TEAM BUILDING

Key Points

1 **Groups and Teams**

2 **Characteristics of Effective Teams**

3 **Stages of Team Development**

Soldiers will not follow any battle leader with confidence unless they know that he will require full performance of duty from every member of the team.

GEN Dwight D. Eisenhower

Introduction

The Army is a team. That's no accident: The Army trains Soldiers to work together. Experience shows that Soldiers are most willing to perform for the other members of their unit, down to the person to their right or left. The fundamental truth is that Soldiers don't want to let their buddies down.

As a leader, you must learn to build on that trust and commitment among team members to accomplish your missions. Team building is hard work that requires patience, good interpersonal skills, and an understanding of the team's dynamics.

Good teams complete their missions on time, within budget, and without wasted effort. In combat, effective teams generally take the fewest casualties. But even during times of peace—as new members of the 25th Infantry Division discovered one Christmas—effective team building can be a powerful glue to make a unit more cohesive.

Reception on Christmas Eve

An assistant division commander of the 25th Infantry Division told this story as part of his farewell speech: "I ran across some new Soldiers and asked them about their arrival on the island [of Oahu]. They said they got in on Christmas Eve, and I thought to myself, 'Can't we do a better job when we ship these kids out, so they're not sitting in some airport on their first big holiday away from home?' I mean, I really felt sorry for them. So I said, 'Must have been pretty lonesome sitting in a new barracks where you didn't know anyone.' And one of them said, 'No, sir. We weren't there a half-hour before the CQ [charge of quarters] came up and told us to get into class Bs and be standing out front of the company in 15 minutes. Then this civilian drives up, a teenager, and the CQ orders us into the car. Turns out the kid was the first sergeant's son; his father had sent him over to police up anybody who was hanging around the barracks. We went over to the first sergeant's house to a big party with his family and a bunch of their neighbors and friends.'

"My guess is that those Soldiers will not only do anything and everything that first sergeant wants, but they are going to tell anyone who will listen that they belong to the best outfit in the Army."

Critical Thinking

What aspects of effective team building did the first sergeant of the 25th Infantry on Oahu practice with his new Soldiers? Why would it inspire loyalty and commitment to the unit?

Groups and Teams

A **group** is a collection of individuals who gather and interact for a common purpose. For example, a bird-watching club, a community association, a study group, or a volunteer society are all groups. They gather and usually focus their attention on an activity or common interest. They may or may not have stated goals or rules to govern membership in the group. Being a member of a group probably requires minimal expertise and may or may not be professional in nature.

A **team** is a more specialized kind of group. Team members also have a common objective or purpose, but focus on performance and collective improvement. An example would be a basketball team, a class project team, or emergency medical team. An Army rifle squad or platoon is a team, and the Army itself is a team. Teams frequently have structure and certain criteria for membership. Teams almost always have stated goals. Team members frequently have an area of expertise and may be professionals.

How Groups and Teams Differ

Teams and groups differ most in their focus on performance and improvement.

A team focuses on its collective performance and usually offers members opportunity to improve incrementally over time. Individuals on a team are dependent on one another to achieve their goal. Their performance affects others on the team and its results. Team members take mutual responsibility and are accountable for results.

Groups do interact and may work together well, but they usually do not have a requirement for collective and incremental performance. Success in the group is not dependent on how others perform and individuals take responsibility for their own successes. Accountability is usually at the individual level, not the group level.

In short, all teams are groups, but not all groups are teams.

Characteristics of Effective Teams

Great teams, like great leaders, are made, not born. Effective teams don't succeed by happenstance. They all have certain things in common in addition to their focus on performance and collective improvement. In general, members are clear on the team objective. They are capable and committed to meeting the objective. They work in a trusting, collaborative way to achieve the objective. Those two concepts, **trust** and **commitment**, are the glue that holds teams together.

As an Army leader, you will need to focus on building trust and commitment among your team members to successfully complete your missions. This section explores how that happens.

