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# Achieving Potential

**July 2010**

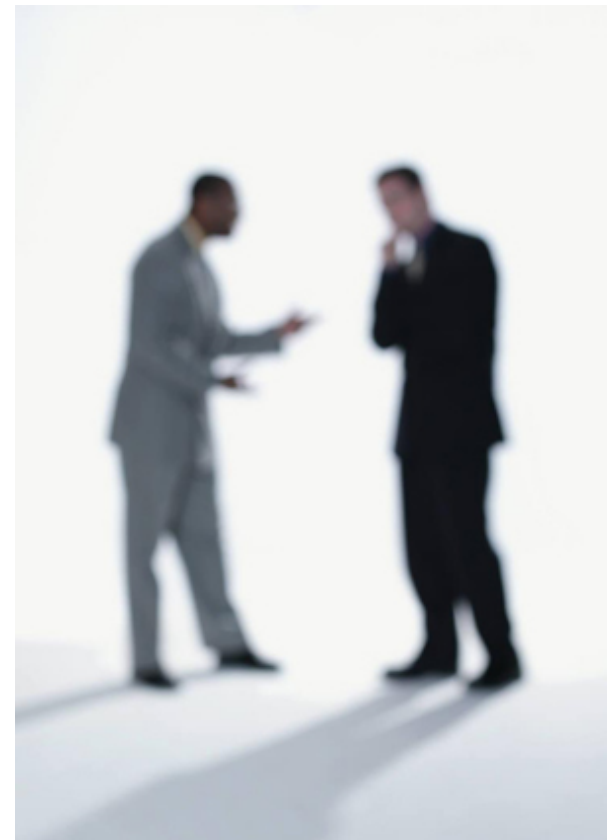
In this month's edition of our monthly newsletter "Achieving Potential," we focus team leadership.

Whether you are leading a large organization or you have a few employees your results and potential for growth will depend on your team.

Growing businesses need to create a clear vision for their organization and that vision needs to be cascaded to leaders and their teams.

## Reasons you and your Organization Need to Refocus

*Team building exercises are a large part of the growth and forward movement of your team. Working as a team can become routine despite the various activities that are used to keep your team at the top of its game. Every team will experience a moment of weakness and potential setback. This is when it is wise to take a step back and plan a refocus effort. Do not feel that your team does not need to refocus. Taking a moment to regroup and analyze where you are can help to clear the path ahead.*



Refocus on Your Team

There are many reasons that may cause you to have to spend some time refocusing with your team. Lack of

**team while satisfying the needs of the organization?**

**How can I improve the productivity of my department, business unit, or team?**

**Am I operating with yesterday's knowledge in today's world?**

productivity and success is one of the main reasons that most teams take a more strategic approach to their team building processes. When sales are slumping and business results are less than you'd hoped for, it's time to look at things from another perspective. This is when refocusing efforts will be worth your while. Do not make the mistake of waiting until the last possible minute to address serious issues. Nip them in the bud before they can spiral out of control.

If things are lacking in your team, make a point to have a meeting about it. Allow all team members to give their opinion and suggestions. Sometimes all your team needs to refocus is some downtime. Plan an event for your team that allows them to unwind in a social atmosphere. A lack of fun can have a serious negative impact on employees which can overflow into the workplace. Incorporating social activities into your team can directly affect the serious aspects of your team's responsibilities.

Celebrate achievements within your team. From birthdays to landing that huge client account, there are a large number of things that should be recognized. It does not matter how large or miniscule. It brings a warmth and humanity to the workplace that is much needed. It is unhealthy to run your team strict and formal all the time. People need to feel appreciated in a comfortable setting.

Many teams fall into a pattern where everyone is busily doing their part but nobody is really talking about it. Communication among team members on all levels is essential to have everyone operating like a well oiled machine.

Regular meetings should be scheduled where each team member is able to voice any questions or concerns that they may have. Private communication should be encouraged as well so that team members are comfortable with approaching upper management with any issues.

Lack of accountability and discipline will quickly lead a team down the road to ruin. Everyone must be accountable for their actions and their duties on the job. When there is no accountability, then there is no reason to work hard or fight for that shared goal. People need to have a reason to work hard. However, this doesn't mean that disciplinary measures should cross the line into severe or unfair. Teams can require refocus at any time, for any reason. Pay attention so that you can meet the needs of your team before your business suffers.

About the Author: Visit the place for dollhouses and miniatures, [TheMagicalDollhouse.com](http://TheMagicalDollhouse.com)

**Make sure your team understands the Vision, is engaged, and shares accountability for team results.**

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## Team Communication - Four Ways to Avoid the "Crickets" at Your Next Team Meeting

*So I'm sitting at a large round table, talking with a team of eight senior-level leaders who work for a large corporation. These are smart, sophisticated people, who have both street cred as field operatives and many years' experience leading various types and sizes of work groups. We're discussing how to ensure that our communications are less command-and-control. Comments start to flow...*

"We need to be more open-minded."

