

# HorizonCares

Manager's Edition

Fall 2006

## Building High-performing Work Teams



**M**any organizations recognize that a team of people working together toward a common goal can often accomplish more than individuals working separately. Team building, the process of helping a group of people work together to reach a goal, can make the difference between a team that works well and one that sputters or fails. Effective team building involves clearly outlining the team's goals, identifying any barriers that inhibit the team from reaching its goals and addressing these barriers early on to enable the goals to be achieved.

Good leadership is crucial to work team development. Leading an effective, high-performing work team requires skills and talents that may change throughout the lifespan of the team. The team leader's role may initially include identifying the team's mission and purpose and developing interpersonal and group skills such as conflict resolution and meeting management. As the team develops, the team leader might decide to take on a working role within the team or to back off and limit his or her involvement. Finally, the leader may be responsible for working with others in the organization to assure the team's recommendations are put into practice.

### Clearly Identified Goals

Successful teams operate with clearly defined goals, a shared sense of mission and an understanding of the team's relationship to the organization. From the beginning, all team members should have a clear understanding of their roles and functions within the team. Group members should place their efforts into reaching the team's goals, rather than working in different directions and/or competing with each other.

### Good Communication Skills

Interpersonal relations can make or break a team. Teams are generally not successful if conflicts and problems cannot be discussed openly and dealt with appropriately. Group members must be comfortable communicating with each other and the team leader about the team's goals, accomplishments and areas where the team may need to improve. The key is for team members to practice listening and understanding rather than trying to control the group and talk over others.

*See TEAM BUILDING on Page 2*

### In This Issue...

Today's employees are asked to contribute in many ways, including working together toward common goals. Creating a climate that encourages and values the contributions of team members is important to helping your organization remain competitive.

This issue of HorizonCare presents information on how you can develop and lead high-performing work teams. In addition, we offer suggestions to help you with the difficult task of addressing employees' anger in the workplace. These skills are indispensable in helping to manage conflict and create a more productive work environment.

In addition, Horizon Health offers employer services such as training to help supervisors identify and manage troubled employees; consultation with workplace experts who combine clinical and management expertise in addressing employer concerns; crisis management and response services; and workshops including team building, stress management, violence prevention and conflict resolution.

### TEAM BUILDING

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### Diversity

If all team members have the same strengths, the team will have difficulty working creatively. Successful work teams include members with different backgrounds, skills and talents that complement each other.

### Willingness to Accept Risk

High-performing teams are open to taking chances rather than playing it safe. Team members shouldn't be afraid to push the envelope and accept some degree of risk in their approach to problem-solving instead of always maintaining status quo.

### Regular Evaluation

It is important to periodically assess the team's progress toward its goals, including evaluation of strengths and weaknesses as well as successes and failures. Don't be afraid to change course if the team is not progressing in the right direction, is moving too slowly or becomes stalled.

### Celebration

Everyone benefits from a pat on the back for a job well done. Frequent celebrations of the team's successes and milestones – even minor ones – will reinforce the team's purpose and help keep morale and productivity up.

## WORKLIFE ISSUES

### The Sandwich Generation

*Each edition of HorizonCare: MI discusses issues faced by employees and highlights WorkLife Services designed to enhance their quality of life.*

- According to a study by the Families and Work Institute, 25 percent of U.S. employees have provided elder care during the preceding year and one-in-five working parents is part of the "Sandwich Generation," having responsibilities for both raising children and caring for elderly relatives.
- National Alliance for Caregiving has estimated that an employee with elder care responsibilities costs his or her employer about \$1,150 per year.
- A study by Public Agenda found that 52 percent of employees surveyed think their employers could do much more to make it easier for parents to juggle work and child care responsibilities.

Helping employees who must provide care for their children or elderly family members can save your company time and money. Horizon Health offers many resources to assist employees in finding appropriate care for their family members. Referrals for child care services, including child care centers, nannies, after school programs, and sick child care, are available on-line or through our toll-free service. Employees may obtain referrals for elder care services in the areas of residential care, home care, hospice services, long-term care insurance, Alzheimer's resources, and understanding public benefits.

Horizon Health's WorkLife Services offer dozens of on-line screening tools to assist employees in selecting care for their loved ones. Information and checklists will help find the right child or adult day care, nanny, babysitter, home care, nursing home, or residential care facility. In addition, referrals are available for many other services including educational resources, financial counseling, and more.

For more information about how Horizon Health's WorkLife Services can benefit your employees, please call your Account Manager.

While managing your own anger can be difficult, coping with other people's anger can seem frustrating and even frightening. However, you can develop skills in addressing anger and other strong emotions in and outside of the workplace, you'll have made a head start

## Managing Other People's Anger

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toward getting to a resolution of a conflict situation. Some general considerations around managing the anger of co-workers and customers are provided below.