Nine Key Attributes of Effective Teams

The structure of any effective team rests on a foundation of trust and commitment. Trust comes from the confidence the members have in you, the leader, and in each other—and from their sense of how much they can rely on you and each other. Commitment is each individual's motivation and willingness to belong to the team and help achieve the defined goals. Both are equally essential to the team's effectiveness. As a leader, your job is to foster these two aspects of the team, ensure they continue to grow, and sustain them in the face of other variables and obstacles during your mission.

But how do you foster trust and commitment in your team to begin with? These nine attributes of effective teams show you where to focus.

Trust-Building

As an Army officer, you will have at your command a wide range of resources to foster trust and commitment. The simplest way to begin is to use shared experiences—awareness exercises, activities, seminars, events, sports, competitions, fitness training, workshops, battle drills, war games, and social occasions—to build relationships that result in trust.

To foster trust day-to-day on your team, you can consistently employ four key elements as part of your team's normal operations. These are the first four of the nine key attributes of an effective team.

Competence

Members—starting with the team leader—need to perform competently. Effective training is at the core not only of establishing competence, but of continuously improving, as well. Remember that competence does not mean mere mediocre performance or meeting minimum standards. Competence always strives toward mastery.

Integrity

Integrity means being whole. Your team's shared values (which are reflections of your own values) guide their actions and help refine their own individual values. At the core of your team's integrity are the Army Values and the Warrior Ethos, covered in the ROTC Values and Ethics Track.

Concern for Others

Members must constantly stand behind and support each other. Genuine concern for the well-being of others on your team helps build trust. How you welcome and orient new members to the team demonstrates your concern for others. One member's problems become the team's problems to help solve. In this way, your team's strength becomes the individual's strength.

Communication

Communication is a significant part of your job as an officer. When you and your team members are clear on expectations, receive regular feedback, and inform each other, trust automatically improves. When leaders give little or no candid information, team members begin to make their own assumptions—which erodes trust. And remember, assumptions based on rumor and gossip are almost always wrong. Fill the information void and communicate to foster trust on your team. Build regular two-way communication into your daily schedule.

The nine attributes of effective teams

Trust-building
1. *Competence*
2. *Integrity*
3. *Concern for others*
4. *Communication*

Commitment-building
5. *Motivation to participate*
6. *Perception of value of team's purpose*
7. *Rewards and recognition aligned with required energy*
8. *Opportunity to learn and grow*
9. *Positive environment.*

Blindfolded Pairs
One simple, creative trust-building exercise is to split a team into buddy pairs and have one partner blindfold the other. The pairs then spend some time on routine activities and chores with the sighted partner leading the blindfolded partner. Then have them switch. The whole team then gathers in an after action review (AAR) to discuss insights members gathered from the trust they shared.

Commitment-Building

In addition to a developing sense of trust, your team members must feel that their contribution to the team's work truly matters. They must have their individual identities and roles recognized within the team. Trusting relationships motivate your Soldiers to work together and help each other. Knowing how they have contributed to the improvement and success of the team on its missions instills pride in your team members—which in turn strengthens their commitment to your team.

You can consistently employ the following key elements—the final five of the nine key attributes of an effective team—as part of your team's normal operations.

Motivation to Participate

Remember that commitment is an attitude. Attitudes are notoriously hard to change and guide, but with patience and consistency, you can do it. Your team members must first want to be on your team. After that, your attitude, values, and behavior inform theirs. They will want to perform and excel if you are watching and expecting them to do well.

Perception of Value for Your Team's Purpose

Your team members must be able to see that your team's vision or purpose has intrinsic value. You must make clear in your words and actions that you are engaged in essential, valuable work. Your team members must be able to see their individual roles in contributing to that value. They must be able to see how their roles help the team achieve its overall goal.

Rewards and Recognition

Everyone likes recognition when he or she does well. Almost nothing you can do holds more power than your approval and enthusiasm for good performance. And your praise and rewards are fuel for the engine of your team members' commitment. Be sure you give rewards that are immediate, appropriate, and fairly won. You will see quick results.

