

Some thoughts on Teams

There are many effective definitions of teams. However, we will focus on developing the elements of the definition of a team-based approach put forward by Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, in their book The Wisdom of Teams:

A team is a small number of people with complimentary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.

Here we would *differentiate carefully between teamwork and work done in and by an effective team*. Teamwork represents a set of values that help people perform. Groups of individuals can cooperate and exhibit teamwork (as do many of our divisional fund-development departments), but not function as an effective, high performance team. A real team is a discrete unit of performance in and of itself, not just a set of values. While teamwork encourages success in teams, it never makes a team on its own. Principally, a working group may share information, best practices and perspectives. However, it relies on the sum of “individual bests” for their performance. A real team, on the other hand, strives for a greatly magnified impact to what the individual members could achieve on their own. In a work group there are no shared performance expectations, mutual accountability, or joint work products.

What most staff exhibit is an effort that falls under the definition of a working group that exhibits some teamwork. This is good -- as far as it goes -- but it is not the optimum required to meet current needs, and especially not enough to meet those for the future. If what we need/want is significantly heightened donor service that will translate directly to increased income generation, then a team approach offers us the best opportunity. We believe that some of the existing groups would develop into true teams if trained and supported while others may need to be reconfigured.

Some examples of the success from the work of teams include:

Aid Association for Lutherans	Raised productivity 20% and cut processing time 75%.
Chrysler	Teams developed the compact Neon automobile for \$1.3 billion in 42 months, as compared to GM's Saturn at \$5 billion in 7 years.
Shenandoah Life Insurance	Case handling time reduced from 27 days to 2 days.
U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs	Reduced multiple incoming calls by 75% from Jan to Aug of the same year.