Celebrating Team Success

One of the most often overlooked aspects of working in a team environment is celebrating team or individual successes. Many times, team members feel that there is just too much “real work” to do for the team to take time to recognize accomplishment. However, successful teams have found that taking this time to recognize success or important milestones in the group’s history is important in developing and maintaining a team’s focus, creating a sense of commitment and confidence, and maintaining positive morale on the team. Celebrating completion of milestones also assists individuals on a team to mentally transition from one stage of a project to another, which can be particularly important when new roles, behaviors, or relationships are required in a subsequent stage.

Celebrating successes is also another way to reinforce the values and preferred culture within an organization. By taking the time to recognize accomplishments, individuals and teams are publicly acknowledged for the talents and contributions they bring to the organization, showing the respect they have for one another.

This tool can be used in the early stages of a team’s formation to clarify the importance of celebrating successes, to create a team-generated list of “celebration” points, and to develop ways to celebrate the successes. The output from these discussions should then be used throughout the life of the team. Recognition and celebration is especially important as the team reaches the stages of Performing and Adjourning.

**The critical aspect of the attitude of the team leader:**
The attitude of the team leader is critical to getting team members to buy into the celebration process. If the team leader truly sees the value in these activities and communicates it to the team members, it is much more likely that the outcomes of improved team dynamics and morale will be achieved.

Brainstorm with the group a list of individual and/or team contributions the team will celebrate throughout the life of the team. These items should link in some meaningful way to the goals of the team and/or the overall mission of the organization. Items to celebrate may include:

- Achievement of a key milestone
- Recognition of an extraordinary effort
- Special circumstance of knowledge sharing
- Outstanding/remarkable service provided to a customer
- Addition of new team members
- Endings (members leaving, teams disbanding)
Celebrating Team Success (continued)

Often, teams focus most of their attention on internal processes or achievement. Many successful companies have learned that organizations and teams must focus a great deal of their attention on their customers if they are to fulfill their mission and succeed. As the team looks at areas that warrant celebration, be sure to prompt the team to focus on celebrating achievements that involve or serve the customer if the team members are not coming up with ideas in this area--not only will individuals come up with creative ways to involve the customer, but the customer-focus of the organization will again be brought to the forefront in the discussions.

Through a facilitated discussion, have the team determine which event(s) the team will officially recognize and incorporate them into the project plan.

Next have the team develop a list of ways they will want to recognize and celebrate achievement. Many times leaders will select the method of celebration themselves; however, asking the team for input can help ensure that the effort, time, or resources expended will be truly valued by the team. After the team lists several options, have them decide what particular means of recognition will be used for specific achievements or successes. Note: The leader will want to outline parameters (e.g. the amount of time or money the team can spend) prior to generating the list.

Depending on the means of celebration the team decides upon, additional planning may be necessary. A person or sub-group may be charged with planning for and managing the recognition event. The team leader should periodically check with the team to see that they have the support they need to successfully achieve the goal. If on-going recognition events are developed, the team may want to rotate responsibilities so that a member or members are not unfairly burdened.

Over time, the team’s membership, goals, and responsibilities may change. Revisiting this tool periodically will ensure that the celebration activities still match with the team composition and dynamics.

The team leader should also follow through to ensure that celebrations are occurring regularly. Many times, teams with the best intentions stop acknowledgment activities due to the constant pressure of work. The leader should monitor the team to ensure that celebration activities are an on-going, valued part of the team’s life.