

Members Quarterly

Fall 2013 Edition

feature

Team Charters Build Collaboration, Communication and Clarity

What you need to succeed

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A Team Charter helps teams collaborate, ensure clarity and communicate for results. Typically a Team Charter is a document that summarizes how the team will work together. Charters developed *with* the team not *for* the team, have the highest chance of success.

Sarah's team was a highly skilled group of professionals who were committed to customer service. They did however struggle providing that same level of quality service to one another in the team. The tension in the team was high, issues had gone underground and silos had started to reappear. Old issues frequently surfaced and many comparisons to "the way we used to do it" got in the way of the team's response to change.

There were many reasons that Sarah's team pursued a process to build a Team Charter. One was to clearly document its purpose and strategic direction. The charter also provided clarity about individual roles, responsibilities, operating guidelines and courtesies within the team. The Charter also established procedures and processes for both the team and organization management on communication, decision making, reporting and conflict resolution procedures. A Team Charter is really a map or blueprint for conducting business. It defines how the team will work together in an empowered and collaborative manner, including setting out responsibility and authority.

With Sarah's team, we identified the strengths and unique qualities of the group. This conversation framed the purpose of the team's charter. Here's how the team's charter document started. *"This charter has been developed collaboratively by our team to support us to enhance our interpersonal and team relations/communication, team functions and also defines how we will work together in support of our vision. We are committed to working respectfully and effectively together as a team by: communicating effectively, creating a workplace environment that is based on trust, integrity and passion for our work, and by assisting/supporting one another to learn, so we grow as a department. Our -approach is strengths and resilience based."*

Following the conversation about strengths and the summary of the purpose statement, the team identified their values. These values became the thread that wove the other charter components together. After the team clarified the roles and responsibilities of its members and how each role contributes to the bigger picture and overarching company goal, the team then explored relationships and processes.

This next phase of the team's discussion focused on the theme "how we work together". This conversation included discussion and agreements about:

- How decisions would be managed in the team
- Expectations around team communication
- How issues would be identified and addressed

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- The process for providing feedback and resolving conflict and disagreement
- When and how the charter would be reviewed
- Who would be responsible for overseeing the charter and ensuring that new employees received an orientation to the charter
- The activities and ongoing efforts to build the team and foster healthy working relationships
- How the charter would -become a working tool to support team cohesion, effectiveness and collaboration

Ready to build your Team Charter? Here are a few pointers to start the process:

1. Wherever possible have an internal facilitator lead the process. This might be a Human Resources -professional in your -organization, a leader from another department or an external facilitator.
2. Ensure that there is adequate and appropriate communication to the team in advance of the facilitation process commencing.
3. Plan for at least a full day for the process.
4. Engage the team in the identification of issues and the creation of agreements which become the structure of the Team Charter.
5. Explore who will champion the Charter, how the Charter will be reviewed and ensure that the Charter has a visible home in the office.
6. Discuss as a team how commitment will be confirmed (e.g. signing the agreement).

Sarah's team not only signed the agreement, but they chose a Champion Team (2 staff and 1 Manager) who oriented new staff to the Charter, held quarterly Charter check-ins and arranged for the Charter to be summarized into a beautiful piece of art that hung on the wall in the reception area. Two years later, this team continues to work collaboratively, resolve conflict with more ease and respect and is working with greater focus.

*Charmaine Hammond, MA, BA is known as the
Bounce Forward Expert – building inspired and resilient teams.*

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