

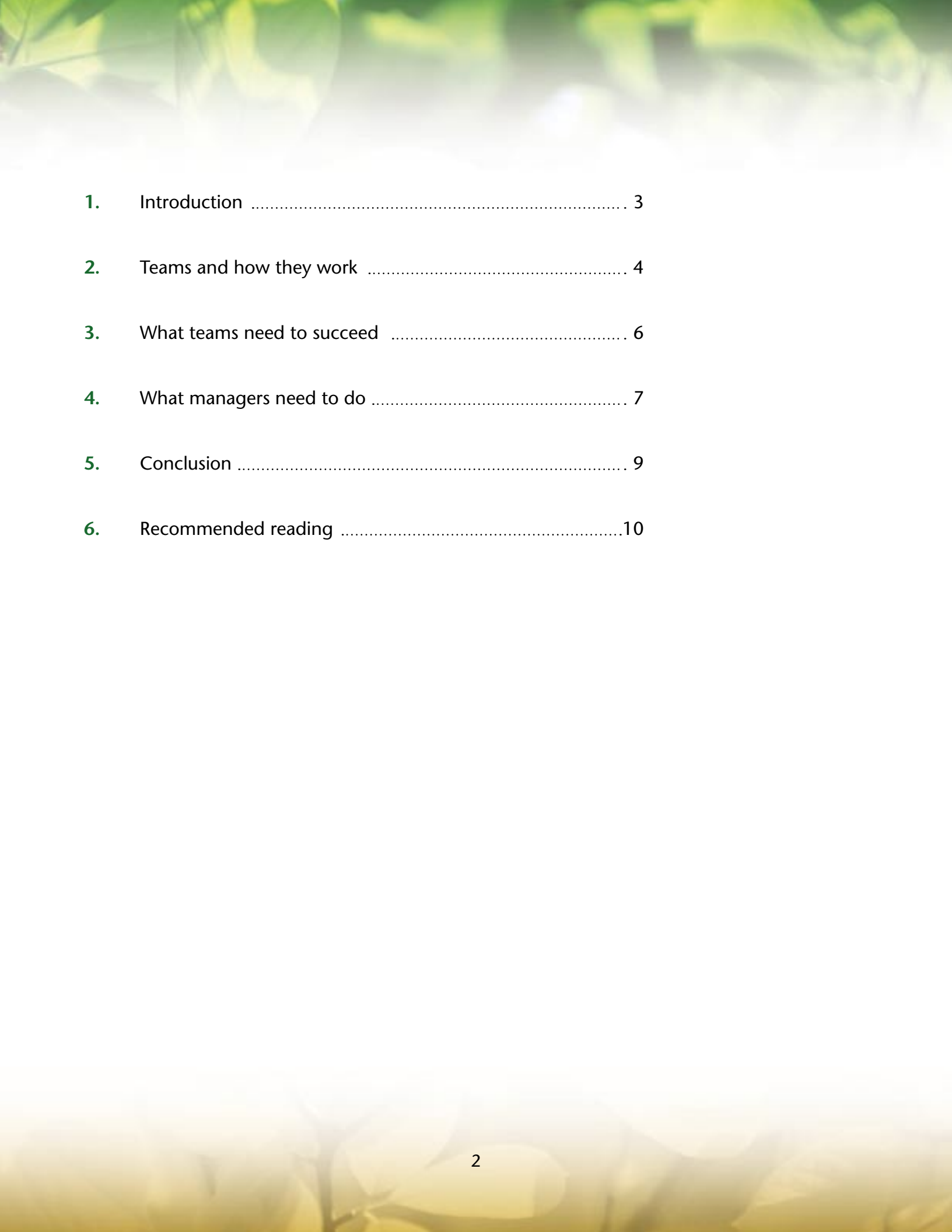
GROUP LIFE
& HEALTH

ONLINE EDUCATIONAL BOOKLET
BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE TEAM

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Introduction

Most challenges in the workplace today require much more than good individual performance. In an increasingly competitive marketplace, success depends on teamwork – that is, bringing together as much expertise as possible to solve problems, improve processes and products and provide innovative ideas. Organizations are moving away from hierarchal structures of days gone by and towards flatter, team-based operations.

