

WHO DO YOU feel knows more about what works best in the daily functioning of job responsibilities? Who do you think has a tighter bond or higher level of ownership for their jobs? Certainly the employees do. While others may theorize about what would work best for improving the jobs of employees, only the employees themselves know because they are the ones actually performing the tasks. This is the premise of a working entity called self-directed work teams.

Self-directed work teams (SDWT) are small groups of people empowered to manage themselves and their daily work. These formal, permanent units are charged with performing daily responsibilities, planning and scheduling their work, managing production, solving problems and sharing leadership roles.

In their purest forms, SDWTs offer the benefits of:

- giving each team member equality
- altering an environment of blame into one of trust
- improved productivity
- increased job pride
- bolstered confidence in job skills
- reduced conflict
- decreased turnover
- and more

Because teams are given the majority of control over their own goals, performance and results; they function more efficiently and with a greater sense of independence.

While the concept of SDWTs is enticing, not every team is ready to be converted from a traditional structure of manager-group-employee to self-directed, self-managed work team. How do you know if your team is in a position to be transformed? You can simply answer a few questions.

ONE Is the need to implement the change to SDWTs accepted as a business imperative?

ARE YOU PREPARED FOR THE SHIFT TO SELF-DIRECTED WORK TEAMS?



There needs to be organizational-wide support for SDWTs. Never use employees as guinea pigs just to see what happens. The company as a whole needs to embrace the implementation of SDWTs in order for the teams to succeed.

TWO Are employees ready to be empowered?

Are employees mature, professional, goal-oriented individuals who are capable of handling many co-leadership responsibilities? If not,

your team may not be ready. It shouldn't be expected that converting from groups to SDWTs will cure employees of previous problems.

THREE Are the employees right for the teams?

Do you have a good balance of personalities, attitudes, skill sets and talents?

FOUR Have the required resources been made available to ensure the change-over is implemented?

Don't make the leap from groups to SDWTs prematurely. If resources are not available, wait until a more opportune time.

FIVE Are the employees interdependent?

If you have employees who generally work only under the direction of others, you will need to train them to become interdependent.

SIX Will the transformation of self-directed work teams be implemented throughout a majority of the company?

Once a decision is made to go all out with SDWTs, the change-over should be done throughout the majority of the company.

If you are comfortable with your answers to the questions above, chances are your group, department or organization would benefit from converting to a SDWT. Once you do, you ▶ *continued on page 2*



NOTE FROM
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Think you are ready for the conversion to self-directed work teams? Because SDWTs have special collective characteristics, you'll want to be sure.

Assuming can lead to unnecessary struggles and even possible defeat. Always take time to review the ins and outs of what makes successful SDWTs. Evaluate those employees currently in your department individually to see if they have what it takes to perform as part of a SDWT. Once the information has been reviewed, plan accordingly for a smooth transition.

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can look forward to teams that manage conflict and discipline from within, perform well as individuals and as a team, balance short-term needs with

long-term goals, focus extensively on internal and external customer satisfaction and achieve their objectives consistently.

THE SUCCESSFUL DESIGN OF SELF-DIRECTED WORK TEAMS

WITH THE EXCITEMENT about self-directed work teams (SDWT) running rapid throughout corporations nationwide, many department managers have gotten geared up and ready to implement their teams. However, some have neglected a fundamental principle: planning and design.

There are some simple steps that can help ensure the success of your SDWT. By laying a core foundational design, you can be the architect of a SDWT destined for prosperity, achievement and accomplishment. Let's take a few minutes to outline the vital design steps needed prior to launching a SDWT.

Step 1

Define the team's purpose.

Why does the team exist?

How will your team contribute to the success of the company? What services will your team deliver to internal and external customers? The answers to these questions should give an overview of why this self-directed work team will provide something new, different or better than any other team.

Step 2

What is the team's vision statement?

What will the team look like in the future?

What will this team accomplish that no other team has? How will they do it more efficiently? More productively? Less costly? What changes will the team

make? How will this team improve processes? Implement strategies? How will the team be perceived by customers or coworkers? When you look a year, five-years or ten-years into the future, what will this team be doing?

Step 3

What goals and objectives will need to be in place to reach the team's vision?

What do customers expect from this new team? How will progress be measured? How will the team define quality? Are there definable benchmarks in place now?

Step 4

What strategies and tactics will be implemented to reach our goals and objectives?

Do team members require any new training? Do new or revised policies need to be in place before the team launch? Has an outline been created that denotes what is required of each team member in order to achieve the defined goals?

Step 5

What roles, responsibilities and support systems are needed for the team to function successfully?

To foster a culture of shared accountability, teams must learn to trust. This is the central cog that makes the wheel of team- ▶ *continued on page 4*

Communication is key when developing self-directed work teams. Unless and until every team member feels comfortable expressing his/her opinions, ideas and concerns, the team will not function at maximum efficiency. Teams should set timeframes for meetings (weekly, monthly, etc.) and create standard protocols to ensure everyone is heard and that issues are handled promptly.

SUCCESSFUL DESIGN

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work turn. Without trust, team behavior can quickly dwindle down to finger-pointing and childish “he-said-she-said” arguments about whose job consists of what. Rather than an environment of blame, you’ll want to develop strong, team-approved roles and responsibilities for everyone. You’ll also want to instill a system that allows for trust to grow.

Perhaps meeting leaders should be encouraged to turn discussions away from the problem and toward prevention of future mistakes. Follow-through should be a point of accountability with everyone reporting their progress on various tasks at each team meeting. Talk openly about responsibilities, accountability, expectations and reprimands so each team member is clear about what is expected of them as an individual and as a team member.

Step 6

Set standards, norms and expectations. What will guide our development and behavior in this new work environment?

Conflict management can be a trial if not handled properly. While many methods of conflict management are prevalent, each has its own pros and cons. Empower your SDWT to handle conflict.

Have them answer the following questions:

1. What is the problem as you perceive it?
2. What does the other person contribute to the problem?
3. What do you contribute to the problem?
4. What, in your opinion, should be done to resolve the problem?

Whichever way you deem best to handle conflict, be sure the process is in place before launching your team.

By taking these simple six steps, you can successfully define the SDWTs in your company. The added attention to pre-launch detail will give your teams a decided advantage and will equip them to handle every challenge that is thrown their way.

BUILDING AND MANAGING HIGH-PERFORMING ORGANIZATIONS

IN THIS HIGHLY interactive and hands-on workshop, we will explore how to build and grow a high-performing organization. The end result will be a corporate environment that caters to the new “knowledge economy.” Old assumptions about “job security” and “number one” will be shattered. In their place will be a cooperative, interactive team that works as a whole to accomplish exceptional results and takes full responsibility for its output.

During this two-day workshop, we will accomplish the goals of:

- ▶ Involving each leadership team member in designing the standards and characteristics of their high performing organization.
- ▶ Gaining commitment and accountability in implementing and executing the standards for a high performing organization.
- ▶ Providing an experience where the members of the leadership team return to the organization prepared to make individual contributions.
- ▶ Enabling the leadership team members to experience - through actual problem solving exercises - the significance of their commitment and desire to carry out the demands necessary to build a high performing organization.

**Contact XB Coaching today at
401-682-2859
for details or to
schedule a workshop for your team.**

Don't move too fast. While progressing to self-directed work teams (SDWT) can cause excitement to overtake you, remember one thing: Flipping a switch and declaring that SDWTs now exist can be dangerous. Move logically and methodically from your current team structure to SDWTs for a smoother transition. Making sure every step has been discussed, planned, communicated and effectively implemented is the best way to achieve a victory.