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How to Enhance Executive Team Communications



4 Steps to Healthy Communication in a Management Team

Step 1 – Prepare

Have your management team read Patrick Lencioni's The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.

Step 2 – Plan

Plan a 1-2 day off-site meeting for your management team with the purpose of building a healthy core of open, direct and proactive communication. This meeting should be away from the office and free of distractions such as email and phones. Start the off-site with a social dinner the night before to set the expectation of a positive team experience.

Step 3 – Discover & Commit

- A. Share the first two rungs of the pyramid (Trust & Conflict) in the Lencioni model to set the stage.
- B. Conduct team-building exercises focused on getting to know each other. Remember that the leader sets the pace in openness and vulnerability. Many effective exercises can be found in Forum: The Secret Advantage of Successful Leaders.
- C. Establish the boundaries for healthy conflict. This includes: direct communication (no back channels); criticize the behavior NOT the person; and recognize there are at least two sides to every story. Emphasize the importance of how a message is both delivered and received. Most of all, explain that to become an effective team, it is critical that members speak their truth.
- D. Beginning with the leader, explore individual person-to-person communication within the group:
 - In turn, each participant expresses to the leader what works and what does not work for him/her in interacting with the leader. After receiving all input, the leader thanks the group and shares openly how he/she has been affected by those comments and how he/she would like to be reminded of or held accountable for maintaining healthy communication going forward.
 - Next, the exercise is repeated with a different individual listening to what communication practices work and do not work for each of the other members of the team, following the same process as above. Repeat until each team member has heard from the group and shared openly his/her reaction and process for going forward.
- E. Close the meeting with each team member making a commitment to practice healthy communication going forward.

Step 4 – Make it Stick

To ensure these habits form, keep the following in mind:

- A. It takes 21 days to form a habit.
- B. Failing to remind someone when he/she violates an agreement is failing the person.
- C. Letting an issue fester can damage healthy communication.
- D. Back channel communication is the responsibility of both the sender and the receiver.

This level of honesty creates an environment in which a “bad apple” simply cannot hide; instead, a reluctant team member is likely to see an opportunity to either step up or to simply step out.

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