Three Easy Ways for Dealing with Team Conflict

Question:

I have been a project manager for years, and I have dealt with many conflicts amongst my team members. Mediation, effective communication, team-building exercises…sure, they all work, but the team conflicts still keep coming. Frankly I'm bored with all of those techniques. What are your favorite techniques for dealing with team, conflicts? I would like something interesting and fun – for me that is.

Please help me Samoht!

Rodrick

Answer:

Rodrick

I am happy to hear from a long-time project manager. Your comments show that no matter how much experience you have and no matter how many successful techniques you may know, there are always new techniques to learn. (Of course this applies to everyone other than me.)

Conflict among team members is a very serious problem - no matter how much fun it might be for you to watch them squabble. But don't worry. Not all teams can be high-performing, and that's good, because if they were then we wouldn't call them high-performing, we would just call them normal. When dealing with conflicts on your team, there are a number of techniques that I would like to point out to you.

The Mr. Brady Method

As we all know, effective communication is key when dealing with conflict. For someone in your position, this can be pretty boring, but there are ways to spice things up. In the "Mr. Brady" technique, just think of the team as being part of your family. Everyone knows that families should talk most around mealtime. In this technique, you would call daily meetings around breakfast, lunch, and dinner times. Bring in some meatloaf or other delicious treats to get people to loosen up. Make sure to impart at least one nugget of wisdom at each meeting, such as "Wherever you go, there you are". Employees LOVE that kind of thing.

Communication can do wonders to resolve conflict. Soon you will find that the team members with conflicts will be united in their opposition to you.

The Shadow Method

This technique is based on the having another team member assigned to each of the team members in conflict. The additional team member will shadow the first person to make sure that each person stays upbeat, does what they are told, and avoids conflict with the other team member.

An interesting twist on this is that sometimes the two additional team members sometimes join in the team conflict. Now you have four team members to worry about – but only for a short time until you can get four more "shadows" involved. There will

come as time when there is so much team chaos that the first two team members will forget what even started the entire fiasco.

The "Go Team!" or "Go Home!" Method

A lot of team conflict is caused by whiners and prima donnas. Even these people can sometimes work effectively in a group environment; and if not, then put a special plan to work.

Team-building exercises are a good idea, especially in this scenario. But you should forego the usual events like picnics or pizza parties, and head straight to competitive games! Some events to consider include wrestling, boxing, or in the case of a large team, rugby or paintball. If you choose the popular paintball game, try it without padding. This will really test the theory of "no pain – no gain".

While supervising these games from a safe location, you can put the conflicting team members on opposite teams so they can work out their aggression in a healthy way. You could really make it interesting by stating up front that the member on the losing team will be fired. I have seen this lead to some really interesting results – as well as fine, competitive games.

Using one of these methods will guarantee success in resolving team conflict, and if not, it will certainly eliminate the boring nature of your job for a while.