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What is the Decision Leader Review?

This monthly publication brings you current research and information in the area of business decision making. You'll find new concepts and ideas you can put to use immediately to improve the quality and speed of your strategic and tactical decision making activities.

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10 Rules for Launching a Successful Project Team

Teams are a fact of life in virtually all medium and large organizations. But project teams fail at rates much higher than many of us are willing to admit. Why do teams fail? One primary cause is because they get off to a poor start. Why? We rarely equip them to negotiate the most critical stage of their existence - their formation and launch.

During the past 20 years we've worked with countless teams and have observed firsthand what factors matter in the crucial "first days" of team life. As a result, we've created the "10 Rules" for launching an important project team. Follow these and you'll have a reasonable chance of success. Ignore them and your team is certain to fail, or experience significant delays.

#1. Choose the right team leader. The wrong one jeopardizes the team's success from Day One. The right leader is the person that best meets these criteria:

- High project knowledge - both technical content and project management process.
- Positional power - rank in the organization.
- Personal power - credibility in the organization.
- Ability to create a collaborative team environment.
- Good track record of success in team projects, either as a team member or leader.

#2. Be crystal clear on the project's purpose. This is a single statement that describes the team's reason for existing. Why is this so important? To define the scope and boundary limits of the project. Without this, a team will experience unnecessary *delay*, as team members engage in activities that are not in scope, or fail to address in scope issues. An effective purpose statement begins with the word, "To..." and is short, concise and memorable.

#3. Be crystal clear on team goals. These are the measurable end results that, when met, ensure the team achieves its purpose and the project is deemed successful. The most common breakdowns we observe in the formation of goals are:

- Not measurable.
- Vague or non-existent completion dates for each goal.
- No shared understanding among all team members.

#4. Be crystal clear on the role of the team. This is one area where teams often shortchange themselves and end up with trouble downstream. Use a process to define specifically what the team's role is, and what it is not, in the key areas of its responsibilities.

#5. Get alignment on each team member's role and time commitment. Many times team members assume their roles are based on job titles, when, in fact, they have been selected because of other skills, talents, or resources they bring.

Teams also get off on the wrong foot because of misunderstandings over time commitments required vs. what team members assume the requirements will be. This is rarely discussed at the outset of the project, and usually leads to trouble. In our experience, over 80% of project teams have a *disconnect* between the percentage of time a team member should allocate to the project (to ensure time and quality success) vs. the percentage of time the team member is able to work on the project. This leads to poor team morale and resulting project delays.

#6. Make sure team members' work is recognized in their PSP's. During a recent assignment we worked with a team who was responsible for a key product launch. Many team members invested up to 35% of their time on the project, yet this work was not reflected in their job performance standards or goals. As a result, an undercurrent of discontent grew among the team which ultimately contributed to missed deadlines and other project failures. Much of this could have been avoided if team members' work was properly recognized in their job performance goals.

#7. Engage in trust-building activities within the first 2 weeks of the team's life. Trust represents the most basic, required element for a team to be successful. Without trust, team members are reluctant to disagree or engage in debate. Without debate of issues, there is no commitment to goals and tasks. Without commitment, there is no accountability. Without accountability, team results are not achieved. Trust is the foundation.

The best way to build trust is to simply spend time together, face-to-face. And, the best way to accomplish Rule #7 is to do Rule #10 below!

#8. Use the Decision Focus "team thinking" tools for assessing situations, solving problems, analyzing decisions and making recommendations. A team is only as good as the decisions it makes and the problems it solves. If the team does not use robust processes to guide their thinking, they will fail to use the full brainpower available to them. This leads to poor decisions, lack of team alignment around conclusions, and decision re-do's (decision recommendations that are rejected and sent back to the team for rework).

#9. Set up a system that guarantees the free flow of information among the team, and from the team to its sponsors and stakeholders. Information is the lifeblood of most team activity, and if a *robust* system for this is not established early, the team will hemorrhage.

#10. Formally launch the project with an event (a 1- or 2-day in person meeting if at all possible). "Must" agenda topics include #2,3,5,7 above. Accomplish the other "Rules" at future times, but do all the rules within the first 8 weeks of the team's life.

The Idea in Practice

The first 10% of a team's life is critical to its success. Think of a team you've been on (either as a leader, member, or management sponsor) that's experienced trouble. How many of the rules above were violated? Which ones are "musts" for your next team?

News

If you are interested in learning more about our team consulting services or workshops, contact us at 952.595.8000 or Info@FocusTools.com



Quote of the Month

"A bad beginning makes a bad ending."

- Euripides
(Greek philosopher and playwright)