"Our younger workforce expects to be part of the conversation."

"How do we invite more participation?"

"It's a more informal process these days."

Heads are nodding in agreement. The group is engaged, building on each other's responses. Then, one person is brave enough to play the Devil's Advocate:

"OK, so let's say that I do all of these things. I'm asking for input, I'm trying to get them involved. Which, by the way, I think I'm pretty good at. So I ask for feedback and all I get is, you know, The Crickets." To which I inquire, "Crickets?" "Yeah," he says. "You know-so quiet you could hear the crickets chirp?"

Ah, yes, I do know. And the other leaders around the table chuckle and nod their heads in understanding. What leader hasn't tried to draw out his or her team, only to be met with silence or the perfunctory "Nope, we're all good. Nothing to say?" While there's no "truth serum" to get people talking, there are some ways to ensure that your team members will participate when asked.

Think about how you ask the question. Are your questions truly open-ended, or are they statements disguised as a question? Phrases like, "What's your reaction to the idea on the table?" and "Who has an alternative idea to offer?" are neutral and invite discussion. If you say something like, "Can we all agree that we need to do XYZ?" or "That's a great idea, don't you think?" you tend to put the emphasis on your opinions and agenda. These statements are good for bringing a dialog to a close, but not for creating a discussion.

Inspect your consistency. Do you consistently ask for input? Or, do you only ask on the "easy" stuff-things that don't take a lot of time to work through? Leaders who establish a track record of inviting diverse opinions are those who will, over time, get valuable input from their teams. Many leaders say to me, "I'd love to ask for input, but it takes too much time!" This is true; there's an upfront investment. Ask yourself, "Will the investment of time upfront pay off in the long run?" If there is a true urgency and no time for extended discussion, you can

still ask for input, but set a clear parameter: "Team, we've got a time crunch for this-we can only do a quick 15 minute huddle-what can you give me quickly to be sure we still make a good decision?"

Review your track record of taking action. The biggest mistake that I see from leaders is that they ask for input, ("because that's our culture-we need to be team-based") but don't intend to do anything with it. If you know you won't (or can't) take any action on the team's suggestions, don't bother asking. Of course, you won't be able to implement all suggestions, so again, set the framework: "I'm looking for 10 - 15 ideas. After that, we'll whittle the ideas down to the ones that make the most sense, given our time and budget constraints."

Close the loop. Which of their ideas did you use? Be sure to let them know. Moreover, be sure to let them know if you didn't use the suggestions-and why. Be as specific as possible about why the suggestion couldn't be implemented. By giving specific feedback now, you can inform the team's thought process for later, helping them understand the bigger picture issues of budget, strategy, resources, and yes, even organizational politics. This will pay dividends for future "I'd like your input" discussions. Enjoying the serenade of cricket night-song at home on a balmy evening is a delight. "Crickets" at your team meetings-not so much. Follow these four simple tips and you'll reduce the silence at your team meetings.

Jennifer V. Miller is the founder of SkillSource, a training and consulting company that helps leaders improve their interpersonal skills

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## Teambuilding in the Workplace



Team Building

Team building is very important if you wish to extract the best out of your workforce. Read on to find out more about the importance and the process of team building in the workplace and how to go about it.

### Simple Team Building Exercises in the Workplace

These are some common team building exercises for communication, success, and improved team performance.

Conduct Employee Feedback Activities: Employee surveys and

feedback activities are a great way of breaking the ice and encouraging the employees to speak freely. It makes the employees feel wanted and gives them an assurance of the fact that their opinions are valued.

**Promote Informal Addressing:** Step out of the traditional formal way of employee-boss interaction and speak freely. This gives the employees a reassurance that you are one among them and not a corporate Hitler. This will work to your advantage as it will encourage open workplace communication, sharing of ideas, and will help to maintain healthy work relationships.

**Organize a Day Trip:** Reward your employees for the good work that they have done in the past by organizing a day trip. Encourage employees to bring along their spouses and children. It can be a welcome break from the daily work-related pressures and can help fellow employees and their bosses to interact, bond, and get to know each other better. This can, in many ways, translate into better returns at the workplace.

**Celebrate Each Other's Success:** Learn to appreciate and acknowledge each other's efforts. Also, celebrate the success of a job well done or a project delivered well ahead of the deadline. This helps in wiping out any negativity and keeps the team united.

**Initiate Group Discussion Sessions:** If you have a major project-related decision to make which you are not very sure about, try asking your employees for their views on the subject. Have a group discussion on the matter and seek their suggestions and opinions. In any case, it will be you yourself who has the last word, but this particular gesture will promote teamwork, boost employee confidence, and once again, make them feel valued and wanted.

By Tintin

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## Motivational Quotes

*"When a team outgrows individual performance and learns team confidence, excellence becomes a reality."*

- Joe Paterno

*"There is no "I" in TEAM."*

- Anonymous

*"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success"*

- Henry Ford

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