Teamwork Equals Triumphs

By Candace Gwaltney

There’s no ‘i’ in team. Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. Or to borrow from Michael Jordan: “Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence wins championships.”

Any number of motivational adages tries to define what teamwork means, but what does it look like in the workplace? Eight companies share real examples of how teamwork cultivates and contributes to a winning culture – beyond what those motivational posters say.

Finding and developing team players

While most companies require teamwork in order to accomplish day-to-day tasks, organizations on this year’s Best Places to Work list acknowledge the desire to work together is a quality sought in employees.

“Teamwork to us means everyone on the team is willing to help each other,” states Reagan Rick, M&I Bank regional president for Indiana. “That sounds fairly simple, but it doesn’t operate that way everywhere.”

When hiring new employees, M&I looks for people who are self-confident and have a strong desire to see others succeed. People who are willing to share the spotlight often receive more of it anyway, he notes.

“It’s very tempting as a manager to hire someone who has strong individual performance, but if the entire team production doesn’t increase, you didn’t gain anything,” he asserts.

Toby McClamroch, managing partner for Indianapolis law firm Bingham McHale LLP, agrees it all starts in the hiring process. “We like to focus our recruiting efforts on people that we think are consistent with our standards. In addition to that, we try to actually manage the (team-building) process through events and through putting our people together for interaction.”

New hires at ExactTarget add to the success of the business because they draw on excitement and creativity, they want to share with others and they expect from others, says Todd Richardson, senior vice president of human resources and strategic risk management.

“We try our best and are successful at recruiting people who thrive on working with others,” he adds. The Indianapolis company is a global provider of on-demand e-mail marketing solutions.

At MJ Insurance, a single person is not responsible for training new employees – instead anyone within the organization could be called on to help prepare new associates, explains CEO Michael H. Bill. Mentoring can last two to three years at the Indianapolis company.

Training program MJ University allows for development of new associates who don’t have prior insurance experience. These employees “are being mentored and working hand-in-hand with more experienced individuals,” Bill notes.

Basic ingredient

Bernardin, Lochmueller and Associates, Inc. (BLA) is a full-service survey, planning, engineering and environmental firm headquartered in Evansville.

“Teamwork is incredibly important here in that we may have jobs where we have all those distinctly different groups working together on a single project,” says public involvement manager Dave Goffinet.

“One of the wonderful things about this company is that when you are hired in you are...
given opportunities,” he states. Employees have opportunities to work with different departments, contribute to a multitude of projects and spend time outside of their field of study. This allows individuals’ different skills to surface while contributing to different projects, Goffinet stresses.

For example, one young employee who studied urban planning was asked in a two-month period to work on the I-69 extension project, contribute to a number of planning and environmental projects, do mapping work and field studies, Goffinet relates.

Efforts to improve communications in recent years at Teachers Credit Union (TCU) also helped build a sense of collaboration. The South Bend company set up teams to address specific topics. That resulted in a successful communications plan to keep employees informed and a diversity council to recognize respect in the organization, shares Richard J. Rice, CEO.

When the company planned to introduce a new phone system, a group of individuals from different departments worked together to decide how to best implement the change and how to address training. This allowed the technology department to learn how different departments would use the system, which improved the experience for everyone, Rice notes.

A new strategy at MJ Insurance allows cross-discipline teams of employees to work together to deliver services to clients. “It’s not just an executive team driving a strategy, it’s more of a grassroots structure,” Bill relates. These key account teams put together employees from various departments and various roles to do the market research and build processes. “This concept has really torn down the walls in trying to deliver in a cohesive manner all of our products and services to a client or prospect,” adds Jon Loftin, MJ Insurance president and COO.

A growing group

ExactTarget started nine years ago with three employees working in a garage – it’s now nearly 650 strong with associates throughout the world. Teamwork is the driving factor behind the company’s culture and continuing success, Richardson asserts.

