



Smart Strategies Solutions for Workplace Challenges

Issue #7
November 2008

Happy Thanksgiving to You & Your Family!

Dear Alan,

Summer is finally over... snow is in the air and the holiday season is upon us. Hope it's a good season for you and your family.

This month we review the leadership role in team building recently and some more tips on time management.

Hope you enjoy!

Alan Krieger

Feel free to forward this newsletter to your friends and colleagues.



Alan Krieger
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Team Work Working Well With Co-Workers

PART II - THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

As I noted in the last issue
(<http://www.kriegersolutions.com/oldnews/index.asp>)

I've been hearing from a number of organizations that their staff are not working well together. The tough fiscal times certainly adds to workplace stress, and last month I identified three core factors in poor teamwork.

Last month we discussed one of these factors - poor communication, and this month we'll discuss the second factor - the role of leadership.

Survey Responses

Thanks for your feedback! We got quite a few responses to our survey questions last month.

Fiscal Crisis and Training:

The fiscal crisis is having a large impact on people being able to sign up for training, especially if it involves travel. Unfortunately, training is one of the first things to get cut.

In tight financial times when positions go unfilled, training is often a critical element in managing effectively and keeping the team on track. I'm hoping that your leaders see the wisdom of

Skilled leadership is essential to keeping a team working well. Many leaders are promoted to leadership because they had good technical skills in the job they did, and often not because they are natural leaders.

Therefore, many leaders focus on the tasks their staff perform, but not on the connections between staff. If not actively nurtured, team work usually frays due to the other two factors - misunderstandings due to poor communication and workplace or personal stress.

This is not to say that leaders need to become social workers with their staff, but leaders do need to lead. And leadership includes:

- developing and actively promoting a positive vision about the work team's mission
- communicating that vision to staff and really hearing their response
- intervening when staff don't respond well
- intervening when staff DO respond well

Let's briefly look at each of these:

Developing and promoting a positive vision.

Most people want to feel their work is valued and makes a difference. Most people respond well to a reasonable challenge for excellence. A vision statement does both. The vision should include how people work together (team work) as well as what they do (tasks).

Staff can see how their work adds value when you show them how it contributes to the greater good of the organization, the customers, or other stakeholders. Embedding statements of quality work in the vision message presents a motivating challenge to staff, if the vision is compelling and the challenge is realistic.

It's most helpful to engage the whole staff in creating this vision statement and periodically coming back to them to update and revise it as needed. Once the vision is created, the leader's role is to hold and promote the vision, and note when it needs to be updated. This brings us to the next step...

Communicating the vision to staff and really hearing their response.

The vision has to be communicated so that staff understand

this soon - for your sake and mine!

Webinars:

The second question asked about webinars and most responses were negative - you want more interaction in a training program. People also mentioned that webinars are often light on useful content.

I'm with you on both points, but in these tight times, I'm thinking a webinar is better than no training at all. I'm working on designing a webinar series that will include interactive components. Stay tuned!

In This Issue

Team Work - Working Well with Co-Workers Part II - Leadership

Time Management Tips

Survey Response

A Little Humor

Leader's Role in Team Building

(see article at left)

"If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea."

Antoine De Saint-Exupery

Or, on a more cynical note:

"Don't go around saying the world owes you a living. The world owes you nothing. It was here first."

and buy into it. That's why the last half of the statement - "really hearing their response" is so important. While the leader may be very taken with the vision, if the staff don't respond well, the vision has no value.

Listen for what they like and don't like about the vision. Listen for what registers with them and what raises a cynical reaction. ASK for their input/feedback. The vision needs to be a team effort. The team's work should be built around the vision. Central to effective team work is feeling that you are all working to a common, valued purpose.

Intervening when staff don't respond well

When staff don't respond well to the team's vision, it's either time to revise the vision or identify what's getting in the way of staff buy-in. Poor teamwork, conflict, lack of cooperation and poor quality work all are aspects of a staff member not responding well to the vision.

