

# Achieving Team Success: 7 Tips For Management

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They come in all shapes and sizes, and no two are ever exactly alike. I'm talking about problem-solving teams. Yours might be a quality circle, a quality improvement team, an autonomous work group or a self-directed work team. No matter what you call it, there is only one way to insure its success: visible top management commitment and active support.

More than lip service. Problem-solving teams are hot. It seems every company serious about quality (and which isn't?) has at least one. But it takes more than just assembling team members and charging them with a mission. Management must make its commitment and support visible at all times. If not, the team will fail ... and fail miserably every time.

A team's success requires more than just your approval, even more than a list of concrete goals. Management must provide visible commitment and support, not just lip service. Here are some tactics that are easy for management to implement and will ensure your team's success.

1. *Give an hour of your time each day.* Be visible. Get out from behind your desk and talk with team members. Your job is to foster innovation, fuel new ways of thinking, share information and ideas. Keep the process flowing, and when necessary, improve the process itself.
2. *Provide the best possible education and training.* You can't expect your team members to work productively together if they don't know how. After all, it wasn't too long ago that all manufacturers required from their employees, and in fact all they wanted, was labor. Suddenly, we want their minds. We want all employees to think creatively, to review systems and processes, to make suggestions for change, even implement change. Perhaps hardest of all, we expect them to work cohesively with the other members of the group. Proper training will deter power struggles, define roles, and clarify action plans and methods. But education and training shouldn't begin and end with the team. Consider all levels of your organization. Should all employees know about the team and its mission? Should top management be educated about realistic goal setting and time frames? This is not the place to cut corners. Provide the best education and training possible.
3. *Change the measurement process.* Most manufacturing companies run by performance measurements: How many did you make? How much did you sell? This "pass-fail" method of measuring does nothing to motivate employees. Focus on measurements that

move people toward process --- thinking, being creative and trying different approaches. To do this, you must learn to ask questions that will give you the opportunity to listen -- and learn. Avoid the "how much" and "how many" questions that simply chase results.

4. *Implement a problem-solving method.* Don't just dictate the problem and outline the goals. You've brought together a group of individuals who must work together as a team, cooperatively and effectively. You can throw your best and brightest together, but without a focused plan or approach, you may get some interesting banter instead of an effective solution. You need a team mission and a game plan. Each member should know what is expected of him - or herself and the other members at all times.
5. *Celebrate successes.* Recognize and publicize achievements every chance you get. Remember, you are encouraging creativity and different approaches. This means you must let the team implement new ideas (yes, even if you're certain they're a mistake). Let the team members know that their contributions matter. Use newsletters, bulletin boards and verbal acknowledgment whenever possible.
6. *Give it time.* Teams need adequate time to evolve. The easiest way to demonstrate management's commitment and support is to give the team plenty of time to grow and develop. Give them time to succeed.
7. *Challenge your people.* Use reward and incentives to motivate everyone, including top management, to search out better ways of doing things - even those things that your company does very well already. Welcome all new ideas with enthusiasm and praise - it creates an atmosphere-that challenges employees to think creatively.

### **Total success**

Is your company's management commitment visible to your problem-solving teams? Is management actively involved in the team's efforts? Is everyone properly trained to embark on the mission or adequately educated about the team's mission? Does management foster creative thinking? Do the team members receive encouragement and recognition? Is management willing to devote time to the project? If you answered yes to these questions, your team's efforts will have a measurable success. And, remember - -

**The team's success is your company's success!**