

# **BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE TEAM: THE 7 MISTAKES MOST PEOPLE MAKE AND HOW TO AVOID THEM**

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Do we need teams? Do they make a difference? Do people work more effectively as part of a team? The answer to these questions is Yes, Yes, Yes! So how do we make teams work? We need to start with what a team really is.

A team is a 'group of people working together to achieve an agreed result or outcome in a way which uses the skills and talents of the members without compromising their values'.

What should be some of the key aims of a team?

- Free up management time by at least 30%
- Encourage your team to think like an owner! To think, If I owned this business, if it was my dollars I was about to spend, what decision would I make?
- To be self sustaining, i.e. how do we handle people coming and going from the team?

Most people have not been taught how to be an effective team member. We need to remember that people need the following at work:

- Direction
- Leadership
- Clearly defined boundaries
- Opportunity to contribute.

Knowing some of the potential mistakes means you are better prepared than most people when it comes to building a team.

So what are the most common mistakes that bosses/supervisors/managers make with their teams?

1. Poor Communication. For example:
  - Not having clear expectations of the team and team members and/or not communicating these clearly
  - Not giving new employees a good introduction or orientation to the property, their role and the other staff
  - Not involving the team in what is happening on the property and the reasons for some decisions.
2. Not acting on issues (may be unintentional). These could be things that are important to the team or it could be not dealing with poor performance. This includes rewarding behaviour we do not want.
3. Team members being unclear who is the team's boss; farm owner or farm manager?

4. Stepping in too early with the small things that the team should be sorting out amongst themselves.
5. Poor time management and organization; this leads to jobs taking too long.
6. Preferential or unfair treatment of staff.
7. Not having the respect of those in the team.

## So what can we do?

The two keys to getting teams performing and functioning well are the quality of **leadership** and the level of **trust** within the team.

Effective team leadership can lead to better communication, mutual support and reinforcement, higher productivity and clear roles and objectives along with shared vision or purpose.

Trust is **compulsory**. For team members to fully participate as part of the team, they need to know that it will be safe to do so; that the manager or other team members are going to support, encourage, give feedback and allow participation.

So how to achieve this? Well it will not happen overnight. We need to work in some key areas and continue to develop and evolve all the team's skills. With perseverance over time you will build an effective team that can continue to be effective as team members come and go. Start with:

- Communication
- Dealing with conflict
- Understanding personalities
- Getting people working together
- Building trust.

Practical things you can do include getting the team together and asking them these questions:

- What do each of the team members like about working in this team?
- What can they contribute individually to the team? For example, someone might like getting up early and finishing early, whereas another team member might like to sleep in and work later
- What does each of the team dislike about working in this team?
- What are the different personalities at work in the team?
- What effect do different personalities have on communication and learning within the team?
- What behaviours do they want to encourage in the team?
- What behaviours will not be accepted by the team?
- What is in it for them if they function effectively as part of the team?
- Can they think of a 'motto or statement' that they agree to work by or that motivates them as a team?
- What are the rules the team will abide by?
- How will they deal with behaviour outside of the agreed boundaries? And who will enforce it?

- What are the targets or goals the team is aiming for? Ideally the team should set these targets for teamwork
- How often does the team need to meet to discuss how it is functioning as a team?
- How often does the team need to meet for practical daily management?

Winter is an ideal time to get your team together for team building (not outings and beers!!) but focused sessions aimed at getting the team to understand each other and work together better.

Bosses/supervisors/managers can and should do these things daily:

- Clearly communicate what is expected of the individuals and the team
- Keep the team informed about what is going on
- Allow and encourage the team to take ownership of what they are trying to achieve and how it achieves it
- Treat everyone fairly according to the same rules
- Help the team to deal with issues that arise within the team e.g. conflict
- Deal quickly and effectively with any behaviour that is not appropriate
- Involve the team in decisions or let them make some of the decisions
- Make sure everyone knows who the second in charge is
- Work closely with the second in charge to develop the team culture that you want.

## **Benefits of having an effective team**

- Supportive encouraging environment
- People are more likely to enjoy their work and work environment
- When team members know it is safe to show initiative then they will
- Less opportunity for 'slackers' to flourish
- Pride in achievements
- Lowered turnover and absenteeism
- Increased job satisfaction and improved productivity.

Remember effective team leadership involves observation, assessment, awareness and knowing when to intervene. The challenge is to become **an effective leader**.

## **So what is your next step?**

- Look for someone you respect who has an effective team and ask them to mentor you to be a better team leader, and/or
- Read "Finding the Square Root of a Banana" by Ann Andrews and/or
- Get professional assistance.

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