

•  
STEP THREE

## Master the Skills

•  
EIGHT

## Use Information to Drive Great Results

When teams get through step 2, the joy of acceleration often becomes a problem for making the final step to the Next Level. It is tempting for people to take their eyes off the vision of a fully functioning Next Level Team. As we have learned, these teams focus not only on more involvement for team members but also on expanded responsibility for achieving great results. Next Level Teams have important responsibilities for everyone on the team. In Next Level Teams, people voice their opinions, disagree with one another, argue for their positions, and feel the pressure of performance responsibility. People also feel a sense of ownership, are listened to and understood, make and implement team decisions, and make use of and further develop every member's talents.

As you move into this last step of the journey, a number of questions remain:

- We have had some success with these new team skills, but will we be able to fully master the skills so they become new habits?

- Is the effort to master the skills really worth it? Will our leadership let us go all the way and become a true Next Level Team?
- Are we really making a positive impact in terms of the results we are achieving? Are they really great results?
- Who is not yet on board with the new team approach, and how do we get them more involved?
- Our team is doing better working as a team, but can we work together more effectively and really be a Next Level Team? What is inhibiting us?
- How can we take on an even more significant role in the business? Can we get involved in strategic decisions and other critical issues?

Let's consider how information can be used to help address these questions and move the team closer toward its ultimate goal.

### HOW CAN BETTER USE OF INFORMATION KEEP THE CHANGE PROCESS GOING?

At this point in the change process, teams are really beginning to use the information that they have received during the first two steps of the change. They have also seen how the information they have begun to share with management is valuable in better managerial decisions. Because of this better utilization of information and the two-way sharing of information, they are now in a better position to know what additional information they need to enhance their performance.

It is time for your team to discuss how it is using the information it now has available about site and organization performance. Could the team use additional information on particular

issues? Less information on others? Information in a different format or time frame? Discussing such questions will help senior leadership and your team ensure that they are placing value and importance on the same information and using the same measurements to track success. If inconsistencies exist between the information being used by your team and by senior leadership, the result will be wasted effort. It is critical for the team to be clear on what information is most closely related to the goals of the company. At this stage, it is also imperative for senior leadership to listen to what the team feels is important to measure relative to those goals.

*Knowledge desires always increase, it is like fire,  
which must first be kindled by some external agent,  
but which will afterwards propagate itself.*

DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON



#### EXAMPLE

### *Using information in a packaging company*

*One company in the packaging industry slowly over time gave complete control of business results to the teams in the company. Each team was set up as a little company within the larger company. The teams controlled the information-sharing process, asking for what they needed and generating a great deal of their own information.*

*Once a quarter, all the teams came together to share their results for the quarter and relate them to the overall company performance. The combined reports of the teams were rolled up into a company profit-and-loss statement for the quarter, along with*

other key measurements of performance, such as waste, machine downtime, packages shipped, turnover, and cost per unit of production. Through an open dialogue at these meetings, everyone learned what key measurements were being used to assess company performance and what new ones might be needed to enhance accuracy. The impact on team morale, energy, and involvement was almost as amazing as the impact on company results.



#### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

---

##### *Additional information*

Now that your team has been in the process of receiving and using new types of information to achieve results, what additional information could help the team operate even more effectively and help it make better business decisions? Also, could any information be modified in timing or format to be more useful?

### DETERMINING WHAT INFORMATION IS UNNECESSARY

At this stage of the journey, your team has a great deal of experience with using information and has a much better idea what information is needed to achieve its goals. Your team may decide that some of the information it has been receiving is just not necessary. By identifying what information is not needed, the team can help streamline the information-sharing process. It is important to recognize that information needs may change as problems are solved, goals are achieved, and issues are addressed.



#### EXAMPLE

---

##### *Collecting useless data*

One of our clients had recently won the coveted Deming quality award. The process of applying for the award had led people in the organization to collect great volumes of data. In fact, they had become so used to collecting data that they were gathering it on almost everything they did. For example, they measured the response time of the receptionists for over a year and found a very steady pattern. Response time dropped off between 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. and between 1:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. They found that response time was slower when one of the two receptionists went on a lunch break and was faster when both were present. Nobody had bothered to ask if that slowing of response time actually created a problem. When the receptionists found it did not create a problem, they stopped collecting this useless data. If, on the other hand, the slower response time had created a problem, they could have identified a measure of the problem and begun to address it.



#### QUESTION TO CONSIDER

---

##### *Unnecessary information*

Is your team now receiving any information that is no longer particularly useful and could the team stop with no great loss?

### REVISITING INFORMATION SHARING AND TRUST

As more and more information is requested by teams to help them make better decisions, the issue of trust will continually need to be addressed. As teams begin to ask for sensitive information, the leadership may be tempted to limit some types of

*Information sharing is, quite simply, the lifeblood of a Next Level Team. But it needs to be the right information at the right time to get great results.*

information. It is critical to the long-term success of the Next Level Teams to trust them with whatever information they feel they need. If leaders feel the information is particularly sensitive or could be damaging in the hands of competitors, they need to say that and then trust the teams to guard the information carefully. It is certainly in the teams' best interest to do so, as well as in the interest of management and the company. Remember that sharing sensitive information compliments both the intellect and integrity of team members, and both factors are needed at the Next Level.



#### EXAMPLE

### *Saving the wire harness plant*

*In 1981 Xerox Corporation announced that for economic reasons, it would be subcontracting the assembly of wire harnesses used in its copiers and closing the harness assembly department of about 180 people. Since the company a year earlier had initiated an employee involvement process called "Quality of Worklife," the union was concerned that this unilateral decision, which affected so many lives, contradicted the principles of the process.*

*Meetings between the union and management led to a temporary suspension of the decision until a study team could look at the issue. The team—comprised of six workers from the affected area, an engineer, and a manager—were given six months to find ways to improve quality, cost, and delivery performance of the business to levels which will assure a positive competitive position and, ultimately, to secure jobs.*

Ideally, your team will possess a clear statement that summarizes its work, its methods, and its beliefs. This statement should also include the organization's vision, mission, and values and how the team's purpose and goals align with them. New team members will also need to understand the team's norms and ground rules for working together, as well as the individual task roles for each member of the team.

Communication strategies, both inside the team and with other teams, also need to be spelled out for new members. Additionally, new members need to learn about any specific internal team processes, such as those for problem solving, decision making, conflict resolution, team meetings, and more. In short, new team members, whether insiders or outsiders, need a crash course in your Next Level Team so they can be fully functioning members and not detriments

•  
*The kind of thinking that led to past success  
will not lead to future success.*

KEN BLANCHARD, ALAN RANDOLPH,  
AND JOHN CARLOS