

Team Building

It's not just about the beers!

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Executive Summary:

Team Building is one of those trendy Human Resources buzzwords that get thrown around when we think we should be doing something for our staff. But what is it? Is it worthwhile? Will it be worth the cost, time and effort? Many employers have organized Team Building activities for their staff and then later questioned the value when things didn't seem to change in the workplace.

We need to change our perception of Team Building. "It's not just about the beers!" It is good to have fun, but results are just as important. Team Building is about ongoing, focused, planned, outcome driven behaviour that should in some form happen daily. It is about the environment or culture in the workplace, how people interrelate, and the support they provide for each other.

The benefits are significant. Staff retention is a key issue for all employers: Team Building can be a major tool in the fight to retain quality, motivated, skilled staff.

Other benefits include more enjoyable work environment, supportive colleagues, less conflict and increased job satisfaction.

To achieve these benefits, commitment needs to be made to demonstrating leadership and building trust. Leadership doesn't mean just issuing instructions, it is acting with integrity - doing what you say you will do - treating people with respect, understanding and accepting differences.

The first step is identifying what "mistakes" you are making now as a leader of your staff. Commit to changing these areas and doing the basics of communication well. Set a plan in place to meet regularly with your staff, involve them in what is happening on farm, set some rules and some goals as a team for team achievement.

Is it worth it? Absolutely.

Is it easy? No.

Will it happen overnight? No.

Will it be fun? It can be.

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Thank you also to the clients and friends who have allowed me to coach them in people leadership, you should know that I learn as much from you as you do from me.

Finally, but most importantly thank you to my family for your support, understanding, child minding assistance and calf feeding over the course of the year. It really is appreciated.

About the Author:

After graduating from Lincoln with a BAgSc, Sarah went variable sharemilking in Southland with her husband. Returning to Canterbury, she started her career in people management, spending much of the next 13 years developing her skills in staff management and training. These roles were predominantly in the agricultural sector.

In 2002, she started working for Christchurch Casino as their Human Resources Manager, seeing to the needs of 550 staff. A desire to return to the agricultural sector and to work part time to fit better with family, has seen Sarah start her own HR Training and Consulting business. Sarah has worked with Dexcel and presented papers at both SIDE and Dairy3 conferences.

Sarah, Tony and their children are developing a block of land at West Melton on which Sarah runs a calf rearing operation.

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Introduction:

“Team Building: Isn’t that a few beers and a barbeque after calving is finished?
Or is it getting out of your comfort zone, facing your fear, embarrassing
yourself in front of your workmates?”

This common perception of Team Building is not completely unfounded. It is also the ‘reason’ Team Building just doesn’t seem to have worked. Unfortunately this means most employers and managers are missing out on the many benefits that quality, focused, ongoing Team Building can offer.

The objective of this project is to define what Team Building really is and give employers a few simple tools to begin the process of building an effective team. A team that performs well, with motivated and committed team members. This project builds on the paper I wrote and presented at SIDE 2005 – “Building an Effective Team – the seven mistakes most people make and how to avoid them”.

I believe building an effective team is a significant tool in the ongoing battle to retain staff. Whether you employ one person or 500 people, there are real benefits to be had in developing a strong team culture.

This paper is an introduction to why I think the benefits of Team Building are worth the concentrated, planned effort required. It is certainly not for everyone. If you do have an interest and think your work place could benefit I encourage you to read further, talk to employers, coaches, managers who you feel have a successful team, find out what they are doing that works.

My aim is to encourage employers and managers to commit to an ongoing strategy of building the team culture in their work environment. I have coached businesses, including farming businesses in the formulation of a Team Building strategy that works

for them. I have seen the results of these strategies improve productivity, improve retention and increase motivation of the people working for them.

No, it is not a quick fix, instant answer to your retention and team challenges. It is about making an ongoing commitment to managing your farm business, with a long-term view of the results.

Background:

The Hype

There is a lot of hype and misrepresentation surrounding Team Building.

Examples of press articles that appear from time to time:

“An exercise in personal humiliation and team-building” NZ Herald 13 Jan 2004

“We ended the day cold, wet and tired but a buzz with a sense of achievement and a few stories to tell. But looking back now, I wonder what we actually achieved. Did we work better as a team; communicate better, like each other more, get more of a sense of each other’s strengths and weaknesses? Not really” The Dominion Post 15 April 2005.

“Too often, while employees have a great day out and get a real buzz out of the physical challenges given them, the effects or benefits don’t translate back into the workplace”.
NZ Business Feb 05.

Team Building is a term that gets thrown around very casually however it is a serious topic. Most of us associate the term ‘Team Building’ with a few beers after work, a meal out or session on the golf course.

If you want to develop a supportive, committed group of people working together towards achieving the business goals then you need to understand what Team Building really is and where to start.