Why this move towards more teamwork? Simply put, performance!

The benefits of collaborative work are increased productivity, improved customer service, more flexible systems and employee empowerment. Teams are effective because they bring a wider range of skills and experience to the solution of a problem – and accomplish the myriad tasks that are involved. They can produce more creative, successful results because different people view situations from varying perspectives. Teams vastly outperform the combined output of individuals in traditional work settings. But simply grouping a certain set of people together does not make a high performance team -- it requires planning, accountability, and commitment. Team building is one of the hardest skills for managers to learn. Teams can be vibrant and productive, but they can also be dysfunctional, wasting valuable time and resources while making bad decisions. The key to successful leadership is to understand how your efforts as team leader support an environment where teambuilding is seen as a priority as well as knowing how teams develop and operate.

More information and assistance is available through Expert-Aide, a service that offers professional coaching and consultation for managers to help them deal with employees who are facing difficulties. Orientation sessions and online booklets are also available, as are referral services for employees who are facing difficulties that effect, or could effect, their job performance. Contact Expert-Aide at 1 866 314-9533 (English service) or 1 866 314-9534 (service en français).

Teams and how they work

Bringing a diverse group of people together does not mean you've created a team. The differences are clear:

Groups

- little communication
- no support
- lack of vision
- exclusive cliques
- the whole is less than the sum of its parts
- seeks to hide its identity
- leaves new members to find their own way but insists on conformity
- leader manipulates team to own ends

Teams

- plenty of opportunity for discussion
- plenty of support
- process of discovery supported by openness and honesty
- tactical and work groups combine easily into single team
- welcomes new members by showing them existing norms and openness to change
- leader seeks team decisions by serving the team as a focus for two-way communication

Any team, whether in the military, the sports arena or the workplace needs:

- a mission
- personal bonding
- time
- training

It is the manager's job to not only provide all four components, but the mentoring and environment that allows people to evolve from a group of separate personalities with diverse skills into a cohesive, productive and creative team.

Most teams, especially self-directed teams, develop in four stages: Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing.

Forming

This first stage lasts anywhere from a few days to a few weeks. People are unsure about their new tasks and new environment and are planning and thinking about their work and responsibilities. Emotions are positive. During this time, you should make sure your team learns about team processes in preparation for bumpy times ahead. They need to have an understanding of conflict resolution, communication, time management, and group decision-making.

Storming

The anticipation and enthusiasm of the forming stage falls away as the team faces a myriad of technical, interpersonal and social challenges. People feel frustration, resentment, and anger as problems fester and progress stalls. Members are on an emotional roller coaster from elation to depression and back again. The situation seems bleak. With proper training and support however, the Storming period may only last a few weeks. Without training and support, the team may not progress.

Norming

Here, the unit works through individual and social issues and establishes their own norms of behaviour and begins to trust each other. As the team develops interpersonal skills, it also hones other skills. Members become increasingly adept at problem solving. They cross-train and learn new job skills. They manage their time and their quality with growing competence, confidence, and independence. The Norming stage usually lasts four to 12 months.

Performing

Now things begin to click. Members help each other, conflict is de-personalized, problems are solved and successive goals achieved and exceeded. Satisfaction and pride become the dominant emotions.

What teams need to succeed

There are three areas of group behaviour that must be addressed for teams to be effective:

1. The team must work hard. The effort that the team puts in to get the job done is dependent on their level of motivation.
2. The team must have the right mix of skills. These include technical, problem solving and interpersonal skills.
3. The team must be able to develop appropriate approaches to problem solving. This depends on developing a plan of attack and using appropriate techniques for analysis.

All highly effective teams share certain elements. Managers leading teams need to understand what leads to superior performance.

