Understanding Your Team Responsibility

You've heard about the benefits of teamwork—about executives and managers who can make their staffs into productive teams and who can also participate in cross-functional teams for greater productivity and organizational performance.

Highly valued leaders and managers are successful heads of teams, members of teams and/or sponsors of self-directed teams because they:

■ Know the various stages in which teams operate and their responsibilities in each.

■ Know if a team is truly warranted. High-value executives and managers know that some problems are better handled by working alone or one-on-one with another manager.

■ Know about the latest technology so they can reduce the need to bring in experts from other organization sites, thus saving work time and travel expenses.

■ Are able to staff a team with the right members and gain their support and cooperation.

■ Define the team's mission and its goals and stay on track through completion of the project.

■ Run meetings smoothly by setting ground rules for communication and behavior within the team structure.

For information about AMA's public seminars and on-site programs on teambuilding, visit www.amanet.org

Ten Ways to Manage Innovation

BY CYNTHIA BERRYMAN-FINK AND CHARLES B. FINK

There are several ways that executives and managers can encourage creativity and innovation on the job. Here are ten:

1. Cultivate a sense of enjoyment at work. Innovation rarely occurs when tasks are boring. A work culture that is fun and enjoyable can trigger creative thinking.

2. Encourage silliness and risk taking. By encouraging a childlike sense of play and rewarding employees for unusual ideas, managers can foster innovative thinking.

3. Allow a balance of thinking and resting. A relaxed mind is more likely to generate innovative ideas than will a stressed one.

4. Change organizational routines. Since routine calls for repetitive behavior, it precludes original or innovative approaches. One way of enhancing innovation is to eliminate routines and to have employees function in ways they think best.

5. Rely on instincts, intuition and hunches. They are based on recall of past experiences, keen observation, the combining of ideas and analogous reasoning.

6. Seek naive views. The non-expert on a task may bring a very different perspective to a problem than will experts. The layperson may have an innovative approach to a task that experts cannot see because they are blinded by past practice.

7. Think in terms of opposites. Consider doing the very opposite of what you would normally do on a task, problem or decision.

8. Use trial and error. When attempting to solve a problem, try various approaches until discovering the one that works best. Remember, creativity involves a willingness to take risks, even risks that prove to be wrong.

9. Ask hypothetical questions. Like a child, ask "What would happen if….?" when dealing with a task.

10. Practice envisioning. Envisioning is part of managing innovation.

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To better manage innovation in your organization, check out and register for *Innovation and Creativity: How to Improve Performance and Foster Growth* at www.amanet.org/seminars

Do You Agree with Findings of Our Innovation Study

The *AMA/HRI Innovation Study 2006* found more than two-thirds of the 1,356 global respondents considered innovation either "extremely important" or "highly important" to their organizations today. Looking into the future, about half of the respondents said they thought innovation would be "extremely important" to their organizations in ten years, and 35 percent said it would be "highly important."

To discover what can drive your innovative efforts, check out the survey results at www.amanet.org/research

Don't Ignore the White Spaces

Reorganizations, restructuring and lay-offs leave white spaces within departments or divisions, or between them. Within these white spaces may be problems or opportunities that previously were someone's responsibility, but now they don't officially belong to anyone. Or these orphan tasks might stem from recent changes in the technology available to the firm, the marketplace in which it sells its products or the distribution channels by which it sells them—they may not be problems, but rather opportunities that the company is not availing itself of because no one fully knows their worth.

The situation is understandable. It's tough enough for today's executives and managers to complete their assigned work, let alone address situations for which they have no responsibility. Everyone is so busy that it is easy to think of orphan responsibilities as someone else' job. Consequently, tasks that exist in the white space frequently go unattended.

Some orphans are like gnats, annoying but deserving of nothing more than a swat of the hand. If it was clear to whom these orphans belonged, they might find themselves at the bottom of that individual's priorities list. But some orphans hold the potential for significantly increasing corporate revenue or decreasing expenses.

As a leader, you need to:
■ Recognize orphans for what they are.
■ Know how to make judgments about which orphans or problems in white space to devote time to.
■ Draw attention to the orphan or problem without invading another person's turf.
■ Encourage staff members to step into the white space to benefit the department, division or organization as a whole, and do so yourself.

Build synergy by bringing together colleagues to work on the issue. Open communications and begin spanning the white space between job titles or departments.

7 Ways to Counter Groupthink

Groupthink is a process of rationalization that sets in when members of a group begin to think alike. It can be fostered by leaders and managers who discourage dissent or who offer so much praise of an idea that pretty soon everyone is behind it. Either way, it discourages critical thinking.

There are seven steps to countering groupthink:

1. Reward critical thinking. Go out of your way to invite thoughtful criticism of new proposals. As leader, if they are your proposals, you might go so far as to appoint a "devil's advocate" to attack your ideas. If one person is given the chance to point out weaknesses, others are more likely to do so.

