# Three Requirements of Functional Business Teams

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A basic mantra of EthixBiz is that "ethics is a team (not solo) sport."  An individualistic ethics is inherently weaker than a relational one. In fact, many historians and sociologists would say that all ethics and morality are by nature "socially constructed."

But let's go further.    Not just ethics but business itself is predominantly a team thing.  Why do companies exist?  Because we can do certain things better together than we could on our own.  If that is not true, why bother?  Let's skip the group struggles and just pursue our work on our own.

Within organizations it is critical to maintain a healthy yin/yang between (1) unleashing and empowering individuals to take on tasks best done unencumbered by others, and (2) building effective teams/groups to carry out tasks (like ethics) best-served by multiple perspectives.

Few things are more destructive to organizations than ineffective, time-consuming, boring, aggravating teams (by which I mean committees, working groups, task forces, even departments; we're speaking broadly here about sub-groups in organizations, the intermediate groupings between the individual and the organization as a whole).

All teams, groups, committees, and departments---even those viewed as permanently essential (e.g., the HR department)---need to be reviewed regularly and dumped if they are not adding clear value to the organization.

Inspired by Patrick Lencioni's wise reflection on five *dysfunctions* of a team, I couldn't help but think about the three requirements I have discovered in my work with teams.

### Requirement #1: A Clear, Unmistakable Mission

The first thing I notice about dysfunctional teams is their lack of a clear *raison d'être*---a "reason to exist."  What is our purpose, our goal, the job we have been assembled to accomplish.  One organization I worked in actually dropped the term "committee" in favor of "task force"---just to make it plain that these teams had a job to do.

If we can't articulate a compelling reason why we are coming together as a team, we are dead in the water.  Trust, communication, accountability, etc.: all these team virtues are secondary to the matter of purpose.  It is purpose and mission that inspire (or not), that unite (or not), that drive (or draw) the team forward in constructive ways.

Here are some important aspects of team missions:
- The mission has to be clear, understandable, articulate.  Fuzzy purposes lead to fuzzy performance.
- The team/sub-group mission must be in clear, recognizable alignment with the grand, overall mission of the company.
- What inspires effort is creating/building something great together----or fixing/repairing some big problem together.  Tap into one of those missional themes to leverage people's enthusiasm and high performance.
- Set clear timelines for the accomplishment of the mission and work of the team.  Teams that float along without clear, ambitious but achievable deadlines will sink.

### Requirement #2:  Effective Team Leadership

The second dysfunction on teams I have seen and worked with is lack of effective leadership.  All the other components may be in place but bad leadership will still ruin the team.  A sports team

may have a great playbook, supportive fans, warm and open relationships, and talented players; but if the leadership is not there, they will not win. We see it all the time.

An organization I used to work for had lots of great, talented people---whose energy was too often wasted by drifting, purposeless committee duties. A working rule in this paranoid organization was that committee and departmental leadership should be rotated at least every three years. It was thought that this was necessary to prevent anyone from building an entrenched mini-kingdom in the organization. What it actually did was to ensure mediocre leadership, lack of continuity, and, in consequence, low morale and poor performance. There are other ways than term limits to prevent min-fiefdoms from arising.

Here are some team leadership essentials:
- Leaders need to have passion for the mission, not the position. Good leaders want to get the job done, want project success and are champing at the bit to get it done well.
- Effective leaders have great eyes and ears: like great quarterbacks who "see" the whole field of play; like great counselors and friends who really listen to what others are saying.
- Effective leaders are good at synthesis; they see or build connections between what individuals contribute; on the personnel level it's called collaboration.
- Good team leaders hold themselves and their team members accountable; they set team members free and trust with their individual tasks but coach, evaluate, prod, encourage, and reward as appropriate.

Good team leadership isn't automatic. It is much more than mechanically working through an agenda.

### Requirement #3:  Empowering & Equipping Teams for Success

The third dysfunction on business teams I have seen is a lack of empowerment and equipment to get the mission accomplished. The purpose could be clear, talented leadership could be in place, but the team will still underperform if it is not given the means to accomplish the end.

On the material level, I'm talking about meeting and work spaces, communication and computer hardware and software, and adequate budgetary support. The material infrastructure empowers or impedes team performance.

On the policy and structure level, this involves clear and effective job descriptions, scheduling, guidelines for communication, research, and collaboration, meeting and decision-making protocols, reporting, and reviewing. It also means having reward and compensation systems that recognize team accomplishments. Policies and procedures either empower and encourage team performance---or they discourage and undermine it.

On the personnel level, teams need to have solid players with the gifts and experiences to cover all the key positions on the team. You can't have all running backs and no blockers---or vice versa---and win games. In light of the particular mission and the nature of the business "game" that will be played, teams must be equipped with quality personnel in all the appropriate spots.

***Good business teams are essential---but neither easy nor automatic. Clear mission, effective leadership, and an empowering infrastructure and culture are the foundation on which functional teams are built and sustained.***