

## Some Thoughts on Breaking Down Organizational Silos

Compiled from articles & TeamStrength members – by Susan Schilke, May 2015

TeamStrength members sometimes speak of the silos within their company – the us vs. them approach between sales and operations, or corporate and the field, or admin vs front-line. It's an age-old problem, and stems from communication challenges and a misdirection of the competitive nature of business (hint: the competition is outside your company – not within it!). Here are some ideas on fighting this destructive force.

In a recent LinkedIn article, Mia Dand suggests the following:

### **Assert responsibility to corporate goals that are well defined**

If an individual's loyalty is only to their boss, and only measured by their departmental contributions, the overall corporate goals become much less important. Workers who know the bigger picture, who are empowered to cross silo walls – and who are rewarded for successes that come from that – pull together in the bigger boat.

### **Set up a system for communication and collaboration**

Organizations need to be able to group expertise on the fly in order to address new problems. Individuals need to easily reach across the aisles for answers and advice. Community tasks sometimes need community debate. All this requires some type of unified collaboration/cooperation system to reduce the overhead and increase the dialog.

### **Create a culture of collaboration**

If getting individual tasks done is rewarded over a collaborative effort, no one will step out of boundaries. If strong leaders (and management) don't model cooperative efforts, neither will anyone else. **Culture isn't a magic thing that is or isn't there. Corporate culture is built anew each day, conversation by conversation, action by action, and incentive by incentive.**

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/its-2015-why-do-organizational-silos-still-exist-part-mia-dand>

Brent Gleeson offered the following, somewhat similar insights in Forbes:

#### **1. Create a Unified Vision.**

It is imperative that the leadership team agrees to a common and unified vision for the organization. There must be a large level of executive buy in and core understanding of the company's long term goals, department objectives, and key initiatives within the leadership team prior to passing it down to the teams. A unified leadership team will encourage trust, create empowerment, and break managers out of the “my department” mentality and into the “our organization” mentality.

#### **2. Work Towards Achieving a Common Goal.**

It is up to the leadership team to remain on task and define the single, qualitative focus that is shared among them as the top priority. Once the “elephant in the room” has been identified it is important that all executives and all members of management work together towards achieving that common goal. It is also important that all employees are aware of this objective and understand how they can make an impact individually.

### **3. Motivate and Incentivize.**

Once the common goal has been identified, each member of the management team must incentivize their employees accordingly. Incentives will go a long way with motivating employees; however, it is not all that is needed. Managers need to remember that motivation encompasses a wide variety of tactics including common interests, individual investment in growth, shared voice, and positive words of encouragement. All of the tactics described within Motivation are designed to avoid the “it’s not my job” attitude and encourage input, team work, and most importantly – productivity.

### **4. Execute and Measure.**

Just like any established goal, it is important that once this goal is defined, it is also measured accurately. The leadership team must establish a time frame to complete the common goal, benchmarks for success and delegate specific tasks and objectives to other members of the management team. Regularly scheduled meetings with the intention to hold each employee accountable against their assigned task should be held. Team work and constant cooperation must be present for the above 3 steps to work properly.

### **5. Collaborate and Create.**

There are a few key factors in creating a thriving and productive team; knowledge, collaboration, creativity, and confidence. The exchange of knowledge and the collaboration that will inevitably take place between teams is absolutely priceless. To maximize collaboration, knowledge, creativity and confidence it is suggested that management works to reduce unnecessary long and frequent meetings, builds out accessible and small meeting rooms, implements a cross-departmental training/education system, and encourages constructive feedback from outside departments.

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/brentgleeson/2013/10/02/the-silo-mentality-how-to-break-down-the-barriers/>

Here are some final suggestions from TeamStrength members:

1. Challenge one of your department teams to recognize another – offer a small budget and let them creatively design a way to show appreciation to the other department – candy, flowers, and posters all work. Then have that department select another group to honor... and continue to pass it along.
2. Hold formal team-building sessions – maybe with a facilitator – to illustrate the impact of teamwork and work through some challenges. Have team members share things their co-workers may not know – their greatest accomplishment, secret talent, favorite book, etc.
3. Publish results of each division/department/work group so everyone can see.
4. Create cross-functional teams for project work; and provide cross-training or shadowing so team members can ‘walk a mile’ in each other’s shoes.
5. Have an environment for gathering and socializing (break room or patio area); and hold regular events so team members can play together and build relationships.
6. Communicate, communicate, communicate – document processes, explain the whys, track performance.
7. Tie the entire organization to collective goals so they win together.

It’s common for team members to take ownership of their responsibilities/department and sometimes view other groups or departments as barriers rather than part of the same team. Breaking down silos and keeping teamwork high takes effort, but pays off in improved morale, retention, and productivity.