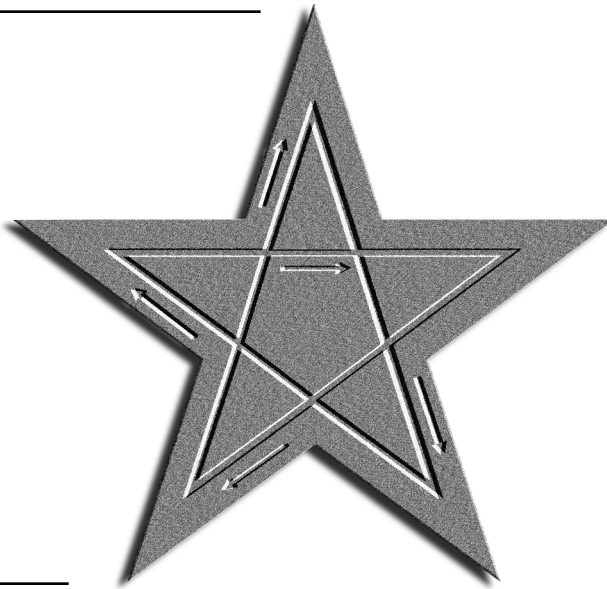


Lesson #7

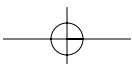
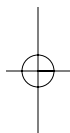
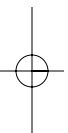
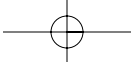
Assure Team Communications Amidst Warp Speed and Information Overload

★ Team Communication Guidelines/Agreements

★ The New Prioritizing Rule



Stage III:
Implementing And Maintaining Star TeamsSM



“If you want to change an organization, the best lever is to change how it communicates,” says W.R. “Bert” Sutherland, director of SunLabs.¹

Time is now one of our most precious resources. Today’s workers are bombarded with simultaneous demands for their time and attention. The choices they make every minute have a direct impact on whether the next minute will be wasted. An observation of how today’s workers have been making decisions is that they are deciding (whether consciously or not) to save time by cutting back on communications — by not using cordialities or tact, not really listening, not thinking the thought through before speaking, and many other bad habits. These all have costly results such as:

- work to be redone
- misunderstandings
- anger, defensiveness and hurt
- mistakes
- lost customers
- missed opportunities

MATH CHALLENGE:

If there are approximately 100,000,000 American workers, and each worker makes one small listening error each day due to being in a hurry and not really focusing, what will it cost business at a cost of just \$10 to fix each mistake?

The answer of \$1,000,000,000 makes us wake up and realize the impact of poor listening. This riddle only addresses the tip of the iceberg. Most communication mistakes cost much more than \$10 to correct. On a team, where relationships are the foundation of communications, it becomes even more costly.

It is a misconception that warp speed communication saves time. Courteous and open communication is one of those things we learned in the past (often the hard way) and are still useful factors for our future success. The following guidelines, when agreed upon and adhered to, create a supportive environment which allows a team to focus on getting the work done — not on dealing with the anger, defensiveness and other negativity that results from warp speed communications.

Team Communication Guidelines/Agreements

Most teams function together more effectively if team members think about how they want to communicate with one another and reach agree-

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ment on some guidelines. Following are some suggested guidelines for communication. Discuss these with your team, then check those you decide are vital for you all to observe.

☐ **Really Listen: Don't "Wait to Talk"**

When others are speaking, focus on what they are saying, trying to understand their meaning completely. Don't focus on what you are going to be saying next.

☐ **Be Concise**

For people who tend to be outgoing and talkative, be concise, get to the point and do not monopolize the conversation. Give everyone in the group the chance to shine.

☐ **Speak Up**

If you tend to be quieter or shy, speak up and share your ideas and questions. Others can benefit from your participation.

☐ **Be Open-Minded**

Reserve judgments. Consider all points of view and possibilities.

☐ **Show Respect**

Respect one another while talking or listening.

☐ **Tell the Truth with Tact**

Mom was right. "Honesty is the best policy." However, remember that tact should be used to assure the communication is really heard.

☐ **Think Before Speaking**

Put your brain in gear before taking your mouth out of "park."

☐ **Avoid Derision or Sarcasm**

Making fun of others can hurt communications.

☐ **Seek and Confirm Understanding**

When you are unsure of what someone means, ask for clarification. To confirm that you understand, summarize back to them what you heard.

☐ **Be Open to More Than One Right Answer**

Appreciate the diversity on the team. Each person brings a different skill set and perspective. Accept that there can be more than one right way to solve a problem.

☐ **Disagreement Is O.K., Conflict Is Not**

Disagreement is intellectual, conflict is emotional.

☐ **Additional Guidelines**

What other agreements would be important in order to assure that **your team** maintains open communications?

Assure Team Communications . . .