1. **Commitment.** Commitment is the foundation for synergy in groups. People must want to participate. Team members need to understand how their work fits into corporate objectives and agree that their team's goals are achievable and aligned with the corporate mission and values. Individuals must be willing to put aside personal needs for the benefit of the team or the company. This shared vision provides a backdrop against which all team decisions can be viewed.
2. **Clear expectations.** Executive leadership must clearly communicate its expectations for the team's performance and outcome. Why was the team created?
3. **Resources.** The team members and team leader must determine what resources will be required and whether or not they will be available. The motivation of team members depends not only on their belief that what they are doing is worthwhile, but that it can be done.
4. **Contribution.** The power of an effective team is in direct proportion to the skills members possess and the initiative members expend.

Work teams need people who have strong technical and interpersonal skills and are willing to learn.

5. **Communication.** For a work group to reach its full potential, members must be able to say what they think, ask for help, share new or unpopular ideas, and risk making mistakes. This can only happen in an atmosphere where both team leader and team members show concern, trust and focus on solutions, not problems. To assess work performance, members must provide honest feedback, accept constructive criticism, and address issues head-on.
6. **Co-operation.** Success depends on the degree of interdependence recognized within the team. Team members need to work effectively together and understand each other's roles and responsibilities. As already mentioned, individual needs must be set aside for the needs of the project or organization.
7. **Conflict Management.** All teams need time to coalesce. No matter how highly skilled or intelligent, a team is made up of diverse personalities with differing communication and work styles. Conflict is to be expected and is a normal, natural and even necessary part of the process. Handled well it builds skill and confidence among members.
8. **Connections.** A cohesive work team is not only connected to each other, but to other work teams and the organization as a whole. When your team has developed strong connections among its own members, people volunteer to help without being asked, cover for each other in a pinch, congratulate each other publicly, share resources, offer suggestions for improvement and find ways to celebrate together.

Teams that connect well with other work groups typically think of those groups as internal customers and treat their requests with the same respect shown to external customers.

What managers need to do

Managers cannot force staff to do their very best. The art of management involves creating the conditions conducive to motivating people. That motivation comes from person needs, aspirations and self-image. Effective managers are able to tap into those internal processes through the relationships they build with staff members and the way they shape the environment.

Here are 10 ways to create a motivating environment:

1. **Lead by example.** Model the expectations you have for your team. If you expect them to treat each other with respect, make sure your behaviour is respectful. If you want honesty, make an effort to own up to your own mistakes. If you expect hard work and dedication, don't take two-hour lunches.
2. **Be enthusiastic.** Enthusiasm is infectious. A manager who can transmit enthusiasm to his or her staff will increase motivation. One way of ensuring you stay motivated is to write down three things that have gone well each day.
3. **Build trust.** Encourage collaboration rather than competition. Act with integrity and approach your employees with empathy instead of anger. In a strictly hierarchical setting, managers often become isolated from the problems that threaten the project or organization. Keep your door open and listen. Show your team you appreciate them and foster an environment in which employees feel free to offer constructive criticism without fear. Be patient with people.
4. **Support your team.** Make sure team members are given credit for what they do. If they do well, praise them to senior management. Defend them when appropriate and cultivate loyalty. Watch for emotional and behavioural signs of stress – irritability, lack of focus, blaming, frequent illness, complaining, cynicism, exhaustion -- and deal with those issues immediately. Remember that many are good at talking, but few at listening.
5. **Give ownership of the process.** Motivating a team means understanding what drives each individual member. For one it may be the challenging work, for another it may be the salary and for another it's a chance to be noticed. Once you've determined your staff's individual needs and have done your best to meet them, create a sense of shared purpose. An effective team leader defines the mission but then allows each member to have a voice in how the goal is reached.
6. **Communicate.** Discuss everything openly. Give your team a clear mission, goals and objectives. Teams work better when all players know what they're working towards. Ask your staff for their opinions and feedback. Walk around the office, engage in discussion and share as much information as possible.
7. **Play.** Adding a sense of playfulness, whether it's day-to-day or on special occasions, can help break down barriers and build unity. Encourage humour, laughter and fun. Conflict and mistrust are reduced when people know each other well. Play allows people to get to know each other in a positive and enjoyable manner.

