How to Keep Your Teams Engaged

It used to be common that people who worked in a team sat in a common location. A team member could walk across the room to ask a question about a procedure or deadline or problem and get help. But today, team members are used to communicating through mobile devices.

Also, with globalization and the Internet, teams have changed. From large corporations to niche start-ups to government agencies, teams have expanded to inhabit other buildings, other cities, states, time zones, or even countries. Technology has spawned "virtual" teams: those with members and bosses who live so far apart from each other that the only ways they can communicate are either on telephone conference calls, emails, text, and "meet-up" programs like Skype, Zoom, or MeetUp.

Distance can create problems on a work team because of differences in something as simple as time zones or as complicated as cultural expectations. The challenge, whether you are a member or leader, is how do you keep your team engaged? Because even if situations have changed, human nature has not. We still need to feel we belong. We need camaraderie and support, direction toward a meaningful goal, and a mission bigger than receiving a paycheck.

However large the distance or differences or difficulties, solutions can be surprisingly traditional and feasible. People are still people. Teams of people need basic structures and practices despite the number of miles or even generational differences between them.

The Consulting Team suggests these five C's:

1. Common Direction: Common team mission, goals, and values define desired team results and the right way to obtain them.
> Tip: Common values help describe helpful team behaviors. Plan a team activity to identify what behaviors work and what don't. Pick three behaviors most needed by the team to excel and write value statements about each that support the team.
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> *Example: "We resolve team issues in our weekly 'Meet-Ups,' not on email blasts."*

2. Communication: Humans need to identify with and connect to their teams. This takes some time as well as technology solutions for any team.
> Tip: Plan 15 minutes in each team meeting to share personal as well as professional news and successes. At least twice a year plan an event (either virtual or in person) to socialize and celebrate team successes.
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> *Example: During the first team meeting of each year (virtual or in person), have everyone share one New Year's resolution for work and one resolution for a personal goal. Check-in every quarter on progress and celebrate the successes.*

3. <u>Clarification:</u> Ensure job requirements are met with up-to-date procedures that are documented and available online. This will show the team "the big picture."
　　　Tip: Include specific measurements and hand-off instructions.

　　　Example: In a series of meetings, each team member draws a flow chart of their work process and shares with the team to check consistency and resolve hand-off issues.

4. <u>Competency</u>: To do the best job, hire the right people, train and retrain them, and establish measurement and feedback mechanisms.
　　　Tip: Include team input on what to measure and how to improve team competencies by identifying the needed skills and how to hone them.

　　　Example: Do an annual SLOTs assessment (lists of team Strengths, Limitations, Opportunities, and Threats) with your team. Review assessment results with team to plan improvements for overall team competency and performance.

5. <u>Credit and Recognition</u>: If team members are recognized and rewarded for excellence and innovation, they will be more motivated to perform better.
　　　Tip: Recognize individuals as well as the team. Give credit to support staff too.

　　　Example: Start a team Facebook page for the purpose of reporting successes and seeking suggestions to improve results. Be sure to "like" and share others' triumphs and to post suggestions to help team members succeed.

Bottom line: T.E.A.M.—Together Everyone Achieves More!