After your team considers which guidelines to follow, decide how you will enforce them. Here are a few suggestions:

- Have them typed and either posted on the wall or placed on the center of the table in the team meeting room.
- Give permission to everyone to tactfully remind others when they do not follow a guideline.
- Use the Negativity Bombardment Tool (see Lesson #8: “How To Prevent Toxic Team Meeting” — Converting Negativity, Ground Rule #8 for Running Great Star TeamSM Meetings that Get Results).

Case

DENNEN STEEL has become so skilled with communications that they only need to hold 30 minute meetings once a week to address issues and share important information.

HOW MUCH TO COMMUNICATE?

Given the immense deluge of information available, how much information needs to be shared? Too much information can cause confusion and overwhelm. Not enough, reduces decision-making ability, lowers morale and increases anger.

The New Prioritizing Rule

To choose what information to share, ask yourself:

Does this information enable you or others to

- Make a better decision?
- Take a better action?
- Do a better job?
- Feel better about work or the team?

If the answer is yes to any of these variables, it can be just cause to share the information. There are, of course, other considerations like confidentiality or legal restrictions. The main topics teams want to know about relate to their goals and the company’s goals.

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Case:

FERNO-WASHINGTON'S executive team does monthly "Floor Walks." At least two executives stand in the middle of a department or team area, often with a flipchart. These "Floor Walks" are convened quarterly or as needed to address immediate concerns for their 500 people at their headquarters in Wilmington, OH. The executives present company information on the financial status, new developments, or answers to recent questions submitted to the "Answer Box." This is a two-way conversation with each team so questions are handled as they come up.

The "Answer Box" is an effective communication tool for employees to anonymously ask any business-related question and to receive a timely answer. After the employee's question has been answered, it is posted on the "Answer Board."

They use a form (see next page), which they are glad to share with you.

IN SUMMARY

Helping people understand the information is key. This more knowledge based approach is preferable to disseminating information for its own sake.

Poor communications are often the cause for conflicts, defensiveness, trust breakdowns, synergy busters and many of the more fiery, messy team challenges. Poor communication has often been the root cause for team failures. This is a complex skill and issue. By using the Communications Guidelines and the New Prioritizing Rule, you have a good start on assuring effective Team Communications Amidst Warp Speed and Information Overload. Keep in mind that this is only a "good start." Good communication takes constant discipline and continual learning.

NOTES

1. Jessica Lipnack & Jeffrey Stamps, *Virtual Teams* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 167.

FOR EMPLOYEE USE

The question is . . .

If you could ask one business-related question of someone in Ferno management, who would it be?

What would the question be?

Response Will Be Posted Within 6 Working Days

FOR HUMAN RESOURCE USE

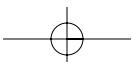
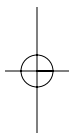
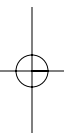
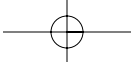
And the answer is . . .

Submitted To: _____

Date Submitted: _____

Date to Be Returned to Human Resources: _____

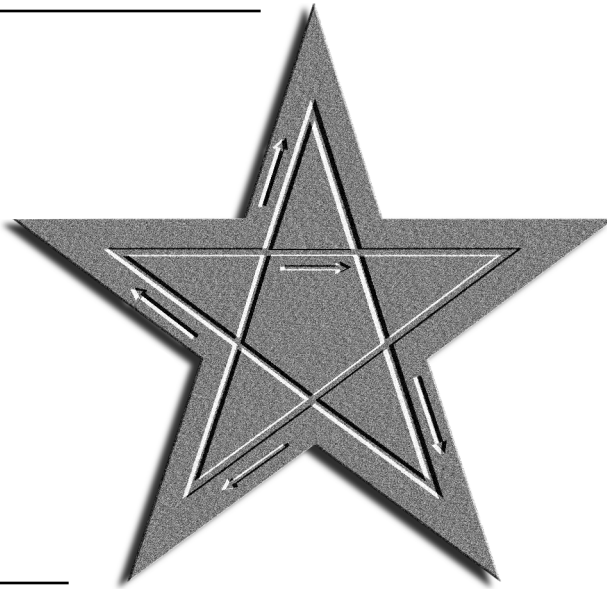
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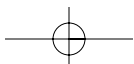
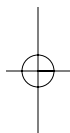
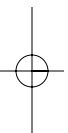
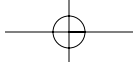
Lesson #12

Assess Team Process Effectiveness

- ★ Before Forming a Team
- ★ New or Problematic Teams
- ★ Once a Quarter



Stage III:
Implementing And Maintaining Star TeamsSM





Working on a Star TeamSM requires a high level of understanding about yourself and your teammates. There are key times when it is important to take assessment of your skills, styles, interests, interactions and progress:

- ★ Before forming a team (*who should be on the team*)
- ★ At the first team meeting — of any new team (*personal styles and interests*)
- ★ New or problematic teams
- ★ Once every quarter (*overall processes, interrelationships and progress*)

Before Forming a Team

In order to assure the right people are on the team, a preliminary assessment is important. Ask these three questions.

