



Slaying the Start-up Nemesis

Part 2 of 3: Team Building

Part One in this series discussed the use of outsourcing to preserve a start-up's limited capital. Part Two addresses the second of three critical issues facing early-stage medical device and pharmaceutical companies: building and maintaining a strong, functional team. No one is capable of developing, manufacturing, and marketing/selling a new product while at the same time organizing and performing individually as the company's complete infrastructure. Impossible to do successfully! That leaves two often-chosen options. The first option is to struggle along with individual contributors who, at best, provide some skill and knowledge. The second is also relying on individual contributors, this time including some individuals who actually subvert the organization's success, consciously or unconsciously.

There is a third, less selected option which is much more difficult to achieve, because it requires both continuous, conscious, hard work and special skills which most of us were not taught. This option is to build and maintain a productive, dynamic, and results-focused organization-wide team, one which is comprised of multiple individuals, all of whom are using similar teamwork skills and working toward the same goals.

Effective communication is the most critical skill required for each member of a team – listening carefully and speaking clearly. We presume everyone is going to hear what we say exactly the way we intend it to be heard. In *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, William Isaacs, Director of the Dialogue Project at MIT, states that, instead of trying to convince others of our positions by refusing to consider other opinions, withholding information, and ultimately getting angry and defensive, communication can be a process of thinking together. He offers ideas for listening and speaking as well as for avoiding the forces which undermine meaningful conversation. Another helpful book is *Learning While Leading*, drawn from Chris Argyris' work in "Action Science." Each of these books is designed to help readers become more observant of the full communication process: individual differences in speaking and listening, motivations, words, and body language.

Not only must the varying levels of communication ability among team members be recognized and addressed, the assorted backgrounds which provide optimal diversity within a team also result in a team with various expectations, motivations, and different modes of hearing and learning. In addition to these common differences are the varying levels of confidence and perceived security of each team member. This is a particularly problematic issue when dealing with highly skilled scientists and engineers. The

September 2006 issue of *Harvard Business Review* has a superb article titled “How to Keep ‘A’ Players Productive” which discusses handling the insecurities of star performers. Implied in the article is the concept that these employees are worth the effort required to mold individual stars into a team. They usually are, and these techniques are important for the “B” Players as well. All individuals have insecurities which motivate or hinder them. A critical facet of team molding is to keep each member conscious of individual differences, even when those differences may not be apparent, so that each one watches and listens to others more closely.

It sounds so simple. Those whom you have chosen to be on your team are the ones who must move the organization to its goals. The more all team members are working by the plan toward the same clearly communicated goals, the faster each goal will be reached. If there are differing agendas, territorial issues, or a lack of trust between team members, those issues must be addressed openly and immediately.

Patrick Lencioni’s book entitled *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Field Guide for Leaders, Managers, and Facilitators* gives sound advice. It is a how-to manual which can be used to help an organization evaluate its current state and which provides suggestions on necessary changes and how to make them. The first chapter deals with building the most important parameter – trust. Though Mike Krzyzewski’s *Leading with the Heart* is less a how-to manual, it makes some excellent points on leadership and building trust.

It would be impossible to address the multiple aspects of team building in a short article. I have chosen instead to suggest a few of the excellent books written on this subject. A superb team is a think tank and a support group in one package. It is worth the time necessary to read each of these books and worth the work required to implement the ideas and suggestions to build that superb team. By working together seamlessly, a team can accomplish goals faster with lower cash burn [see article one in the series] and, heaven forbid, even enjoy the journey.

Billy C. Usrey is COO of BioTechnology Transfer, LLC, www.biotechtrans.com which provides services to medical device and biologics companies. Dr. Usrey holds degrees in business, industrial engineering, and ministry and has over 25 years of business and operations experience in large and small companies.