

Practical team leading tips that you can use today to help you be a more efficient and effective team leader



5 key factors for a successful team leader

Gary Dennis MA PCGE MCFI
Founder KD Training Solutions

Tried and tested practical ways, linked to the UK's National Standards in Management

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Share your Success

Introduction

This book is dedicated to all those real team leaders I have met over the years and who have helped me not only improve my own knowledge, skills and abilities but also run a successful management training company for over 13 years.

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I present this information to you as a professional management trainer and therefore, all of the views expressed within in are valid and justified.

Whilst every effort has been made by me to present accurate and up to date information, it is obvious that technologies change and I, therefore, reserve the right to update the contents and information provided herein as these changes occur. I cannot take any responsibility for any errors or omissions if such discrepancies exist within this book.

This book contains the 5 main topics that team leaders must master if they are to lead a successful team and there is no reason why you cannot copy what they do.

Welcome

Hi, my name is Gary Dennis and I am the founder of KD Training Solutions which is an accredited centre of the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) based in Royal Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire, UK.

I welcome you to my company and thank you for downloading my book which I am sure will be of some help to you in your role of a team leader.

This book has been written with my experience and the UK's National Standards in Management in mind. You can be assured, therefore, that you are receiving the same information as those studying for a national qualification in management.

Well, are you already a team leader, thinking about it or like a lot of other people, fell into the role? Don't worry because you are not alone!! Wherever you are in your team leading career, this book will give you the 5 main topics that you need to master. If you do that, I guarantee that you will dramatically improve your ability to lead a team and help your organisation achieve its goals and objectives. By the way, your team members will like you as well!!

Learning to lead a team properly has brought me great satisfaction over the years and since I have been teaching (too many years to remember), I have seen hundreds of people improve dramatically, when they learn to do it the way it should be done, so I know it's possible.

Even if you have been a team leader for years, you will still find something in this book to either jog your memory or point you in a different direction.

If this book help you improve your team leading skills, reduce your workload or achieve more, then I have done what I set out to do.

CHAPTER ONE

WHY YOU SHOULD LISTEN TO ME?

Introduction

As I said in my welcome, my name is Gary Dennis and I am the founder of KD Training Solutions which is a team leading training company based in Royal Wootton Bassett in Wiltshire, UK.

Over the past 15 years I have been using my team leading knowledge, skills and abilities to help hundreds of people. I have done this through short team leading programmes through to a complete suite of National Qualifications, accredited through the UK's largest management institution, the Chartered Management Institute (CMI).

When I started in management some 40 odd years ago (wow, it is really that long), I had to learn the hard way – yes you know it, trial and error! When I took my first management position and “told” a team member what I wanted and when I wanted it, he threatened to “rip my head off”. Nice bloke but was 20 years my senior and did not appreciate the approach I took! Needless to say, lesson learnt!!

After many years in the military, then working in education for a while, I decided to open my own team leading training company and pass on to people like you, my experiences and tips for managing effectively and efficiently. Since then I have helped hundreds of team leaders improve and visited thousands of different businesses. This has enabled me to bring to you the 5 main factors of successful team leadership.

To prove my point, here is a comment from a candidate on a recent team leader course:

"An excellent course - I learned a lot! The course was very interesting , interactive and very well organised. It gave me the opportunity to increase my knowledge about various areas of the business and provided with the framework, tools and techniques I now apply to my duties. The trainer managed to get excellent group interaction right from the beginning. What is more, he understood the needs of the group and individual circumstances. He brought to the workshop, extensive knowledge, excellent communication skills, a sense of humour and somehow, the ability to make each Unit an interesting topic. In short - great course, excellent instructor and will definitely be recommending it to other staff!"

Since making these comments, this lady has been promoted and is now enjoying the fruits of her labour in completing both a junior and senior team leader course through the Chartered Management Institute.

So, I think I am fully justified in producing this book and I hope that you find it useful. Over a period of time, I also plan to update the book and send you bits and pieces to add to it.

