



## MIIA Employee Assistance Program

*Counseling Services / Information & Referrals / Management Consultation*  
**800.451.1834**



### **Team Building in Changing Times - Keys to Success in Team Leadership and Team Participation**

Successful leadership of, and membership in teams concludes our four-article series on the dominant wave of positive organizational change at the launch of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. **Team-building initiatives, strategies for building teams, and evaluating team effectiveness** described the **developmental landmarks** through which teams evolve in high-performance workplace trajectories. We conclude with a look at the characteristics of qualified team leaders as well as the most salient characteristics of good team performers.

Think of **teams as living systems** that develop and mature over time and go through a progression of stages much like individual people or families do. A good leader will understand that **the requirements on him or her will change over time**, and that **the role is fluid rather than static**. At a

team's inception, author Susan Weelan remarks that members see their leader as both "benevolent and powerful," and as such are in charge of the care and direction of the team members. Once team members can flex their own work muscles they often **begin to challenge the authority and control** of their leader much like an adolescent challenges the decision-making rank of her parents in order to achieve more autonomy. Gradually a good team leader will happily relinquish some of the old role for a role that conforms more to that of facilitator and coordinator.

Other thinkers on the topic suggest some **ways to make the transitions between these stages more harmonious and productive**. Author Stephen Robbins says **trust is the backbone** of leadership because it's simply "impossible to lead people who don't trust you." Author Robert Heller makes the point that trust needs to go both ways. A good leader **also places trust in his or her team members**. **To build trusting relationships: keep team members informed, explain decisions, acknowledge problems, disclose relevant information, make only promises you can keep, be willing to do anything you ask of team members, commit to the work at hand, and value collaboration in word and in deed.**

Bob Nelson uses sports terminology to describe **team leaders as "coaches."** Good coaches operate fluidly in recognizing that their **approaches need to be tailored to the specific requirements of each team member**. Fundamental to coaching is

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making time for team members, explaining the “why” and “how” of things, transferring knowledge from past experiences with an eye to soliciting input on present viability from team members. When employees need resources to do their jobs a **coach will secure those** as well as **offer to roll up his or her sleeves** when a team member is particularly taxed. Lastly, coaches value collaboration. For Americans it is **the field of sports in which team play is valued**, whereas in schools individual achievement is awarded, often at the expense of group learning enterprises.

An **atmosphere of stars**, and competition in which individuals are rewarded for ways in which they stand out from the rest, **is antithetical to a team-oriented culture**. Not everyone will readily adjust to playing on the team well. **A successful team player** must be able to **communicate honestly** and **listen honestly**, to **resist blaming others** for group problems, to **encourage goal, role and task clarification**, to participate in **effective problem-solving, consensus-building, and decision-making**.

On a good team everyone will feel like allies and have each other's backs. The leader will be flexible in providing the necessary support without being heavy-handed as members are ready to take on more responsibility. In this kind of environment one person's problem is everyone's problem and one person's success is everyone's success. Forming a successful team is half the battle to overall institutional success.

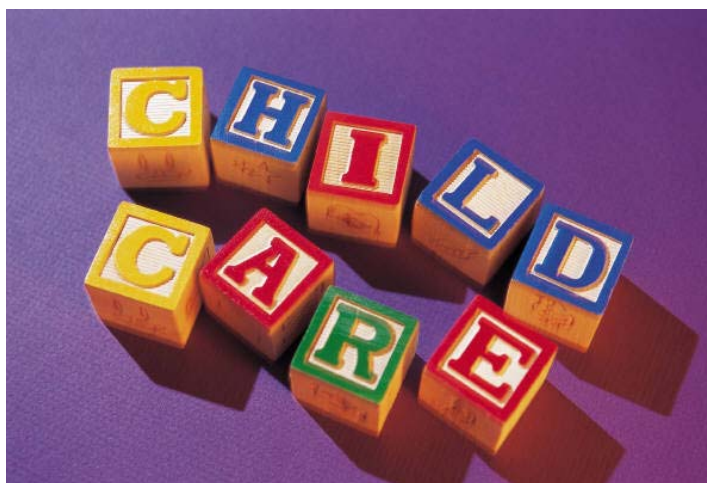
### “I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date...”

Chronically late employees hurt the work environment by lowering morale, undermining office policies, overtaxing peers who must pick up their load, and getting behind in their own work. But not all employees are late for the same reasons. Effective management of this problem requires, first, an understanding of the causes of lateness. While one person's lateness derives from an entitled or devil-may-care attitude, another's may be due to conflicts with child care arrival times or caring for a sick parent. One person may have lifestyle problems - staying out too late partying and failing to wake up on time the next morning - while another person may be working a second job to support his or her family.

If lateness is due to a poor attitude or not balancing leisure and work activities well then a manager could develop a performance improvement plan. But if lateness is based on a hardship situation, then the manager could discuss options with the employee.

Two suggestions:

- Encouraging the employee to call MIIA EAP for child or eldercare referrals or
- Considering a flex-time arrangement.



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