- Although it may be difficult, try very hard not to take the other person's anger personally. Understand that the anger is directed at what you represent or the situation, not at you as a person. If you view the anger as a personal attack, you will run the risk of letting your own emotions get in the way of working toward a solution to the problem.
- Acknowledge the anger and let the other person know that you realize he/she is angry. If you disregard or try to ignore the anger, the other person may well become even more enraged.
- Listen carefully to what the other person has to say. Even though you may be feeling personally attacked verbally, allow the person to express the anger before responding. You may find that you have made incorrect assumptions about what the anger is all about or that you have missed important details of the situation that evoked the anger. Good listening skills are essential for effective conflict management. However, you do not have to listen to or converse with a person who is being abusive. If the other person is being verbally abusive, you should communicate that this behavior is not acceptable. For example, you might say, "If you continue to call me names, I cannot have a conversation with you."

- Maintain an open outlook before deciding who is wrong until you have a chance to fully investigate the problem. Don't jump to conclusions or let your prior knowledge and feelings about the person involved influence your understanding of the situation.
- If possible, steer the angry person to a private place where there will be less outside interference. Privacy will help prevent other people from getting involved in the conflict and will make it easier for you to intervene when appropriate. Moving away from a more public area also will remove some of the

discomfort from the situation for both the angry person and bystanders.

- Help people to "save face" when they realize they have behaved badly. Sometimes, when people lose control and express anger, they later experience feelings of guilt and embarrassment. If this is the case, whatever you can do to help the person to address these feelings and move forward will assist both of you in moving toward your desired goal of a win-win resolution.
- Ask everyone involved in the conflict to sit down rather than stand up. It is easier for people to calm down when they are seated.
- Keep your tone of voice calm and your pitch low. A low voice and calm tone will help to reduce the intensity of the other person's anger. If you were to respond "in kind," i.e. match the intensity of the other person's response, you will only tend to maintain the strength of the rage rather than diminishing it.
- Do not express your personal judgments about what should or should not make someone angry. Such statements will make you appear to be patronizing the other person and increase his or her feelings of being misunderstood. Each of us is unique in our

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### ANGER

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responses to external events; what may make one of us angry or sad may have little or no effect on another person. Remember that each person's perception of a situation is his or her reality of what has occurred. Thus, it is important to try to understand the anger through that person's eyes.

- Support people when their anger slows down without necessarily agreeing with them. The time to intervene is when the person's anger has peaked and begins to diminish. When you notice that the anger is slowing, that is a good time to provide some

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emotional support by acknowledging how angry the person is. Support does not equal agreement; your aim is to assist the person in working through the anger and calm down – not to give your opinion of the validity of his or her response.

- If necessary, ask for outside help. If the person is unable to contain the anger and you fear that he or

she could be a threat to you, to him/herself or to others, it's time to call for outside assistance. Don't try to intervene in a situation that you aren't sure you can handle. In the most threatening instance,

outside help may require calling the police. However, in most workplace situations, you would be more likely to ask for help from a supervisor or friend of the person expressing the anger.

- If you need to, find someone with whom you can discuss what happened after the incident. Dealing with another person's anger can be a stressful experience for you and you may need some support. Often, you will just want to have someone with whom you can discuss the situation and work out your own feelings about the incident. You will need to find someone you can trust who will not only keep your feelings confidential, but also will protect the confidentiality of the person who has expressed the anger.

Source: ©WPOI, 2002

### 7 TIPS FOR MINIMIZING WORKPLACE NEGATIVITY

The best way to combat workplace negativity is to keep it from occurring in the first place. These 7 tips will help you minimize workplace negativity.

1. Provide opportunities for people to make decisions about and control and/or influence their own job. Almost any decision that excludes the input of the person doing the work is perceived as negative.
2. Make opportunities available for people to express their opinion about workplace policies and procedures. Recognize the impact of changes in such areas as work hours, pay, benefits, assignment of overtime hours, comp pay, dress codes, office location, job requirements and working conditions.
3. Do not create "rules" for all employees, when just a few people are violating the norms. You want to minimize the number of rules directing the behavior of adult people at work. Treat people as adults; they will usually live up to your expectations, and their own expectations.

4. Help people feel like members of the in-crowd; each person wants to have the same information as quickly as everyone else. Provide the context for decisions, and communicate effectively and consistently.
5. Afford people the opportunity to grow and develop. Training, perceived opportunities for promotions, lateral moves for development, and cross-training are visible signs of an organization's commitment to staff.
6. Provide appropriate leadership and a strategic framework, including mission, vision, values, and goals. People want to feel as if they are part of something bigger than themselves. If they understand the direction, and their part in making the designed outcomes happen, they can effectively contribute more.
7. Provide appropriate rewards and recognition so people feel their contribution is valued. The power of appropriate rewards and recognition for a positive workplace is remarkable.

Source: About.com, Susan M. Heathfield