PRE-TEAM PLANNING QUESTIONS

- What type of team do we need to accomplish this goal?
- What knowledge and vital characteristics are needed to work on this team to accomplish this goal?
- Who is available to commit the amount of time that this team needs?

When thinking about the characteristics needed, remember to consider their change style (Realist, Collaborator, Goal Seeker or Visionary). If you don't have one of the attributes that you need in any of the players, ask if any of the players can adapt or flex into that style while working with the team. As people become more experienced with working on different types of teams, they will hopefully learn how to flex into any of the styles needed.

By addressing these questions with the people invited to be on the team, members will be able to bypass some of the questions in the forming stage of team development. They will already know why they are on the team, and they should have a good idea of what others expect of them. We believe team membership should be voluntary. In consulting with companies who had mandated participation, we observed that the practice caused negativity which the team had to deal with, taking their focus from the goal.

Other important questions to ask about the goal, available resources and the power of the team were addressed earlier in this book.

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AT THE FIRST TEAM MEETING

When a team is first forming, it is important that all members have a realistic perspective about themselves and how they work with others on a team. Time and angst can be minimized if the following questionnaire is completed by all team members and shared with the whole team.

Personal Preferences Survey

Instructions: Please complete this form with introspection and honesty. You will be sharing your responses with your teammates, so they will have a better understanding of how best to work with you. (There are no right or wrong answers.)

1. I prefer to work ☐ alone ☐ in a group
2. I prefer to work ☐ slowly ☐ quickly
3. I ☐ like ☐ do not like to compete
4. I prefer ☐ to lead ☐ to be led
5. I prefer to receive recognition (prioritize 1, 2, 3, 4):
☐ one to one
☐ in front of the team
☐ with the team
☐ in writing
6. What kind of work assignments, tasks and roles (Team Leader, Facilitator, Scribe, Timekeeper) really turn me on?

7. When people are giving me constructive feedback, what's important to me is

8. On this team, it is really important to me that

Assess Team Process Effectiveness

New or Problematic Teams

When a team is first organizing itself, the following Team Meeting Process Assessment can help members coalesce and improve their work together. We recommend the team take five to ten minutes at the end of each of their first few meetings to answer these questions. Once the team feels it is functioning well, it is still advisable to revisit these questions once a quarter.

These assessment questions are also useful for a team having problems with process or relationships. Ten to fifteen minutes at several consecutive meetings may need to be allocated to discuss them.

Team Meeting Process Assessment¹

Instructions: Each person write your answers to each question, then discuss your responses with the entire group.

1. What did we do well in how we worked together today?

2. What specifically did we do that made it work for us?

3. Did we advance toward our goal? In what ways?

4. What do we want to do more of, less of or differently at our next meeting?

5. Did we follow the meeting guidelines? If not, what shall we do to improve next time?

Once a Quarter

At least once a quarter, longer term teams should go through the following two-part “Getting Even Better” overall assessment. It also can be used when the team feels there are some processing or relationship challenges and they need a way to analyze them. Any segment of this can be done with more frequency, depending on your need. We also recommend a new team experience this survey after four to five meetings if

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they are meeting on a weekly basis. You may want to cover the two parts at two different meetings.

Getting Even Better Part 1: Team

Instructions: Consider how your team works together. Rate each of the following categories with a ranking of 1 to 5, ranging from 1 (we don't have very much of that) to 5 (we are high in that).

- ___ Team member attendance at meetings is as expected
- ___ Members are clear on their process roles (Team Leader, Facilitator, Timekeeper, Scribe)
- ___ Members are clear on their task roles
- ___ We have the right people on the team
- ___ Agendas are helping us stay focused on the right subjects
- ___ Members are committed to the performance goals
- ___ Strategies for achieving goals are clear
- ___ Differences of opinion are handled with respect and logic
- ___ We are following our communication guidelines
- ___ We solve our problems well
- ___ Members enjoy working together
- ___ Members trust each other
- ___ Members carry through on their commitments between meetings
- ___ Executives are kept informed of the team's work
- ___ We have enough laughter
- ___ We are celebrating enough
- ___ We are on target to meet our goal(s)
- ___ The customer is benefitting by the work of our Star TeamSM

Part 2 is used to give and gather feedback on how each person has been as a team member. Two versions are shown, one for the member him/herself, and one for teammate feedback. Feel free to add or subtract any of the items, depending on what characteristics are needed for your team.

First each person completes a form about themselves, then one on each of the other team members. They can be completed outside of the meeting and delivered at a later team meeting. You can make them