2. Do not mistake silence for consent. Don't assume that quiet or silent members at a meeting are in agreement. As a meeting chair, go out of your way to draw them into the discussion—even to the point of asking them if they agree with the discussion to date.

4. Divide the group into subgroups to critique new ideas. People who are hesitant to speak in large group settings may be more comfortable about sharing their misgivings in a smaller meeting group.

5. Don't state your opinion too early and thereby influence your team's thinking. Staff members, especially those new to the group, will be reluctant to criticize what you have endorsed.

6. Give meeting participants time to think through major proposals. After initial enthusiasm wears off, staff members are much more likely to spot problems.

7. Seek wide exposure for new steps. Consider bringing in an expert to analyze your proposal. At the very least, talk to those whom you suspect will be against it. If you cannot convince them of the plan's merits, maybe it's because it doesn't have many.

To be more skillful in working with a group, check out AMA's management and leadership seminars at www.amanet.org/seminars

So, You Need More Ideas?

Most of us are familiar with **brainstorming.** It's usually done in groups, and individuals call out ideas that are written on a chart. No idea is evaluated until the session is completed.

But brainstorming isn't the only way to stimulate creative ideas. Here are some other techniques you can use:

Brainwriting. Like brainstorming, brainwriting uses free association but it is done on a piece of paper. You begin with a single word or phrase in the center of a sheet. Over a five- or ten-minute interval, you and team members write down as many single words or phrases that come to you. Where ideas are related, lines are drawn and groups of ideas can be circled to form islands of thought.

Linking the islands generally triggers workable solutions to a problem.

Analogies or metaphors, sometimes just words randomly selected out of a book, can spark thoughts about a situation. For instance, scrap levels have risen due to lack of training of new workers. You need a way to speed training. Choose an object, like a pen or a book, come up with some metaphors or analogies to the object, then use these metaphors or analogous thoughts to trigger ideas to solve the training problem.

Ask key questions. "What if" questions, for instance, can trigger lots of ideas as can repeatedly asking the question "why" during a discussion. Don't forget who, what, where and how questions, either.

Check out AMA's seminar *Innovation and Creativity: How to Improve Performance and Foster Growth* at www.amanet.org/seminars

On Being Resilient BY MARK VICKERS

Business often feels like a contact sport. Your competitors want to rough you up, blitz you with unexpected new products, undercut your prices, gang up on you via alliances or mergers and hammer away at your stock price. Organizations are bound to get the occasional bump and bruise—or worse.

The important thing is a company's ability to minimize the damage, recover fast and quickly get back in the game with new strategies, business models and products. That's what business "resiliency" is all about.

When couched in sport metaphors like these, resilience sounds fairly simple. It's not, of course. In fact, an analysis by Booz Allen Hamilton finds that only 17% of organizations are resilient, meaning that they are "highly adaptable to external market shifts, yet focused on and aligned behind a coherent business strategy.

Resilience is something that even the best companies will need to perfect as we proceed into an already turbulent 21st century. The ultimate goal of resilience, write Gary Hamel and Lisa Valikangas in *Harvard Business Review*, is creating "a company where revolutionary change happens in lightning-quick, evolutionary steps—with no calamitous surprises, no convulsive reorganizations, no colossal write-offs and no indiscriminate, across-the-

board layoffs." They argue that just as manufacturers routinely shoot for zero defects, resilient organizations should shoot for "zero trauma."

To be resilient, an organization needs to have a certain kind of corporate culture, one that supports the three components of resilience capacity, as laid out by University of Texas researchers Cynthia Lengnick-Hall and Tammy Beck.

First, a company needs to have "cognitive resilience," which means that the organization has a deep understanding of what's happening around it. It not only notices how things are changing but makes sense of those changes and formulates responses.

Second, companies need "behavioral resilience," meaning that they don't react in a simple, knee-jerk fashion when something unexpected occurs. This makes a range of actions possible.

Third, there's "contextual resilience," which depends a lot on internal social connections. Interpersonal networks often help companies rapidly cope with and respond to changes. It turns out that resilient people have a knack for getting others to help them out in times of need.

Although information flows freely in resilient organizations, people tend to be clear about who is responsible for making which kinds of decisions. Decisions are not second guessed once they've been made. And such organizations are more likely to distinguish among high, adequate and low performers.

Resilient organizations also tend to be unusually innovative. In fact, among such companies, there's been a 235% increase in the emphasis on innovation over the last 20 years, according to research conducted by Patrick Reinmoeller and Nicole van Baardwijk. They seek new knowledge both within and outside their organizations, and they work hard to increase entrepreneurial behaviors. In short, resilience means taking multiple paths to innovation.