8. **Empower.** When employees are involved in decisions, given the right training and respected for their experience, they invest more. Allocate tasks to the best suited and if someone comes up with a great idea, let them run with it. Set ground rules and expectations but encourage risk taking and creativity. When mistakes are made, treat them as a means to learn instead of reasons for punishment.
9. **Foster co-operation.** Leaders can facilitate co-operation by highlighting the impact of individual members on team productivity and clarifying valued team behaviours. Encourage all members of the team, including yourself, to follow the F.A.C.T.S.(Follow-through, Accuracy, Timeliness, Creativity and Spirit) model of effective team member behaviours (which will encourage co-operation.)
 - **Follow-through.** Members trust that when a colleague agrees to return a telephone call, read a report, talk to a customer, attend a meeting or provide information, it will be done.
 - **Accuracy.** Accuracy demonstrates personal pride and a commitment to uphold the standards of the team.
 - **Creativity.** Innovation flourishes when individuals feel supported by colleagues. Taking the lead can be risky but such risk is reduced in a co-operative environment where members forgive mistakes and respect differences.
 - **Timeliness.** When work team members are truly co-operating, they respect the time of others by turning team priorities into personal priorities, arriving on time for meetings, sharing information promptly and communicating succinctly.
- **Spirit.** Being on a work team is like being part of a family – you can't have your own way all the time. Members must develop a generous spirit. Leaders can help work teams by addressing these "rules" of team spirit: value the individual; develop team trust; communicate openly; manage differences; share successes; and welcome new members.
10. **Build connections.** To help your team connect with each other, try allowing time before and after meetings for brief socialization, scheduling team lunches, creating occasional team projects outside of work, circulating member profiles, having them take training together and encouraging them to provide feedback to one another.

To build stronger connections with other groups, work teams might consider scheduling monthly cross-departmental meetings, inviting representatives to their own team meetings, "lending" personnel during flu season and combining efforts on corporate or community projects.

Conclusion

In the end, it all comes down to leadership – and leadership means inspiring and motivating your workforce to excel and continue to set new goals. In fact, job performance is considered to be a function of ability and motivation. Ability depends on education and training and its improvement is a long, slow process. Motivation, on the other hand, can be improved quickly.

So how do you know when you've done your job properly? If your team possesses some or all of the following attributes, you're doing a great job.

- high level of interdependence among team members
- team leader has good people skills and is committed to team approach
- each team member is willing to contribute
- there is a relaxed climate for communication
- team members and team leader have developed a mutual trust
- individuals are prepared to take risks
- team is clear about goals and establishes targets
- roles are defined
- team has capacity to create new ideas
- team members know how to examine team and individual errors without retribution
- each team member knows he or she can influence the team agenda

Congratulations! You've created an effective, high-performing team.

For assistance with, or more information on, team building, contact Expert-Aide at 1 866 314-9533 (English service) or 1 866 314-9534 (service en français).

Recommended reading

Improving Work Groups: A Practical Manual for Team-Building

by Dave Francis

Coaching for Commitment:

Interpersonal Strategies for Obtaining Superior Performance from Individuals and Teams

by Dennis C. Kinlaw

Executive Resource Management: Building and Retaining an Exceptional Leadership Team

by Robert Barner

The Big Book of Team Building Games:

Trust Building Activities, Team Spirit Exercises, & Other Fun Things to Do

by John W. Newstrom and Edward E. Scannell

Motivation at Work

by Jane R. Miskell and Vincent Miskell

Heroz: Empower Yourself, Your Coworkers, Your Company

by William C. Byham and Jeff Cox

Full Steam Ahead! Unleash the Power of Vision in Your Company and Your Life

by Ken Blanchard and Jesse Stoner

The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork: Embrace Them and Empower Your Team

by John C. Maxwell

The Pursuit of Wow!

by Tom Peters



Keeping our word is standard

