It's Time To Team [1]

Arnie Dahlke
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It's unfortunate in this distressed economy that organizations are giving up activities such as team-building, just when such activities are needed most.

The stress of downsizing and looming job losses fosters a survival culture. People are out to protect themselves. Their perception of others narrows. They're thinking becomes paranoid. They are quick to point fingers and assign blame when things go wrong. They become more critical, more judgmental. Some become more cutthroat. Departments began competing with one another. Managers became adversaries instead of members of one organizational team.

Overall, relationships suffer. And relationships are what organizations are all about. The success of a company is anchored in relationships. From the CEO to the front-line employee, an organization consists of a complex, interdependent network of relationships. The more smoothly that network is functioning, the more effective is the organization.

It is precisely during these stressful times that organizations should be building teamwork. The most successful organizations are organizations with a *team culture* in which everyone is focused on a collective mission, functioning as one organization-wide team.

Take a look at some key elements of a *team culture*:

Building teamwork starts with *mutual trust*. People don't feel safe when they don't trust one another. Managers must build trusting relationships based on honesty and integrity. They need to radiate calmness and be empathetic and reassuring when witnessing the anxieties of others. They must control their own anxieties and not punish or belittle people for expressing some disagreement. More than ever, they must demonstrate that they are both open to and value employee suggestions by truly considering and discussing every suggestion.

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[1] From: http://arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm —Please take a moment to look at Arnie's site: www.arniedahlke.com
The image is based on a free graphic from thegoldguys.blogspot.com.

Building teamwork calls for *mutual respect*. Managers must communicate with people in ways that convey respect for their unique talents and skills. Communicating with others on this kind of "level plane," signals to them that you respect them. They must actively listen to people when they express themselves—not paying attention to and focusing on what someone is telling you is a strong signal of disrespect. They must acknowledge the contributions of people without discounting them. When someone has an idea, they must resist the temptation to point out flaws in their thinking—they must actively listen to people to understand their point of view.

Building teamwork calls for *open communication*. Managers must keep employees informed with the positive and negative news they have in a straightforward, yet sensitive manner. The more information employees have, the more they will feel they are a part of the organizational team. Managers must counter rumors before they spread. When employees are uninformed they become more attuned to rumors and participate in spreading them. The spreading of rumors leads to increased distrust of each other, their managers and supervisors, and executive management. Managers must counter rumors as soon as they occur with the real facts before they spread.

Building teamwork calls for cultivating a *problem-solving mindset* throughout your organization. The current economy breeds bigger than normal problems for any company. Now is the time to build teamwork by actively promoting and encouraging employees to submit ideas and then training them how to use the tools needed to solve problems. Give everyone an opportunity. The people with the most knowledge of how something is done (and what could be done to improve what is being done) are the people doing it. The more people are involved in the design of their own work processes, the more they will feel a sense of ownership in what they are doing and the more they will exercise self-responsibility for their work.[2]

Finally, *focus everyone on the organizational mission*. Employ systematic strategies that will encourage employees to see the organization as "one whole team" to create an interdependent culture in which people see everyone as performing an important function, as they all collaborate to deliver customer valued services and products.[3] Bring people together from different departments or sections. Help them translate elements of the organizational mission into specific behaviors and commitments, and involve them in team exercises and intersectional problem-solving teams.

In short, respond to these stressful times by building teamwork to cultivate an organizational *team culture* rather than a *survival culture*. You will stimulate people to band together in handling the problems they face and innovating and improving the way things are being done, both of which will help your organization more effectively weather the current economic storm.

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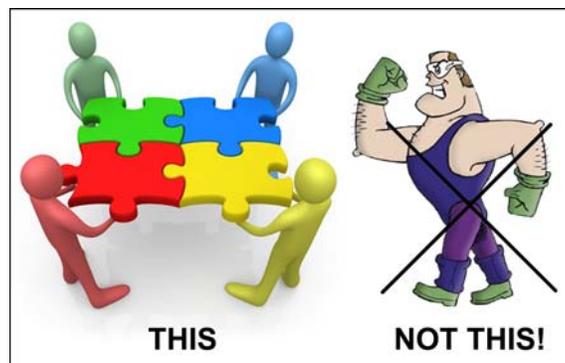
[2] Use *Strike Teams* to cultivate a problem-solving mindset. See:
www.arniedahlke.com/00_Strategic_Planning_in_an_Organizational_Context.pdf, pp. 11-13.

[3] See www.arniedahlke.com/onsiteconsult4.htm and www.arniedahlke.com/00_It%27s_TeamBeing_not_TeamBuilding.pdf