

Team Building

The “Virtual Team”

Lions Clubs International, Multiple District 19 Lions or Individual Districts work in an age of “networking” to accomplish team building and to provide service. Team leaders and team players are geographically dispersed, therefore, we often deal with “Virtual” teams. Advances in technology such as teleconferencing, the Internet, and computers have made virtual teaming possible.

Virtual Teams are a reality. They are not inherently better or worse than conventional teams – the kind one would find in a business office setting. Like other teams, they face challenges and barriers as they go about their business.

These Virtual Teams are groups of people working closely together even though they are geographically separated by miles. Our MD19 LEM/PR team and our District LEM/PR teams often work as Virtual Teams. As we work together to improve our Lions Clubs service potential, we find expanded networking opportunities through a combination of technologies such as telephone, overnight mail, fax, shared databases, the Internet, email, pc-to-pc hook-ups, shared computer screens, and/or video conferencing.

Up front – when the team is formed

- Spend time and resources to bring the team together in the forming stage for a face-to-face start-up session. This helps team members know one another, learn idiosyncrasies and quirks, form friendships, and create systems by learning common methodologies and a shared language to use in their work together. It also allows some relationship and trust to form before moving to electronic and voice communication.
- Even if you can't get together face-to-face, develop and understand a clear direction and plan for what the team intends to do, and values for how to accomplish its goals. Make sure

these are shared by all members. This creates the “same sheet of music” for the team and allows for individual decision making and action to move the team forward appropriately.

- Train members in the methodologies and software necessary for working together, such as problem solving, database management, and project planning.
- Put in place formal operating agreements developed by all team members for what they commit to do or not to do. These cover things all the way from what topics are discussed, to how often everyone will update the database, to how breaking agreements will be handled or how conflicts will be managed.

The most important part of the project is the up-front time. This is when personalities gel, friendships are formed, and members get used to one another’s work styles and temperaments. It’s also the time for finding out, for instance, that when Kurt says no, he’s adamant about it and doesn’t tolerate jawboning. Trying to fathom personality quirks like that via computer is much more difficult and time-consuming, and can damage the rapport of the team if tensions develop into flame wars via email.

John Spencer
Worldwide manager for design and
Development of single-use cameras
Eastman Kodak Co.

Once the team is underway

- Management and communication are formal processes with specific and direct responsibilities laid out and little left to chance. Sharing

of critical information is a top priority, and anything that slows the progress of information must be corrected immediately.

- Expect and require competent performance. Incompetence or lack of accountability can't be tolerated.
- Don't put aside the human side of the arrangement. Ways to have personal contact and informal social time need to be built in periodically. Make special efforts to create fun, celebrate progress and successes, and show personality.

Trust comes from performance. It's trust that springs from competence. If I see this person is going to do a first-rate job with the information I provide, that he won't undercut it, won't embarrass me, then I'm more likely to trust him.

Lee Sproull
Professor of Management
Boston University

SUMMARY

Remember that building fitness into Virtual Teams is an iterative, ongoing job. Dispersed teams, like all others, must follow through on the good things they put in place up front. Regular milestone checks and project planning reviews are critical. The habit of discussing team progress, both on project results and on effective teaming, is required in order to keep in place – and build on – a solid start. Teams must regularly assess how things are going, pick exercise and activities that fit their current needs, carry out those activities, and execute the agreements and plans made.

Virtual Team Leader's Checklist

1. Are we clear about the outcome of the team's work? Are we a team that recommends things? Makes or does things? Runs things?

2. Is everyone clear about the scope of our work?
3. Can every member state the vision, mission, and objectives for the team?
4. Does every member understand his or her accountability for output and the time frame?
5. Do we have the training and resources necessary to accomplish our mission?
6. Have we established a set of operating agreements based on our values and our organization's culture?
7. Does everyone know how to use the technologies and processes necessary to do the work?
8. Are our decisions and meeting minutes documented and distributed within a reasonable time of the action?
9. Do we know something personal about how each team member prefers to work together?
10. Do we deal with incompetence and broken agreements in a timely and effective manner?
11. Do we deliberately build in some fun and celebration of milestones?
12. Do we regularly check in with clubs and our service community, and understand their current needs and requirements?
13. Do I communicate progress, changes, and problems up, down, and across the organizational chain?
14. Do I check in with each member on a regular basis, formally and informally?