Leaders need to be alert to the beginnings of teamwork breaking down: small comments and small errors lead to larger ones if not dealt with. Listening is the first step and responding with constructive feedback is the next. Constructive feedback is feedback that helps the staff construct a stronger team. Clear and specific performance expectations which connect to the vision need to be coupled with feedback. (Maybe we'll cover these in depth in future issues.)

Constructive feedback and the employee's response should point the way to problem solving - revising the work process, revising the vision, training or coaching the staff in question, mediating a conflict, etc. These all need to be tools in the leader's tool box. The important point is that leaders need to lead by staying engaged with their staff and working quickly to identify and resolve conflicts. Even better is developing, motivating and empowering your staff to address these conflicts themselves at an early stage, but that's a story for a future issue as well.

Intervening when staff DO respond well

Too often supervisors only intervene when there's a problem. Is it any wonder that staff come to resent supervisors? The leader's role is to hold and promote the vision... what better way to promote it than to recognize staff who are carrying out the vision?

Positive feedback is easy, and you get a great response, so why not do it more often! It's hard to over do and people really appreciate being recognized when they do good work. The key to positive feedback is that it has to be specific - what they did well and the positive impact of their work. Try

Mark Twain

About Krieger Solutions, LLC

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

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A Little Humor

"If it's sent by ship then it's a cargo, if it's sent by road then it's a shipment."

Dave Allen

"What if everything is an illusion and nothing exists? In that case, I definitely overpaid for my carpet."

Woody Allen,
"Without Feathers"

to deliver this in person, face to face. It has an even stronger positive impact that way.

One caution - people with a strong ["T" style](http://www.kriegersolutions.com/news/TEAM2.pdf) (<http://www.kriegersolutions.com/news/TEAM2.pdf>) sometimes feel positive feedback is patronizing. They are the only ones with whom you can over do positive feedback. With strong "T's" closely monitor their reactions and keep your feedback short, to the point and somewhat less frequent. With other staff, positive recognition several times a day is not too much if it's focused on different and specific actions.

There is much more to leadership, but these four steps are among the keys to leaders building and maintaining a strong team. So when teamwork breaks down, one of the first places for a leader to look is within themselves - what have you been doing to promote teamwork and where have you dropped the ball?

Next month we'll look at the third core factor - stress - and what we can do about reducing stress in the workplace and strengthening teamwork.

Time Management Tips

In these challenging times of "do even more with even less" I try to include some time management tips in each issue.

Learn to Say NO! (nicely)

Most of us want to be helpful and supportive (good team players), but most of us are stressed to the max these days. So what do you do?

Think before saying yes or no. Points to consider:

- How high a priority is this for me and for the team?
- Are there other people who could do it faster or better?
- What will suffer if I take this on?
- Is there a way I can get help so if I take this on, my other work (and my work/life balance) won't suffer?

If, after weighing all this, you decide to say "no":

1. **Don't feel bad!** You've made a rational and intelligent decision. Someone may suffer as a result, but you've chosen the path that you believe has the least negative impact.
2. **Say "no" in a supportive and constructive way:**

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If you are viewing this in black and white text with little formatting... Read this note!

It's come to our attention that some people, especially those in large agencies or those reading this on their Blackberry, are receiving this as a text file. It is difficult to read in that format. It is designed for HTML reading.

We have spoken with the IT department of a state agency who told us it's an easy fix to change from text to HTML. Call your IT help desk and then can quickly step you through the process.

It is much more pleasant to read this, and other newsletters, in HTML.

If you are reading this on your hand held, we'd recommend waiting to read it on the big screen. I know it's tough to wait, but some things are best read at the right time and place.

"What are you nuts?" "I've got more work on my desk than you, how dare you ask!"

These are not especially helpful, although they may be true! Try instead:

"I really wish I could help you, but I'm overloaded as well and if I take on this task, other important work I have won't get done."

OR: *"I'm not the best person to take on this task, I think ___ could do it faster and better than I could which would be a better use of the team's time."*

OR: *"I wish I could do that for you... but I can't. I'd be happy to show you how to do it yourself."*

If you have a favorite tip or a special time management challenge, [let me know \(alan@krsol.com\)](mailto:alan@krsol.com) and we can discuss it in a future issue.

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