

## **WHY TEAMS?**

by Dr. Valerie Dhanens

With job losses at an all time high and profits at their lowest in years, why should business owners bother with teams? Taking valuable time away from production and customers in the current economy just doesn't make sense, or does it?

Here are some of the reasons for using teams – particularly in hard times:

- People who are doing the work usually have ideas for solving problems related to their work
- Drawing on the skills and experiences of a team is an advantage over just one individual trying to solve the problem. In other words, The group is greater than the sum of its parts
- When teams are involved in coming up with solutions to work problems, there tends to be a greater sense of ownership and commitment to making the solutions work
- The communication, conflict management, and problem solving skills needed for teams to operate effectively can carry over to working with others in the organization
- A problem in one department or function isn't necessarily isolated to that area. The problem may be affecting the entire organization and its ability to carry out its mission and goals
- Drawing on employee skills and knowledge tends to increase motivation, commitment, a feeling of empowerment and the organization's overall vitality

On the other hand, it doesn't make sense to delegate work problems to teams if:

- The task has not been clearly defined
- They have not been trained in problem solving techniques and group dynamics
- Adequate time and resources for solving the problem are not available to the team
- Management has no intention of using their recommendations
- The process for approving the team's recommended solutions involves so much red tape that there is little interest in participating on teams

What, then, can management do to get the best out of their employees while trying to grow their businesses with limited resources in a downward spiraling economy? At a minimum:

- The members of the team should be selected from the areas affected by the problem
- At least some members of the team need to have a technical understanding of the problem
- If the manager or supervisor of the team is part of the group, his/her role needs to be clarified, i.e. will that individual be considered a contributing member or will they be “in charge”
- Members of the team should be encouraged to develop a list of ground rule by which they will operate as soon as possible, i.e. no interruptions, one person talks at a time
- The task assignment should be clearly defined with time lines, precautions, and boundaries
- Resources available to the team need to be communicated, i.e. number of hours per week available for working on the problem, use of a meeting room or facilitator
- Expectations about whether the team, the supervisor, or management will make the final decision should be clarified
- Training in group dynamics and problem solving should be provided

The answer to the question, “Why teams?” is that the advantages to team collaboration and sharing resources, even in difficult economic times, far outweigh the disadvantages. With the pre-planning and support, the result of using problem solving teams has the potential to increase both productivity and employee satisfaction. Now, that makes good sense!