Opportunity to Learn and Grow

An effective team allows members the opportunity for individual improvement and growth. Good two-way communication will enable you to explore your team members' expectations and aspirations. Let them know how much better you want them to be and help them get there.

Positive Environment

Remember that attitude and behavior are linked. How you act reflects your attitude and vice versa—and that spreads to your team. The team's working environment reinforces these developing attitudes. If you don't have commitment and a positive attitude, your team will quickly conclude that it's a waste of their time to try to improve. Optimism, enthusiasm, and humor are contagious.

Critical Thinking

Describe a time in your life when you were a member of a group that was not a team. What would have made the group into a team?

Stages of Team Development

Like individuals, teams go through stages on their way to improving their effectiveness. And just like people, teams mature at different rates. But almost every team goes through the following three key stages. Generally, as your teams progress through these stages, members will demonstrate or develop the nine key elements of effective teams.

Formation

In this stage, your team is fragile. Individual Soldiers may not know one another very well yet. Communication among members can be basic and noncontroversial. Your team may tend to focus on immediate tasks, and members' level of trust is medium to high. The team is thinking short term and members' focus is more on the task at hand than on process improvement (your strategic or longer-term result). But team members may also have conflicting opinions, backgrounds, ethics, and approaches to problems. They may even resist your leadership as the team begins to develop.

Be patient! Strong leaders address the needs of team members at each stage to help minimize the conflict and reach higher performance levels more quickly.

How thoroughly and thoughtfully you welcome and orient new team members can make a significant impact on how quickly they develop trust and commitment. Build trust and commitment from the beginning by sharing your team's vision and demonstrating how valuable your mission is, as well as how important the roles of each individual are in achieving your team's mission. Express confidence and accentuate the positive.

Enrichment

During the enrichment stage of team building, personalities may well clash. Your team members may tend to lose focus on the task and the process. They may start to focus on their own needs rather than the team's. Communication becomes more sophisticated, but can be unproductive and even damaging (e.g. sarcasm, innuendo, teasing). At this stage, you should clearly focus on modeling integrity and communication to improve trust.

Build competence through training in new, challenging tasks. Look for small achievements of teamwork and recognize them before the whole team. Challenge individual team members and the team as a whole to improve. Continue to communicate and reinforce your team's vision. Quickly and publicly reward accomplishments. Build confidence with training as you add more challenges.

Members will slowly recognize the merits of working together. This is the point when "I" becomes "We." Team members adopt teamwork methods and processes. And since the mediocre can easily become the norm when teams move into this stage, you need to continue to raise the bar and reward those who rise to the challenge.

Sustainment

At the sustainment stage, your team has fully matured. Work methods become fine-tuned and a process has emerged for each team member. Communication is candid—members feel free to share their views and are comfortable doing so. Members feel confident and receive high levels of support from the team.

At this point, you are able to orchestrate efforts rather than micromanage specific tasks by your team members. Team members operate with minimal direction or supervision, and they take the initiative. Their trust in you and in the team is solid. Competence rises and continuously improves.

Team-building leadership was essential for Soldiers performance during the Battle of the Bulge.

You should continue to be quick but judicious in giving rewards and recognition. Increase opportunities for team members to learn and grow. Train your team for the next level, to build confidence for the challenges ahead.

Strong, cohesive teams—fire teams, squads, platoons, companies, right up to the senior levels of command—survive battles and win wars. Perhaps nowhere was this truth demonstrated more than by the men of the 101st Airborne Division during World War II. In his book, *Band of Brothers,* historian Stephen Ambrose describes how team-building leadership held E Company, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne, together during the dark days of the Battle of the Bulge in 1944–45. These men had weathered difficult training together at Camp Toccoa, Ga.; parachuted behind German lines at Normandy and again in Operation Market Garden ("A Bridge Too Far") in the Netherlands; and were thrown into the breach to stop the German counterattack at Bastogne, Belgium.

