

MAXIMIZING THE POWER OF TEAMS



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Thursday, 4:30 p.m. *You congratulate your leadership team on a job well done and wrap-up the meeting. Tomorrow's presentation to the client is ready. Every slide is complete, materials are assembled and everyone feels confident.*

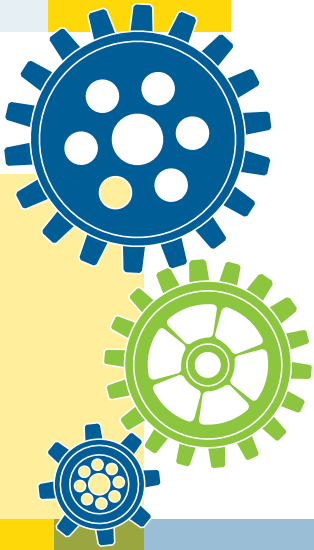
Thursday, 5:09 p.m. *You get the phone call. There is a new development. Your proposal and presentation need to be modified. And now the president is attending the presentation.*

You take a deep breath. You consider your team. The answer is yes, we can do this.

The business environment has fundamentally changed. Organizational structures are evolving. Traditional top-down leadership styles have softened, with more and more organizations leaning toward team-driven approaches to achieving goals.

With increased diversity and complexity in the global marketplace, firms are seeking better ways to compete, relying on their workforce to be dynamic, responsive and possess tremendous organizational knowledge across the board. Employees are also demanding more from their organizations. Today's highly educated workforce desires more from work than a paycheck; employees are interested in leadership opportunities and making substantive contributions to their firms.

According to research conducted at the Drexel LeBow Institute for Strategic Leadership (ISL), organizational success is propelled by shared leadership. Jonathan Ziegert, PhD, a management professor at LeBow and ISL's academic director, says that organizations are successful when leaders delegate and share responsibility with their teams as they need to move onto more challenging or varied tasks. Team leaders still exist among companies and departments, but there is greater responsibility and collaboration among all team members. In his study, Ziegert examined the effectiveness of teams that worked in a trauma center where high quality patient care is dependent on the successful work of a number of interdependent teams.



Patients arrive at the center in critical condition, and a team – namely, an attending surgeon, fellow and resident, nurse, among others – works together to perform urgent, highly consequential tasks to stabilize the patient, all while managing frequent changes to the team. Simultaneously, novice team members, such as residents, are being trained while performing highly skilled work.

During the research, Ziegert and his colleagues observed that the team members who held leadership positions – the attending surgeon, fellow and resident – interacted somewhat interchangeably depending on the events occurring in the trauma center. One “leader” was always in charge, but it wasn’t necessarily the traditional leader, the attending surgeon in this case, but the team member who led because of the circumstances. When the trauma center staff members were asked individually to name the leaders in their units, as part of the study, the majority mentioned all three members, underscoring Ziegert’s assertion that team leadership was shared, and traditional hierarchy was not critical to achieving the goals.

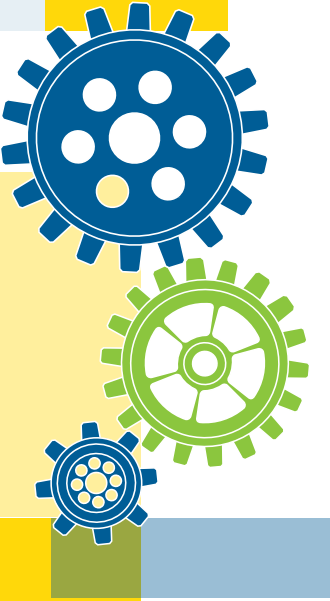
WHEN EMPLOYEES WORK COHESIVELY, THE TEAM FLOURISHES, AS DO INDIVIDUAL TEAM MEMBERS.

Like in the trauma center, today’s top companies work less within restrictive chains of command and more with team-based approaches that share leadership. Benefits to this more collaborative environment can include stronger employee engagement that improves idea generation, retention and improved employee and commitment. When employees work cohesively, the team flourishes, as do individual team members. So how do organizations shift thinking from a traditional, top-down environment and look beyond designated leaders so they to begin to lead together, create a collaborative culture and meet the needs of both employers and employees? To advance a new way of thinking, ISL asserts that self-empowerment and self-responsibility are critical elements of group effectiveness. This kind of “self-leadership” involves managing one’s own behavior and work style to interact effectively in a group enabling shared leadership to thrive. The influence of all members of the group are distributed rather than focused on an individual. Team members take on leadership roles within the group when appropriate, and others contribute with shared leadership rotating depending on the tasks at hand, such as in the case of the trauma center.

Further, there must be employee commitment, not merely compliance, for shared leadership to be successful. Team members influence each other as they work toward their team objectives and foster a learning environment for junior members of the team. Having a team with the knowledge, skills and abilities to share leadership is also critical, even if some members are more experienced than others. Otherwise, there can be overreliance on certain individuals, which can ultimately impede innovation and creativity.

Today’s marketplace is one of rapid change, and remaining competitive no longer just means meeting corporate goals – it also means investing in and retaining your best employees by helping them meet their development goals. Sharing leadership empowers team members at all levels





by capitalizing on individuals' strengths while minimizing weaknesses where others are stronger. A collaborative approach to management will help shield your team from chaos in a fast-paced dynamic environment where the only thing constant is change.

Thursday 5:15 p.m. *You gather the team in the conference room and explain the new direction. Everyone listens and quickly assesses new issues. Team members with specific knowledge start to voice their ideas. A new plan quickly falls into place. The team is ready.*

Jonathan Ziegert, PhD is an associate professor of management at Drexel's LeBow College of Business and a faculty member for Drexel LeBow's Corporate and Executive Education, helping companies by developing programs designed deliver their desired outcomes. For more information, email executive@drexel.edu or visit LeBow.Drexel.edu/ExecutiveEd.

Alison Young is the executive director of Drexel LeBow's Institute for Strategic Leadership. ISL conducts groundbreaking research on topics such as shared leadership, team collaboration, ethical leadership, cultural issues within teams, team communication, empowerment and values. For information, contact Young at leadership@lebow.drexel.edu or check out the website at Lebow.Drexel.edu/ISL.

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