

Building a Team

by Shawn McCadden

Being part of a team is not exclusive to football or baseball. For a builder or remodeler, there are lots of benefits to having a good, solid team of employees who stick together and help each other get the job done. Most employees like to be a part of a team: The opportunity to enjoy the work and participate in the success of the project is just as important as bringing home that weekly paycheck.

Many remodelers tend to be control freaks. But you can't establish a team culture if you feel that you must run the show 100% of the time. Establishing a team culture isn't necessarily the business owner's job; a lead carpenter or a production manager, for example, are certainly prime candidates. But the person who assumes this role must first ask him or herself, "Do I have the ability to take on this responsibility?" If you're the team leader but have a tendency to throw your recip saw at the slightest aggravation, what kind of example are you setting? You can't preach teamwork to your employees and not live it yourself. Ask your crew what teamwork means to them and incorporate that into your plan to lead.

You're in It Together

A team mentality dictates that every person counts. The leader must foster the team's understanding that everyone has an effect on the culture. If one person comes in with a bad attitude, it can jeopardize the whole team.

Initially, you may lose an employee or two — those who buck the teamwork effort. But those are probably people you'd want to get rid of anyway. You either pay now, by weeding out the "weakest links," or pay over and over again by allowing a rotten apple to slowly corrupt your crew — and your livelihood. If you don't get

rid of the "wrong" people, you just might lose the "right" people.

Don't be hard on yourself if you have to let someone go. There's plenty of building going on, and they'll probably have another job by tomorrow. Once you've established a team culture, led by an open-minded, dedicated, honest, and natural leader — whether it's you, a lead carpenter, or someone else — you're less likely to have employee turnover because everyone's happily working together. And happy employees will typically sell your company through word of mouth. They might be out one night, swapping war stories with a remodeling friend, and comment on the team environment in the great company they work for. The friend may say, "Hey, I wouldn't mind working for a company like that. Are there any openings?"

A Little Respect

With an established team culture, everyone shares a vision. For example, all agree that workdays will run from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and no weekends. This is a simple vision; you come to work, participate as a team, but leave the job at 4:00 and go home. Fostering this vision, however, requires sufficient staffing to prevent overwork, stress, or the need for one worker to make up for another's absence. In a company culture, negative stress is a bad thing.

Keep clients on the team. Just as your company members respect one another and play on a level field, your clients must also be treated as equals. When working on a bathroom remodel for stay-at-home clients, do you respect their lifestyle? If you need to shut the water off the following day, do you call the clients to remind them and suggest that they may want

to take an earlier shower? If you don't, tension will surely arise.

Imagine that you're discussing the details of a project with a client when the phone rings, interrupting the conversation. The client may answer, saying, "Can I call you back? I have a worker here right now." Maybe you don't like being described as their "worker" — you'd prefer to hear, "Can I call you back? I'm working with the carpenter who's remodeling my kitchen." Of course, you can't control what your client says, but you can set the tone by how you introduce the members of your team. When you hold a preconstruction meeting with your client, introduce your production team by saying, "This is Mike. He's going to be your lead carpenter. I want you to feel comfortable with the remodeling process. If you have any questions or concerns, you can feel free to discuss them with him. He's here to help you." You've laid the groundwork for mutual respect.

Now, if Mike snaps at a team member in front of the homeowner, or makes a derogatory comment about his company, he's not behaving professionally. Such behavior is not in line with a team-culture philosophy. And he's jeopardizing the client's confidence — what will that client tell others about your company?


Human Touch

I grew up in this industry and worked in a family business. My father believed that people should be slaves to their jobs. I'll never forget the day I closed on my first home: The closing attorney assumed that my wife and I would go over to see our new home immediately afterward. When I told him I couldn't because I had to be back on the job, he asked, "What kind of boss do you have?" I

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laughed and admitted it was my dad. But I agreed with the attorney. People may not always remember what you say, but they sure remember how you make them feel.

Good leaders respect their team members' personal lives and needs, within reason. Occasionally, I want to be able to go to my children's school during daytime events. In my business, I can make that time. But, as the business owner, I shouldn't do so if I'm simultaneously inflexible about my crew's daily 7:30 to 4:00 routine. The company owner and team leader must show an equal concern for the lives of their employees by giving them the flexibility to look after their families and their personal needs.

The team-family mentality is here to stay in my world. I try to show my employees that I honestly care about them, beyond the job they do for my company. And the paybacks are endless. My staff is highly productive, plus we have low turnover, low stress, and an ultimately successful company. If you or your employees are currently unhappy at work, maybe it's related to the culture. What can you do about it? Your work culture is essentially up to you. 

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