

The Successful SUPERVISOR

2010

June

Tips from  LifeSolutions

“My staff members are all strong performers, but they operate like independent contractors! I think we could be a lot more productive if we worked as a team. Do you have any suggestions on how to persuade them to work together?” LifeSolutions frequently receives questions about team-building. Every manager aspires to create a strong work team, but very few have any idea about how to actually develop and maintain a team environment. In this issue, *The Successful Supervisor* provides suggestions for creating an environment that fosters the team experience. As always, we are interested in your feedback and questions. Please e-mail your questions and comments to EAP at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com or contact an EAP account manager at 1.800.647.3327.

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Every manager wants his or her employees to function as a team. The advantages are obvious: improved communication, utilizing employees' diverse strengths, a more harmonious work environment, a synergy that flows from shared input, a common mission, and increased productivity. The question is not “Should we work as a team?” The question is “How do we get there?” With the best of intentions, we often schedule yearly retreats or enlist an engaging speaker to tout the values of collaboration. We're disappointed when the results are short-lived at best. A team can't be created or maintained by inspiration and good feeling alone; it has to be cultivated day after day, every day of the year.

What Is a Team?

A team by definition is: a group of people working collaboratively to accomplish a common goal. It seems pretty simple, but what are the qualities that distinguish a true team from a group of people who may just happen to work in the same setting? They include:

- ◆ A common mission with clearly defined goals
- ◆ A shared belief that two heads are better than one
- ◆ Open communication (no alliances or coalitions)
- ◆ Flexibility and openness (to ideas, styles of working, personalities)
- ◆ Trust and the willingness to take risks
- ◆ The ability to resolve conflict constructively
- ◆ Sound relationships (mutual respect and friendliness)
- ◆ A sense of shared responsibility and accountability
- ◆ A sense of empowerment (we can do this together!)

In a team-oriented environment, workers genuinely believe that the best way to achieve their goal is to work collaboratively. People may have different tasks, but everyone is unified in their efforts to accomplish the overall goal. The team adopts this attitude: “None of us are as good alone as we are together.”

The reality is that this perspective is hard to come by in today's workplace. Most of us have been raised in a culture that eschews teamwork. The messages from school, family, and even pastimes have emphasized independence, winning, competitiveness, being the best, coming out on top, “every man for himself,” and the win-lose philosophy. This doesn't mean we can't strive to cultivate teamwork, but it does mean it goes against the grain for most of us. It's a challenging endeavor, but one that managers can tackle.

What Can Managers Do to Promote a Team Environment?

Managers can:

- ◆ Communicate clearly that teamwork is expected. Form teams to solve work issues. Send the message that no one completely owns a project and convey the expectation that workers seek and use ideas from others.
- ◆ Model teamwork. If you are a “lone ranger,” it will be hard to lead your staff to collaborative interactions.
- ◆ Reward and recognize team efforts and successes. Highlight team achievements.
- ◆ Make it clear that team-friendly attitudes will be rewarded. When an employee is helpful, supportive, respectful, flexible, etc., he or she should be applauded. This includes an employee who may “lose” so the team can “win.”
- ◆ Remember, a team can flourish only in an environment in which open communication, trust, and respect are “givens.” A civil workplace where all members feel comfortable and safe is a prerequisite.
- ◆ Don't assume that employees understand what it takes to make a team viable. Managers can maintain “ground rules” such as: “We critique ideas but never criticize people”; or “No side conversations during a meeting ... if you have something to say, you say it to everyone”; or “If you see a job that needs to be done, it's your job.”
- ◆ Build in opportunities for shared activities such as potlucks, after-work get-togethers, icebreakers, etc. Sound relationships are one of the building blocks of a team.

Next month we will talk about conflict resolution. In the meantime, call LifeSolutions with any questions or if you would like to explore ways to foster team building in your workplace.

Online Leadership Support



As leaders, what we do and say can have significant impact on those around us. *LifeSolutions* offers a series of self-guided online courses specifically developed to equip managers and supervisors with the appropriate tools to help make a positive impact in the workplace.

In keeping with the theme of this month's The Successful Supervisor, we offer the following Skill Builder courses:

Conflict Intervention

Defuse a potentially morale-draining work environment through successful conflict intervention.

In this course you will learn:

- ◆ How to assess the climate of a conflict
- ◆ Methods to help set the stage for a positive outcome
- ◆ Techniques to broker a resolution and follow-up advice

Managing Disagreement

As an effective leader, you can set the stage for individuals to handle their differences over workplace issues and decisions.

In this course you will learn:

- ◆ The principles and styles
- ◆ How to apply a four-phase process
- ◆ Ways to refine your skills

Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

Emotional intelligence is a set of skills that enables leaders to understand, anticipate, and deal with our automatic reactions in the workplace.

In this course you will learn:

- ◆ Intelligent thinking about emotions
- ◆ The keys to behaving wisely
- ◆ Techniques for fostering emotional intelligence in others

Follow the steps below to learn more and to get started:

- ◆ Access www.lifesolutionsforyou.com.
- ◆ Click on the *WorkLife* login at the top right.
- ◆ Enter your company code. If you do not know your code, call 1.800.647.3327.
- ◆ Locate *Working* on the left-side menu.
- ◆ Click on *Effective Manager*.
- ◆ Click on *Skill Builder*.
- ◆ Click on the title that interests you and review the highlights of each course.
- ◆ You will be able to click on the link at bottom (within the Skill Builder highlight) to get started.

If you have questions, call **1.800.647.3327**.
