



Smart Strategies Solutions for Workplace Challenges

Issue #6
October 2008

Dear Alan,

I've been doing a lot of work around team building recently and it's gotten me thinking about key issues for teams.

I've also been pretty busy, so I've been dusting off my time management tips and I've included a few more to share with you.

Hope you enjoy!

Alan Krieger



Alan Krieger
President
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Team Work Working Well With Co-Workers

I recently heard from a number of organizations that their staff are not working together. The tough fiscal times certainly add to workplace stress, but what are the core factors in poor teamwork?

I've included my thoughts below. [Let me know](#) if you have other ideas.

I believe that people would rather get along with each other than bicker, but there's so much bickering going on, above and below the surface, in so many work places, that I've put a lot of time thinking about what's behind it.

I think the three fundamental causes of poor teamwork are: poor communication skills, workplace or personal stress, and lack of effective leadership.

In this issue we'll discuss poor team communication. One major factor in poor communication is

Survey Question

We've got two questions we'd like to get your feedback on this month. Please let us know what you think!

- 1. How much is the fiscal crisis impacting your ability to sign up for training programs?*
- 2. What do you think of webinars (live web based training) as a lower cost and more convenient alternative to classroom training?*

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miscommunication / misunderstanding.

Miscommunication within a team in turn is often caused by misperception (see quote to the right, below). We all operate by different sets of rules in terms of how we work together. In earlier issues, you've heard about [my T.E.A.M. communication and work style model](#), and I think that's a huge part of miscommunication. Culture, age, and gender differences also play a large role. The problem occurs when we each experience the same interaction, but draw vastly different conclusions, and then FAIL to clarify our different perceptions.

We often assume the other person is out to give us a hard time, when in fact they are seeing a very different situation. If we do try to clarify, too often we do it from our own context which often makes the problem worse!

So one key strategy for building a strong team, and resolving conflicts in the workplace is awareness and flexible response.

First, **awareness**: be aware as soon as you notice tension in the other person. You'll get it from their body language and tone of voice long before they say anything about it. Also be aware of tension in you, sometimes your body picks up the tension before your brain does. Also look for confusion, different reading of the same situation, or other conflicting perceptions.

Second, **flexible response**: We often think we're in the right and the other person is wrong. This is not helpful (even if it's true). What is helpful is to respond collaboratively when a conflict arises. The first statement should be an apology:

"I'm sorry we've gotten off to a rough start." - OR -
"I'm sorry that we seem to have a misunderstanding." Follow up with something like:
"How can we clarify this?"

Note: you are NOT apologizing for your behavior or your thinking... you may be right and have nothing to apologize for. You are apologizing for the circumstance. It is unpleasant and you are simply noting that.

Further flexible responses: Read the other person carefully. What is their T.E.A.M. style? What other cues are you getting about how they like to interact

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Communication(?) Quote!

(see article at left)

"I know you think you understand what I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant."

- Fritz Perls

About Krieger Solutions, LLC

We are a training and consulting company dedicated to helping people work together more effectively.

We offer training, leadership coaching, facilitation, team building and organizational consulting services.

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www.kriegersolutions.com

to find out more about our programs and services.

Or call Alan Krieger at
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with others and handle conflict? Go slowly and try to adapt your style to best fit theirs. Keep your awareness up... is this helping or are things getting worse? If it's helping, keep going. If it's getting worse, take a time out. Most conflicts do not have to be resolved on the spot. Even with a difficult customer contact you can often call them back to follow up once you've both had time to cool off.

Also, do much more listening than talking! You'll get to have your say later, if you do good listening at first. Listening is the best way to defuse tension and build connections. Remember to be an active listener - ask questions and paraphrase the other person's message. Don't try to have your message understood until you are sure you **fully understand** the other person.

Next month we'll look at the leader's role in team building and then in December we'll look at what we can do about reducing stress in the workplace and strengthening teamwork.

Time Management Tips

Do More With Less... has become Do EVEN More with Even Less!

I try to include one or two time management tips most issues. Here's some I've found to be very helpful:

For those of you with messy desks! (I'm one.) I've found that taking a day to clear off my desk and sort things out helps me be more efficient for a day or two... and then I'm back to my old ways. After years of this, I found a simple fix. (Even if you don't have a messy desk, read on for some organizing tips.)

When I come in every morning BEFORE I do any work at all or check my email or make any phone calls, I take 5 minutes to clean off my desk. Really, 5 minutes and my desk is clean because I do it every day. (Those of you with neat desks will wonder what's to get excited about, but if you've had a messy desk for years, you'll see the value quickly.) The key is to do it every day with no exceptions.

The other key is to have a place to put everything. So as you clear your desk, have file folders handy to put important papers in. Two important folders for

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NEWSLETTER

New Words for the 21st Century

OHNOSECOND:

The tiny fraction of time in which you realize that you've just made a BIG mistake.

SALMON DAY:

The experience of spending an entire day swimming upstream only to get screwed and die in the end.

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me that go in a stand on my desk are:

Calls/emails/letters to do; and Calls/emails/letters pending. The "to do" file is an easy one to fill up quickly - you need to discipline yourself to take care of these every day and after a certain period of time (one week usually), either do it or toss it. The "pending" one is where I put notes that I want to be sure to have on hand when the return phone call or email comes back. It's also a way for me to track who owes me a call. I review it every day or two and follow up as needed.

For those of you more electronically minded, you can replace the folders with notes in your electronic calendar and have your desk even cleaner. I'm still a paper person.

To keep these files lean, don't put extra information in them. Use cross referencing. For example if I'm expecting a client to call to discuss a training program, I don't put the training materials in my "pending" folder. I put a note in there to see the training folder for Dealing with Difficult People under the client's name in my file cabinet (or in My Documents in my computer). This way when the client calls I can quickly pull up the information I need without it having to sit on my desk.

The third important folder is a current projects folder where I keep current notes about projects I'm working on. Again, I keep the details in other folders, but keep the key notes in a folder in my desk file drawer for easy access.

If you have a favorite tip or a special time management challenge, [let me know](#) and we can discuss it in a future issue.

[Check our newsletter archives](#)

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