through a microscope, and the last two are like looking at the environment the group is operating in through a telescope.

Identify Needed Changes – What must change in order for the group to actually achieve the vision?

Identify the strategies – How is the group going to achieve the needed changes in a timely manner? Here it is important to avoid having too many strategies. I believe five strategies at any one time is optimal. What you are doing is trying to focus the effort of the group on a few key drivers.

Specify the Tactics – Identify the specific actions that are required to accomplish the strategies. Who is going to do what and by when? Make sure the tactics are reasonable so people are not overloaded.

Identify measures – How is the group going to identify progress toward the vision? The measures must be expressed as SMART Goals. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic, and Time-bound.

It is critical to get this work done quickly or the team will become frustrated by a long, drawn-out process over a number of months. I like to facilitate groups to develop their strategic plan in less than 8 hours duration. That may seem unrealistic, but I have developed a process that is actually quite doable with the proper preparation done ahead of time.

Creating a solid Strategic Framework is the best team building activity a team can do because it engages everyone in creating an exciting future for the group.

This is a part in a series of articles on “Successful Supervision.” The entire series can be viewed on www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision or on this blog.

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