

Welcome to the eighth edition of Jennifer Selby Long's *Traveling Light*. *Traveling Light* is a newsletter exploring how those blessed with the talent and opportunity to lead can be more effective and lighten the load inherent in their lives, based on the work of executive coach and management consultant Jennifer Selby Long. Copyright 2008 Jennifer Selby Long. All rights reserved.

How Great Leaders Successfully Jumpstart Reorganized Teams

So many clients have been telling me they're launching new teams this month. But there's a catch – these are new teams made of “old parts,” which is to say no brand new employees are on the teams. The teams are comprised entirely of managers, professionals, and staff who have been reorganized to better meet market demand.

Is it any different launching a brand new team vs. a reorganized one? I don't think so, but it's easier to blow it, because of assumptions you make about people you already know. The steps are the same; it's the nuances that are different.

Most leaders and their direct reports do a fantastic job of addressing the goals and business objectives of the team and of planning the *tasks* to be done. It's the building of *relationships* that is too scant or poorly executed, and this is why it's essential to build a relationship with each new team member, and to get any relationship issues out on the table so they can be addressed. If you don't have time to deal with relationships now, when exactly will you? This also gives you a chance to spend time with new team members and learn who's on board and ready to move forward with you and who isn't.

Let's look a little more closely at underlying relationship problems, because they always come back to bite you. Because your team is comprised of people who already have working relationships of some sort, you need to understand what's already going on, who's likely to work well together to produce results, and if there are problems to be addressed early on.

You also need to observe what's *never* going to be fixed because, frankly, this means you need to eliminate someone (or several someone's) from this team soon. It sounds harsh, but it's the truth. I see more leaders drag down their teams with team members who hate each other, each one waiting out the other, hoping the hated peer will quit or get fired. This makes it impossible for the team to get to work and move the organization forward.

Be sure to check your relationship assumptions at the door, even as you keep your legitimate concerns. A legitimate concern is one that's backed up by observed behavior or reports from reliable and utterly trustworthy sources. If you've seen two people nearly tried to kill each other while working on separate teams, o.k., you can safely assume you'll need to do some heavy-duty relationship repair or eliminate one of them from the team, but remember that there are plenty of relationship problems and strong points that are mostly hidden from you. This is true for all leaders. There are no exceptions. You just can't see everything that's going on all the time, nor should you in most cases (that would be micromanagement). But this is also why you have to ask.

To that end, here's what I see the best leaders doing, generally in this order:

1. *Meet with each of your direct reports one-on-one, preferably in person, in a private place.*

During the one-on-one, ask each direct report to share any observations or concerns, not just about the business goals and objectives for the team, but about the team's ability to work well together to get the job done. Be open about your own concerns, too, to encourage a frank discussion and to begin building a trusting relationship with each of your new direct reports.

No, they won't tell you everything, but you'll at least establish that you want a relationship characterized by frank exchange.

Ask what he or she needs from you as a leader. You might be surprised. If you don't ask, you will give your directs what *you* want from a leader, not what *they* want, which is often different. I'm working with two leaders now whom I'm convinced are among the most independent people on the planet. They constantly have to remind themselves that 80% or more of the managers and professionals in their organization want what seems like an absurd and downright insulting level of direction, because their needs are different.

Share what you need from him or her as a team member and, in the case of management teams, what you expect from his or her leadership. So few team members will ask, and this is incredibly good information to know.

2. *Bring the team together for a good, solid launch.* That's launch, not lunch, but food is always a nice addition. Ask each person what he or she wants to get out of the meeting, the one thing that will cause them to leave at the end saying, "Wow, that was a great use of my time on this new team."

Yes, this does mean a little bit of designing the meeting on the fly, particularly if you are surprised by some of their answers. If you or they absolutely hate improvisation, ask them in advance and build the agenda accordingly. Have a flipchart in the room and use it to track the discussion and any decisions made.

Reiterate any important messages that you shared in the 1:1's, whether they be business/task-oriented ("the company missed our sales target by 20% last quarter for the first time and it's our job to turn that around this very quarter") or relationship-oriented ("I expect you to work together, to share resources, and to come to me with solutions, not just problems. I want you to work out your differences regardless of whether or not I'm in the room. I don't plan to play referee; I've got my hands full calming shareholders.").

3. *Do some concentrated teambuilding focused on the relationship side of the equation; the business/task side as well, if you need it.* I use the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) to help people work better together because it is reliable and valid and I have delivered proven results with it many times over. I also occasionally use other tools if I deem them a better fit.

Whatever tool you use, make sure you use it to learn about each other and your likely team strengths and blind spots in a *non-judgmental* manner. Any tool that measures someone's effectiveness, for example, is terrible for team-building, because it puts people in a hierarchical line-up from the most effective to the least effective.

Use a tool that *brings people together* by helping them understand their own styles and needs and the styles and needs of their teammates, not one that designates some styles as superior, which is impossible to measure, anyway.

4. *Collectively set measures for team success.* The obvious measures are the achievement of your business goals, but what about also measuring some of the things that enabled that achievement? How about a measure of the quality of your decision-making process? How about a measure of how committed you are to work with each other going forward? How about a measure of how quickly and effectively you were able to integrate new team members, or respond to changes in direction or work load or whatever else matters to the team? The options are endless, but there's merit in identifying a few measures of how you got there, not just whether or not you got there.

Happy Launching!

News

I'll be teaching *Coaching for Performance* in the UC-Berkeley Extension Business Management program March 15 and 22. With a little bit of pride, I'm thrilled to report that I am one of the highest-rated instructors in the entire UC-Berkeley Extension program, based on a comparison of 49,000 feedback forms obtained from thousands of classes. The Coaching class will be held at the downtown San Francisco campus at 425 Market Street. There will be very little theory and tons of practice. If you want to immediately be a better coach and manager of coaching resources, go to <http://www.unex.berkeley.edu/cat/course76.html>.

This is the last quarter for Selby Group's Private Coaching program for individuals who want to invest in their own development -- with their own funds, not their employer's (http://www.selbygroup.com/coaching_individual.html). After March 31, it's gone. Current and past private coaching clients will be able to continue their programs after March 31, but we won't take any more new clients after Q1 is over.

Last reminder for *Opposites Attract -- And Live to Tell About It*, a panel of Type-savvy couples sharing the secrets of how they use psychological Type to enhance their relationships. February 9, 2008, 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at the Hilton Garden Inn, 2000 Bridgepointe Circle, San Mateo. BAAPT charges a mere \$25 per person, including a continental breakfast. More information is available at www.baapt.org.

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