I also plan to open a new website that is devoted to short, mainly online, team leader courses. I am sure you will find these both refreshing and useful.

In the meantime, happy reading and once again, welcome.

Gary Dennis MA PGCE MCFI
Founder KD Training Solutions

CHAPTER TWO

WHY YOU SHOULD DEVELOP YOUR KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES

Introduction

Here is the first tip. People who succeed in team leading always ensure that their knowledge, skills and abilities are always up to date.

Much has been written over the years about personal development and you can even get a Master's Degree in it these days. The thing is, for the average person, there is no need to get over complicated, so the purpose of this first chapter is to give you some very practical steps you can take to ensure your knowledge, skills and abilities are kept up to date, whatever job role you are in.

OK, whatever anyone else says, if you are not properly trained yourself, there is no way you can ensure others are up to scratch.

Here are some recent research statistics which are very interesting:

- Nearly 70% of team leaders do not have the appropriate knowledge, skills and abilities to lead a team properly. Not only is that very sad, but it makes the job very difficult for those concerned, especially in the current economic climate
- There is also a claim that poor team leading skills costs the UK millions of pounds, which is a little bit obvious but you will be aware that some pretty big companies are going out of business at the moment and a lot of people are claiming that poor team leadership skills are to blame

In order for you to develop your knowledge, skills and abilities, you need some kind of process to work with and although there are many theories around, here is one tried and tested process that I have found works without failure.

Where do you start?

Well, where you work, like most companies, will be trying to achieve something. Whether that is to increase its income, gain more of the market or simply stay alive week after week, does not matter. Your role as a team leader is to use the people you have around you to help achieve that aim.

Most team leaders get thrust into a team leading role without the appropriate training and that is sad because as I mentioned earlier, poor team leading skills is costing the UK millions of pounds. It is also making the life of a team leader quite stressful and de-motivated.

What's next?

I am going to assume that you are starting from scratch and know nothing about developing yourself. That way, I will cover everyone.

The most practical and straightforward way of starting is to look at "where you are now". In other words, determining what knowledge, skills and abilities you currently have as a team leader, associated with both your job role and you as an individual. I like to separate your job from you because I think it is important not to confuse the two.

Like most things, starting off is the most difficult! I remember when I first started training in Martial Arts. After the first days training, I could not walk for a week!!!! But, I kept going and am now a 3rd degree Black Belt some 8 years later. I now help teach people and I can see myself in them when they first start. The simple answer is, just get to on with it and remain determined to succeed!

Once you have collected sufficient information, it can be updated regularly with ease. Imagine you are starting off a list of your friends in a new mobile phone. It takes time to build up your list but once done, is easy to control and change.

You can get your information from many sources, including questionnaires but you need to get as full a picture of yourself as you can.

What do you do with this information?

Now you have done the hard bit, you can lump all of your information together and look for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

We call this a SWOT analysis and it gives you a chance to summarise your information and look at what weaknesses and threats you have so you can turn them into strengths and opportunities instead.

Once you have produced your SWOT analysis, you should look at where you actually want to be, in both the short and long term.

Let's imagine that your decision was get a formal management qualification. It is always useful to make sure you know "exactly" what you intend to achieve and we do this by producing what we call a SMART objective. By SMART, I mean "specific", "measurable", achievable, realistic and time-bound.

A typical SMART objective might look like this:

"To gain a Diploma in First Line Management through the Chartered Management Institute at Level 3 by attending a series of monthly workshops at KD Training Solutions in Wootton Bassett by the end of 2013. The qualification will be achieved after submission of 7 written, work-based assignments"

Where do you get your development?

There are many ways in which you can achieve your aims. The important thing is that you make sure the learning opportunity that you choose is right for you as an individual.

When I go on a course, I like it to be dynamic and full of discussions and role play. Having said that, I can already hear lots of you saying "role play, no way!". You see, what one likes, another might not so it is important you choose carefully.