Mark Vickers is editor of Trendwatch and senior research analyst for the Human Resource Institute.

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Encourage Creativity by Training Employees to Think Critically

Declaring employees to be empowered is easy, but actually getting them to take ownership of their work processes can be difficult. But even more difficult is allowing workers to look cynically on corporate policies and procedures and freeing them to innovate.

Show your employees how to think critically about how they perform tasks by initiating change yourself. Engage your staff in exploring opportunities for streamlining procedures, demonstrating that you really approve of

change, by a willingness to let them come up with the ideas.

Don't discourage creativity by ignoring staff ideas or cut off a staff member's creative thinking by claiming to have already thought of his or her idea and either are already working on it or have discounted it. If it's true that work is under way on the idea, ask the staff member if he or she would like to get involved. If you have, indeed, discounted the idea, explain the problems encountered and suggest that the staff

member come back with answers to the difficulties you discovered.

Most important, by what you say and do, **show your team that established procedures are not sacred** and that it can explore opportunities to improve efficiency and quality.

It is natural for employees to be reluctant to make suggestions for change, but in an environment in which staff can participate in decision making, you can gradually train employees to do so.

Here's what you'll find on the AMA Members-only Website www.amamember.org

LEADERSHIP

Leading the Social Side of Change. It may surprise you, but even in today's "Information Age," *who* you know might prove to be the most powerful strategy of all. What really distinguishes high performers is their ability to maintain and leverage diversified networks.

MANAGEMENT

Become the Boss No One Wants to Leave. Your people want to know: "Are you committed to excellence? Can I trust you? Do you care about me?" Here are some tips to ensure that your team members answer each question with a resounding "yes."

SMALL BUSINESS

Rev-up Your Inner Entrepreneur. Do you have what it takes to follow your dream to success? Former TV "Apprentice" participant Wes Moss shares "Secrets from 21 Ordinary People Who Made the Entrepreneurial Leap."

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Burnout Busters: 10 Ways to Cope When Work Gets Overwhelming. Are you one e-mail away from a meltdown? Management consultant Mike Staver's simple techniques will help you bounce back from the "dark side."

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

The "Accidental" Ambassador. Intentionally or not, when an entrepreneur ventures into a foreign market he or she becomes an unofficial American ambassador, with a potential for bridging the gaps between the U.S. and the rest of the world.

Book of the Month:
Leverage: How to Get It & How to Keep It in Any Negotiation, by Roger Volkema (AMACOM, 2006). Learn how to recognize and use leverage—the perceived advantage that one party has over another—to your advantage in any negotiation in the public or private sector.
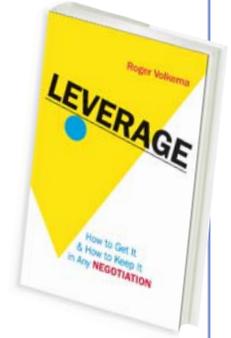
For more information about this book and AMACOM's extensive catalog of business titles, visit www.amanet.org/books

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AMA Conferences/Special Events Calendar

APRIL 26-27, NEW YORK, NY • HR Week, AMA's Employee of the Future Program. AMA shows how HR executives can position themselves as key players in developing both short- and long-term strategies for a growth-driven organization. New York Hilton.

APRIL 26, WEBCAST • Administrative Professionals Day. Celebrate the changing role of the Administrative professional in today's changing workplace. Free.

MAY 17, WEBCAST • The Art of Effective Project Leadership. Susan Junda and Andrew Boyarsky show how you can build team commitment and create a more predictable project environment. Free.

MAY 25, SAN FRANCISCO, CA • Executive Forum: Developing a Strong Partnering Organization. Co-sponsored by AMA and Cisco Systems, this half-day afternoon program provides a roadmap to developing partnering as a core competency, with best practices, critical tools and processes, and people management issues discussed. AMA Executive Conference Center.

MAY 26, SAN FRANCISCO, CA • Executive Forum: Roadmap for Partnering Success. Attend this half-day morning event, sponsored by AMA and Cisco Systems, on the critical tools and processes in partnering organizations. Learn how to build effective, virtual partnerships across functional lines and discuss Cisco's alliance manager tool kit. AMA Executive Conference Center.

JUNE 5-9, HILTON HEAD, SC • Course for Presidents. Learn real-world strategies that you can use right now to address the toughest challenges.

JUNE 6-7, CHICAGO, IL • World Business Forum. Be there for two days of the best business speakers, including William J. Clinton, Colin Powell, Michael Porter, Malcom Gladwell, Michelle Peluso, Kenichi Ohmae, Liu Jiren, Bruce Chizen, Rudy Giuliani, Marcus Buckingham and Dennis Nally.

Register online at www.amanet.org

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