Band of Brothers

They got through the Bulge because they had become a band of brothers. The company held together at that critical moment in the snow outside Foy [in Belgium] because 1st Sergeant [Carwood] Lipton and his fellow N.C.O.s . . . provided leadership, continuity, and cohesiveness. Despite a new C.O. and new officers and enlisted recruits, the spirit of E Company was alive, thanks to the sergeants. Having [then-CPT Richard] Winters as 2nd Battalion X.O. and usually as acting battalion C.O. . . . was a great help.

> C.O. = commanding officer
>
> N.C.O. = noncommissioned officer
>
> X.O. = executive officer

That spirit was well described by [PFC David] Webster. By this time Webster had been wounded twice and returned to combat after each occasion. He would not allow his parents to use their influence to get him out of the front lines. He would not accept any position of responsibility within E Company. He was a Harvard intellectual who had made his decision on what his point of view of World War II would be, and stuck to it.

He was a man of books and libraries, a reader and a writer, sensitive, level-headed, keenly observant, thoughtful, well-educated. Here he was thrown in the most intimate contact (pressed together on an open truck on icy roads in hilly country, sleeping in a foxhole with other enlisted men) with ill-educated hillbillies, Southern farmers, coal miners, lumbermen, fishermen, and so on among the enlisted men in the company. Of those who had been to college, most were business or education majors. In short, Webster was thrown in with a group of men with whom he had nothing in common. He would not have particularly liked or disliked them in civilian life, he just would not have known them.

Yet it was among this unlikely group of men that Webster found his closest friendships and enjoyed most thoroughly the sense of identification with others.

His description of his truck ride with his platoon to Alsace [France] deserves to be quoted at length:

"We squished through the mud to our trucks and climbed in. McCreary and Marsh lit cigarettes. Martin made a wisecrack about a passing officer. I asked what had happened to Hoobler. Killed at Bastogne. Poor Hoobler, who got such a kick out of war, dead in the snow. And the others? Muck and his buddy Penkala, who had the deepest foxhole in one position, killed by a direct hit. Sowosko was shot through the head attacking Foy. And so on. Some replacements who had come in after Holland had also died. A lot of men had been evacuated for trench foot, too many, McCreary thought. The platoon wasn't what it used to be."

Webster thought it was. He had followed a long and complicated route through the Replacement Depots to rejoin the company, a time of frustration and loneliness for him. . . . Now he was back home, back with 1st platoon, back with Easy Company.

Efficient teams—
- *work together to accomplish the mission*
- *execute tasks thoroughly and quickly*
- *meet or exceed the standard*
- *thrive on demanding challenges*
- *learn from their experiences and are proud of their accomplishments.*

"It was good to be back with fellows I knew and could trust," he wrote. "Listening to the chatter in the truck, I felt warm and relaxed inside, like a lost child who has returned to a bright home full of love after wandering in a cold black forest."

There were missing chairs at home. They belonged to the men who had been killed, badly wounded, or had broken. But as Webster's reaction indicates, although Easy had lost many members, and gained others, thanks to the former E Company officers now on battalion or regimental staff and to the noncoms, it remained an organic whole.

Stephen Ambrose, *Band of Brothers*

Critical Thinking

In sports, raw talent alone will not lead to a winning season. Think about a professional sports team or a team at your college. How successful is the team? What characteristics of effective teams do the members display or neglect to display?

CONCLUSION

Building trust and commitment is the basic human foundation to creating an effective team. Soldiers on a successful team have a positive attitude and see problems as challenges rather than as obstacles.

As the leader of a small Army team, you need to focus on building competence and trust. Training together builds collective competence, and trust is a product of that competence. As your team becomes more experienced and performs better, it will become more *cohesive*—and will not only stick with the job until it's done, but will stick together doing it. And the success of your team supports the success of the larger team to which it belongs: the US Army.

Key Words

group
team
trust
commitment

Learning Assessment

1. Describe the difference between a team and a group.

2. Name the nine attributes of effective teams.

3. List the three stages of team development.

References

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