There are many tests you can take and it will inform you of the way you like to learn best.

Do you need any help?

I can tell you now there is nothing worse than trying to do it alone! You need to find someone who has done it before or knows a lot about it. Why re-invent the wheel and start from scratch? When I did my team leading courses, I enrolled the help of my line manager who had an MBA. He helped me gather information so I could complete my assignments. He also showed me his assignments so I could see roughly what was expected.

So you need to get support from someone – don't try and do it alone. It could simply be someone at work or even a friend.

It is also a good idea to have someone monitor what you are doing. Whilst you can do this yourself, you may be tempted to put things off.

Putting it all on paper

Putting it all on paper in some kind of personal development plan has two main advantages. It can be used by the person monitoring what you are doing and act as a permanent record of your development.

And when it's over?

When your development is complete, make sure you go back over it all and see what went right and what could be improved for next time. For example, did you gather sufficient information and was your SWOT accurate? Did you set yourself a SMART objective? Did you achieve that objective? Did you choose the right place to learn? Did the learning match your preferred style? Did your support turn out to be as good as you had expected? Did the monitoring process work?

Final thought

Don't wait for someone to develop you. Take responsibility and do it yourself. Get your SWOT completed now and work out what you need to do.

CHAPTER THREE

PLANNING YOUR WAY TO SUCCESS

Introduction

No self-respecting team leader would get where they are if they are unable to plan their work and that of their team.

Planning is probably the one task that team leaders must be good at because everything they do depends on it. Poor planning gives poor results. It also upsets everyone involved and before you know it, you have been removed from the Xmas card list!

Done properly it can provide direction to people and gives you an opportunity to look at different ways of doing things. It also reduces the uncertainty in a task and helps with the "what if" situation if and when things go wrong.

It also helps use resources the most efficiently and draws the team together so they are committed to achieving the plans aim.

A plan is, however, only a plan and quite often things go wrong. In Alice in Wonderland there is a quote that says "if you do not know where you are going then any road will take you there". So, be prepared for your plan to go wrong but make sure you at least have one!!!

As with all other topics in this book, planning can get complicated so I have taken lots of ideas and put them together so to give you an idea of what you need to think about.

What are you trying to achieve?

In Chapter One we discussed having an aim or goal to achieve and the same applies to planning. Go back to Chapter One and have another look at the SMART way in which objectives should be put together. Once you have produced your SMART objective, you should then agree it with your team. (They might even be involved in producing the SMART aim in the first place!! – that would be nice).

Where are you now?

Knowing where you are now allows you to see what you can actually do, plus it helps identify “gaps” so you can fill them.

Who is going to do what?

Here you can determine what needs to be done; who is going to do it and what resources are required. Make sure you take into account what workload your team members already have and whether their knowledge, skills and abilities match what you are asking them to do. Maybe their experience in certain areas also comes into play. You also need to consider when it is going to be done and what standards you expect (i.e. the quality of the end product).

What if.....

I have always encouraged team leaders to consider the “what if” scenario and am always surprised that not many of them do. In other words, look through your plan and see if you can identify where things might go wrong. Once you have done that you can put what we call “contingencies” in place to cover any problem when or if it occurs.

Let's get on with it!!

Ok everything's covered, let's get on with it. Your job now is to keep an eye on what is happening to make sure it matches your agreed plan. How you monitor, it up to you, just don't interfere too much.

Making changes

As I mentioned earlier, no plan is secure. Something will always go wrong, guaranteed. But if you have planned properly, changes can be made quite easily. If you have ever watched the Apprentice, Alan Sugar often tells the apprentices that if something is clearly not working, then maybe they should have changed what they had planned. Of course, you should try everything possible first, but at the end of the day maybe what you are trying will simply not help you achieve your objective.

Reviewing what you have done

This will come in all sorts of team leader topics. I cannot stress enough the importance of going over what you have done and identifying what you did well and what could have gone better. That way you learn for next time!

And finally.....