The Importance of Retention

The dairy industry is a big employer nationwide. According to the 2001 census, there were 35,000 people employed directly on dairy farms while many more were employed in associated industries such as transportation, processing and marketing (Department of Labour, 2003). With a 4% annual growth target the importance of training and retaining staff in the dairy industry, both on and off farm, is paramount (Woods, 2004).

As the number of people in the labour pool shrinks and the demand for quality employees increases, providing a supportive team environment is one tool you can use to improve staff retention.

It takes time and effort to recruit and train new staff. There is extra pressure on both the employer and other team members while this process takes place. Depending on the skill requirements of the position it can take several months to a year for a new staff member to be completely competent in their role. It makes economic sense to invest in building a team environment and encouraging and developing your current team.

It is widely accepted in Human Resource circles that the cost of recruitment, engagement and training of new staff can range from one, to as high as two and a half times, the annual salary of the new recruit. This cost takes into account the recruitment process along with reduced productivity until the new staff member is established (King, 2003)

So What Does “Team Building” Really Mean?

Team Building typically means some kind of social or recreational activity or special retreat designed to help team members bond. But it should be something more rigorous and well thought out. The ongoing work of creating and managing a team so that it can function and perform at a high level is a skill that can be learned through instruction, coaching, instinct and experience. Sure teams need to have fun, the risk is assuming that just because it is called Team Building it causes people to work better together.

Case Study: Brendon and Gail Woods (exert from Woods, 2004). There were two areas that Brendon and Gail felt were important in the development of a new team: Team Building and communication. They felt if their staff could understand each other, this would lead to better team bonding and more respect of each others' differences. Sarah Watson was involved in running two workshops on farm to help specifically with Team Building and communication. The workshops involved focusing on working together, understanding their own personalities and that of others. There was a focus on communication, listening and understanding. Interestingly on the day of the first workshop staff were reluctant to contribute but after about 15 minutes they started to respond and got more involved. By the end of the session they were quite enthusiastic and eager to participate in the second workshop. There appears to be a better understanding of each other amongst the staff, and they have been positive about what they got out of the workshops.

“Teams develop best when they work together on getting their work done.” (Brounstein, 2002)

But why bother? Can't we just leave people working as a group, even if they aren't really functioning as a team? They learn to get on don't they? What is the benefit of building a 'team'?

These are all fair questions and in some situations having people working individually on their required tasks rather than in a 'team' may be best. However for most workplaces having your people working together as a 'team' to achieve the business goals will increase productivity, improve the culture and work environment, increase motivation and reduce conflict. Your people will learn to understand themselves, each other and you as the leader. They will know what they are there to achieve and success will be something they all contribute to. You will have an environment of Trust.

So how do we achieve this picture of employment bliss? As always it is best to start with the basics...

In my SIDE 2005 paper – “Building an Effective Team” – the 7 mistakes most people make and how to avoid them, I have highlighted Trust and Leadership as key factors required to build effective teams.

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE TEAM

The 7 Mistakes Most People Make and How to Avoid Them

Sarah Watson, SIDE 2005

Do we need teams?

Do they make a difference?

Do people work more effectively as part of a team?

The answer to these questions is Yes, Yes, Yes!!!

So How DO WE Make Teams Work????

We need to start with what a team really is...

A team is “a group of people working together to achieve an agreed result or outcome in a way which uses the skills and talents of the members without compromising their values”.

**Together
Everyone
Achieves
More**

What should be some of the key aims of a team?

1. Free up management time by at least 30%.
2. To encourage your team to think like an owner! To think “If I owned this business, if it was my money I was about to spend, what decision would I make?”
3. To be self-sustaining, i.e. how do we handle people coming and going from the team?

Most people have not been taught how to BE an effective team member. We need to remember that people need the following at work:

- Direction
- Leadership
- Clearly defined boundaries
- Opportunities to contribute

Knowing some of the potential mistakes mean you are better prepared than most people when it comes to building a team...

So what are the *most common mistakes that bosses/supervisors/managers make with their teams?*

1. Poor Communication, for example:
 - Not having clear expectations of the team and team members and/or not communicating these clearly.
 - Not giving new employees a good introduction or orientation to the property, their role and the other staff.
 - Not involving the team in what is happening on the property and the reasons for some decisions, especially those that impact on them.
2. Not acting on issues (may be unintentional). These could be things that are important to the team or it could be not dealing with poor performance. This includes rewarding behaviour we don't want.
3. Team members unclear who is the team's boss - farm owner or farm manager?
4. Stepping in too early with the small things that the team should be sorting out amongst themselves.
5. Poor time management and organisation, this leads to jobs taking too long.
6. Preferential or unfair treatment of staff.
7. Not having the respect of those in the team.

So what CAN we do???