The e-mail software company operates in a fast-moving industry, making collaboration essential between departments, he explains. “If my right hand is not talking to my left hand at every step of the way, we would not be able to be the market leader.”

Still, the biggest obstacle in being orange (that’s what ExactTarget calls its culture) is space. Employees work across the United States and Europe while others are traveling to Australia. The basis of ExactTarget’s success remains “the passion of our people to drive innovation and to drive creativity.”

When International Medical Group (IMG) rapidly grew from 65 to 150 employees, the company adopted a new slogan – big company resources, small company attitude – “to try to keep people focused on the fact that we need each other. We need to rely on the knowledge that each other has,” emphasizes Kathy Schutte, senior vice president.

Now with 217 workers, Indianapolis-based IMG aids customers all over the world – whether it’s defense contractors in Iraq or a family doing missionary work. “You really have to be on your game and be able to rely on the person sitting next to you who might be able to speak Portuguese or Spanish and will be able to help you,” she contends.

Individuals within a team

Companies such as St.Vincent Health – which made its inaugural appearance on the list this year – have found valuing the individual is vital to building a community.

“Our ministry calls us to not only strengthen our whole selves at work, but also to be in service to each other,” states Joe Murdock, chief organizational development officer.

“Our strategic direction emphasizes effective partnerships to sustain our ministry. Our structure promotes working interdependently through collaboration, cooperation and teamwork.”

Working at St.Vincent Health requires a high level of interdependency and communications. What defines the organization’s culture though is its commitment to each individual.

“(Employees) feel a sense of caring – a sense that when I am here I can be my whole self,” he asserts. That means individuals will show “both shadow and light side – and that’s OK,” he surmises. That allows St.Vincent to strive to benefit from that complete person.

Meanwhile, IMG employees are given the opportunity to form the vision for the company through regular meetings with senior staff and a suggestion box, Schutte notes.

For ExactTarget, creating a culture of teamwork begins with the hiring process. New employees must thrive on working with others because that ability is what makes the company succeed, explains senior vice president Todd Richardson.
When company president Joseph Brougher takes a vacation, employees can apply to be president for the day by submitting suggestions for the company. Ideas are chosen and those employees get perks for a day such as a premier parking spot and a two-hour lunch break.

Several of the ideas have been put into place, Schutte shares. “Nothing says you are appreciated more than if you give an idea and then it’s taken seriously.”

Sometimes it’s a single person – such as TCU’s CEO – who makes a big impact on the entire team.

“I told employees that if it became necessary to lay off somebody the first person to be laid off would be me, because that means I didn’t do my job,” Rice declares. “That represents that culture that we are all in this together and that the person at the bottom rung is not the first person out the door if we run into financial tough times.”

As a financial institution in 2009, TCU wasn’t sure what the year would bring. Rice established pay cuts would happen before any layoffs. “I think that type of culture had a real impact on the employees.”

Good times build camaraderie

For BLA, teamwork most resonates through its sense of family among its 158 employees, Goffinet contends. “It’s not that we have to work together, it’s that I’m working with people who I know their kids and I know this one has (a kid) in college or one in high school.”

That sense of family is developed through outings such as an annual trip to Holiday World amusement park or a visit from Santa.

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M&I Bank employees participate in a program called Live the Dream through the Indianapolis Neighborhood Housing Partnership. Teams of employees help a new homeowner with a house project. M&I bankers gain a good team-building experience while helping a worthy cause, Rick shares.

Extensive training and mentoring programs at Bingham McHale, as well as events throughout the year, allow employees to interact and build relationships. “People like to work in an atmosphere that’s positive, constructive – because the people who work here spend as much time if not more so (in the office) as they do with their family,” McClamroch notes.

Several receptions each year allow new lawyers and established staff to get to know each other. “It’s important for retention and for productivity to have a place where people want to be,” he adds.

INFORMATION LINK
Resources: Bernardin, Lochmueller and Associates, Inc. at www.blainc.com
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