As a final issue, when your team has completed a plan that you have put in place, make sure you provide them with constructive feedback so they know how well they carried out the work.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHY BEING ON TIME IS IMPORTANT

Introduction

This tip is one that takes a little while to get hold of completely because things have to change one at a time, however, the very best team leaders are not seen running around like headless chickens from one job to the next. They are calm and in control.

You can do this as part of a national qualification or a simple one day programme. The fact remains that as a team leader you must be able to effectively manage your time.

When people join our courses, we ask them to score themselves out of 10 for their time management abilities. Most people admit they are not too good and scores range from 5-7 out of 10. After we have gone through the topic, the areas that can be improved emerge very quickly and clearly so here goes.

Where do you start?

Guess what? Yes, you start by analysing what you are currently doing with your time. These are some of the things you will find all sorts of things like:

- **Unexpected visitors** – these could be from outside or internal. Have you ever been visited by someone from a different department and spent 20 minutes discussing something that has nothing to do with your work? Of course you have!

- **Telephone calls** – are you in the unfortunate position of having a phone quite close to you? Have you ever spent the same 20 minutes mentioned above, only on the phone??? Of course you have!

- **Meetings** – oh my! I wish I had a pound for every meeting I attended that went over time. Normally, it is because the person chairing the meeting does not have the necessary skills to keep the meeting on track
- **Procrastination** – that’s a big word! It means putting things off. That is something we all do. You don’t need me to tell you that whatever you put off will come back and bite you later on!
- **Inability to say “no”** – you will be surprised at the amount of people who will not say no for fear of offending someone – this is a skill you need to develop but you will be astonished at the response the first time you politely say no to someone
- **Bad delegation** – without being able to delegate properly, it is difficult to get things done through your team

Try working out the percentage of your time that is taken up by all of the things above because then you can work on each one and see if improvements can be made.

As an example, I know a teacher who attends many meetings at his school. When I asked him how many he actually “needed” to attend, the result was quite startling. Out of 8 meetings each week, he only needed to attend 3. That means he could save himself 5 hours (which is nearly a whole day!!).

Where do you go from here?

I think I have given you quite a bit to work on and put into practice but you will soon get used to it and be doing it without thinking. I am also sure you are aware that learning something new always has its difficulties but if you put the effort in, you will get the results out.

Of course, not everything will work straight away. If you try something and it does not go right, why not email me at garydennis@kdtraining.co.uk and I will try to help you. I won't be able to tell you WHAT to do because I do not know your particular job or company, but I will be able to tell you HOW to approach the problems you have come across.

And finally..... Simple - Get hold of your time; don't let it get hold of you

CHAPTER FIVE

HOW TO MANAGE INFORMATION

Introduction

I am sure you are aware that there is far more information around now than a few years ago and this can make things more difficult as it takes time to sift through. The best, though, can find what they want quickly and when they do find it, it is of such a high quality that decisions can be made instantly.

It has been said that information is the foundation of team leading control so without it, you are in trouble! Information management is seen in today's business as a key to competitive advantage and more and more you will find people employed just to oversee information systems.

In my experience, you would not be able to plan effectively, organize, lead or control, if you did not have access to good information. This topic can also get complicated so I am going to simply split it into 3 areas, namely gather/select, store and use.

Data or information

The first thing to think about is "what are you dealing with" Is it data or information. Data is raw facts and figures such as a list of numbers showing how many students enrolled on team leading courses. This only provides an overall figure which is of limited use by itself. It does not, for example give any guide into income or profit.

Information on the other hand is data that has been selected and processed for a specific purpose. For example, these numbers are now related to the level of each team leading course and data is collated into different years.

Why information is important to you

Gathering of information is almost limitless thanks to the growth of IT and regardless of what industry you are in, it is the key to success for yourself as a team leader and your organisation. This is because you can monitor progress against agreed targets, keep up to date, make better decisions and deal with actual and potential problems. You can also plan and allocate work more efficiently.