The two keys to getting teams performing and functioning well are the quality of LEADERSHIP and the level of TRUST within the team.

Effective team leadership can lead to better communication, mutual support and reinforcement, higher productivity and clear roles and objectives along with shared vision or purpose.

Trust is **compulsory**. For team members to fully participate as part of the team, they need to know that it will be safe to do so. That the manager or other team members are going to support, encourage, give feedback and allow participation.

So how to achieve this?

Well, it won't happen overnight, but with concerted effort it will happen. We need to work in some key areas and continue to develop and evolve the team's skills. Over time you can, and will, build an effective team that is able to continue to remain effective as team members come and go.

Start with:

- Communication
- Dealing with conflict
- Understanding personalities
- Getting people working together
- Building trust

Practical things you can do include:

Talk to other farmers who seem to 'have it sorted'. Find out what they do and what works for them.

Get the team together and ask them these questions...

- What do each of the team members like about working in this team?
- What can they contribute individually to the team? For example, someone might like getting up early and finishing early, whereas another team member might like to sleep in and work later.
- What don't each of the team members like about working in this team?
- What are the different personalities at work in the team?
- What effect do different personalities have on communication and learning within the team?
- What behaviours do they want to encourage in the team?
- What behaviours will not be accepted by the team?
- What is in it for them if they function effectively as part of the team?
- Can they think of a 'motto or statement' that they agree to work by or that motivates them as a team?
- What are the rules the team will abide by?
- How will they deal with behaviour outside of the agreed boundaries? And who will enforce it?
- What are the targets or goals the team is aiming for? Ideally the team should set these targets for teamwork.
- How often does the team need to meet to discuss how it is functioning as a team?
- How often does the team need to meet for practical daily management?

Autumn and Winter are ideal times to get your team together for Team Building (not just outings and beers!!). Organise focused sessions aimed at getting the team to understand each other and work together better.

Bosses/supervisors/managers can, and should, do these things daily:

- Clearly communicate what is expected of the individuals and the team
- Keep the team informed about what is going on
- Allow and encourage the team to take ownership of what they are trying to achieve and how they achieve it
- Treat everyone fairly according to the same rules
- Help the team deal with issues that arise within the team, e.g. conflict
- Deal quickly and effectively with any behaviour that is not appropriate
- Involve the team in decisions or let them make some of the decisions
- Make sure everyone knows who the second in charge is, and
- Work closely with the second in charge to develop the team culture that you want

Benefits of having an effective team

- Supportive encouraging environment
- People are more likely to enjoy their work and work environment
- When team members know it is safe to show initiative then they will
- Less opportunity for 'slackers' to flourish
- Pride in achievements
- Lowered turnover and absenteeism
- Increased job satisfaction and improved productivity

Remember Effective Team Leadership involves observation, assessment, awareness and knowing when to intervene.

The challenge is ...to become "AN EFFECTIVE LEADER"

So what is your next step?

- Look for someone who you respect who has an effective team and ask them to mentor you to become a better team leader, and/or
- Read; "Finding the Square Root of a Banana" by Ann Andrews, and/or
- Get professional assistance

Conclusion:

How should our workplace look and feel? This is a very important question that we should be asking ourselves. Ideally it is one where there is a culture that celebrates success, where people are kept informed and people (including the leader) are courteous. The culture should encourage questions, innovation and sharing of different ideas.

People need to have a clear picture of what needs to be done, not just tasks, but the big picture... what are you trying to achieve, what are the business goals? What skills do each of the team members have, how can they be best utilized to achieve the result? What personalities are we dealing with, how do we work with that? Have the team had input into what they are trying to achieve? How does the team resolve conflict in a positive way? How do we all contribute to building trust and leadership?

My advice is to start with small steps. The following checklist might help:

1. Meet with your team regularly
2. Tell them what you are trying to achieve (communicate)
3. Set some small targets as a group
4. Decide when you will review them
5. Write them down where everyone can see them
6. Review them

Still do the fun activities...but don't fool yourself that these activities, in isolation, are "Team Building". These are team-bonding sessions; opportunities to understand each other and build relationships... these are a beginning not an end.

It takes ongoing, determined effort to change behaviours and culture. Every time you have a staff member leave and another start it will change the team's dynamics.

Everyday ask yourself "what can I do to support, motivate and encourage teamwork?"

Often, it's the little things, like treating people respectfully, doing what you say you are going to do, being supportive, encouraging and acknowledging peoples efforts, which can

make a difference. Basic things, but if they're done well they set the scene for workplace excellence.

The benefits include having people enjoy their work and work environment, taking pride in their achievements and those of the team. And ultimately they want to stay working for you and being part of the team.

Is it worth it? Yes, I am totally convinced it is.

Why not give it a go – you've got nothing to lose and everything to gain.

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