



When Your Team Isn't Playing Nice With Each Other

by Betsi Bixby

Your team is supposed to act like a team. Help each other. Solve problems together. Be nice to each other. Put the other guy first. That's the perfect world, but it may not always look or feel like this.

What happens when the team isn't playing nice with each other? When the finger of blame is pointing? When words get sharp and tempers flare? Or someone retreats and sulks in silence? Or worse yet, a disgruntled employee sabotages something important? Welcome to the wonderful world of people!

One of the best things about working with 4,000 plus families in this industry for over three decades is the ability to recognize common personnel behavior patterns that plague most businesses and offer insight and solutions. I've been blessed to work with high-growth family companies helping them negotiate the teamwork hurdles that come with explosive growth.

Do any of these are trouble spots sound familiar? If so, get your players back on the right track. Teamwork really does pay off at the bottom line.

Sales vs. Dispatch - Your sales team typically wants their new customers (and old) to get super-prompt service. You want that too. The trouble is dispatch can't always make that happen even with a Superman "S" written on their shirts. Trucks unexpectedly break down despite the best preventative maintenance, racks run out of product, drivers get sick. In short, life happens. So how do you get sales and dispatch working together like a well-oiled machine? Set realistic parameters and create open communication channels.

Start with a sales/dispatch get together. Set the tone by letting each know their number one goal for the meeting is to understand the other's challenges. Their second goal is to JOINTLY co-develop solutions!

This approach is vastly different than the usual "it's all about me" gripe session. Will there be griping? Absolutely! But the other side won't be defending or justifying. That is management's role, to be sure both sides play by the rules. No interrupting, no blame, no justification. Get all the dysfunction and dissatisfaction out on the table, then just ask the question, "in what ways can we solve this?"

As solutions are offered, no critiquing. This is where you want true brainstorming and someone should be at a flipchart recording ALL the ideas. Sometimes what looks like a poor solution at first, turns out to be a winner.



End with either a next meeting date or a prioritized action plan including SOLE responsibility assignments (remember, if two or more own an action then no one really does), steps and deadlines. The person taking responsibility does not need to be the "doer" but is putting their name on the line that they will make sure it gets done.

Credit vs. Sales - Sales typically wants to fly by the seat of their pants, exhilarated by winning new accounts. Credit typically wants multiple days to collect info and make sound credit decisions. They are concerned with accurately setting up customers in your GL system typically including a myriad of data fields that must be correct for delivery and payment to run smoothly.

Your strategy is exactly the same as I outlined in sales versus dispatch. Call everybody together, get all the snags spoken and out on the table, then develop solutions. With no disrespect intended to sales, it's been an age-old problem trying to get sales people to fill out paperwork and get complete information.

We've solved this dilemma for many frustrated owners through process redesign using a an outgoing and friendly but organized sales admin on a reasonable hourly salary. This person serves as a highly effective buffer, smoothing the processes for both sides of the house.

Owner vs. Division Manager - If you look at the root cause of conflict in top management, it typically gets down to only two things: money or power or both. Let's deal with money first as it's the easiest.

Most owners use a very rational process they developed over many years for making spending decisions. When managers don't know the spending rules, they get frustrated as sometimes your answer is yes, sometimes no, and they don't clearly know why. In some instances, managers stop making even good, sensible requests because of that frustration.

In this case, simply start writing down what you think are your rules. For instance, you might start with a specific return on investment within a specified time frame. But we all know there is more to it than that. Your decision may also be based on several other factors such as current profit, actual cash, current borrowing, debt to equity ratio, etc.

You may also have different criteria for different spending levels or even spending items. For example, your criteria for a new bobtail could be different from whether to do a project that costs the exact same amount of dollars, for instance a c-store upgrade.

As an owner, your automatic response to my suggestion of writing your criteria may be, "there is no way for me to cover everything." You are exactly right. If you can



cover 85 percent of normal spending though, you'll eliminate 85 percent of the discord in your management team. As everyone gets on board with your rules, you'll develop trust and confidence and will be presented with better requests, making fewer denials since they know not to bring the bad ones or simply bad timing requests to you.

Power is a different ballgame. A lust for power can be a cancer in your organization. Why? Because the true definition of a leader is vision coupled with a service mindset. A true leader is always thinking of others and how they can bring value to the people around them. Their mindset is to build the most competent, capable team, not just get to the top to bark orders and be king.

With all that said, there is nothing wrong with ambition and drive. As owners in growing companies hire and develop great managers, they are blessed to have multiple people aspiring to the CEO slot. If this is the case, have one on one meeting with each.

In your time together, ask them their goals. Have them tell you what they think are their current strengths and weaknesses. If they want the CEO position, why? I've had owners make assumptions about a person's aspirations that weren't true, so it's good to ask and have open dialogue.

If they do want the top position, ask what leadership skills they believe need development for maximum effectiveness in that role. Notice I didn't say you *tell* them. That can appear critical and controlling; especially if more than one person is vying for the spot. If they self-discover, it's far better for them and you.

This self-discovery method allows someone with aspiration, but perhaps not gifting for the role based on their unique talents and strengths, to gracefully remove themselves from the running, making the wiser choice to work where they are most effective for the company. Your salary and bonus structures should facilitate good choices so people don't force themselves into unsuitable positions just for higher compensation.

As you considered the three common areas where teams tend not to play nice, I hope you started seeing a theme in the solutions. They are:

1. Get points of contention out in the open. If you are a conflict avoider hoping that problems will dry up and blow over, they usually don't. They get hidden in the dark and then resurface later at the most inopportune times, usually proceeded with "remember when or I told you back when."
2. Allow people full range of expression without interruption, justification or blame. This will allow you to move on to the final step.



3. Collaboratively create a positive game plan with action steps, accountabilities and timelines.

These three steps are exactly what we teach and coach in our M-Power™ program which includes our time-proven total team coaching program. I learned long ago that a CEO, even with the help of a great CFO, can't produce the same profit results as getting the whole management and office team on the same page. If you want to know more about M-Power™, give us a call at 817-594-0546 and we'll schedule a time to talk.

In the meantime, I promise, if you consistently use this process, tackling your toughest contention areas first, your team will start playing nicely with each other again. And that means you will have more fun with less stress, and your bottom line will grow.



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