You can also meet with customers or use questionnaires to get feedback on what they think about your organisation and the products and services it provides.

Gathering information

There are basically 2 main types of information. Quantitative (or hard) information which is normally expressed in figures and asks questions like how much, how many, how frequently, how likely and how quickly, whilst qualitative (or soft) information cannot be expressed in figures and answers questions like what, why and how. Let's look at both in more detail.

Quantitative or "hard" information contains facts and figures from some type of measurement. For example, sales and waste figures, time spent on manufacturing products, number of police arrests or convictions and number of planning applications approved.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency for people to rely on quantitative information because it is seen as being hard fact that cannot be influenced and can be measured objectively. A lot of this type of information exists in organisations and many even employ specialist firms to gather such information for them.

To transform quantitative data into useful information, it is necessary to find patterns and trends by using statistical techniques.

The main problem with quantitative information is that it is objective and ignores the subjective, presuming that "figures never lie". Research shows, though, that you need both "how many" and "why" to get to the absolute truth. An example of this is that police may catch 95% of all thieves. Whilst this gives us a number, it does not indicate how this happens i.e. more patrols on the streets.

Qualitative or "soft" information is about quality, for example the experience of a customer in a taxi ride, cinema, restaurant or theatre. It could also be about the quality of service when reporting an incident to the police, being interviewed about a planning application or speaking to a social worker. As qualitative information is about quality, it is more subjective than objective and can be difficult to both gather and interpret.

Because figures are not involved, it is important to carefully select the source of qualitative information to ensure both accuracy and adequacy and be prepared to ask the right questions.

Primary and secondary information

Information can come from 2 basic sources: primary and secondary. Primary information is that gathered by you for your own purposes and could include notes from meetings, customer survey results, networking with colleagues, focus groups, interviews, production statistics etc.

Secondary information, on the other hand, is that gathered by other people for their own purposes and you are using it for yours. It may include journal entries, published reports and sales figures.

Some secondary information may be more accurate than what you can produce so why not use it instead of "reinventing the wheel".

Storing information for retrieval

In most organisations there are a variety of methods used to record and store information and this could be in the form of databases, reports and filing systems (manual for electronic). In any event, the way you record information will depend on the main purpose of the information, your organisations policy and any requirements by law.

Why store information?

As we have already discussed, since the improvements in IT, there has been a massive growth in information activity and it has also become much easier to store. You only have to think back a few years and look how we have moved from tapes to CD's and beyond. There are a few reasons why we store information and they appear to be for operational or financial needs.

Storage systems

Your information needs to be retrieved when you require it and there are many ways in which it might be stored for later retrieval and come under the general headings of manual and electronic.

The Data Protection Act (1998)

The Data Protection Act (1998) is an extension of the Data Protection Act (1984) and covers information held about individuals on certain paper files as well as computer data.

In essence, to comply with the act, people must be open to individuals about information held about them and be very careful about passing that information to third parties.

The main reasons that the Act was introduced into the UK were:

- To counteract people's rights to privacy, bearing in mind the amount of information that a computer can hold, transfer and process

- To enable the UK to meet its commitment to European law

The 8 basic principles of the new Act state that data must be:

1. Fairly and lawfully processed
2. Processed for limited purposes only
3. Adequate, relevant and not excessive
4. Accurate
5. Not kept longer than necessary
6. Processed in accordance with the data subject's rights
7. Secure
8. Not transferred to countries without adequate protection

Data of a personal nature also covers both facts and opinions of an individual and they are entitled to:

- Be informed by anyone who is controlling the data whether or not such data is being stored or processed
- Have a description of the data being used and be informed for what purpose the data is being processed and stored
- Be informed of where the data came from

Accessing information

It does not matter what system is used provided it is user friendly and that information is easily accessible when it is needed. This information must only be available to those authorised to see it and it must be in an easy to use format. In order to ensure that the information you use is of a high quality, you should use the formula below:

Quality = relevancy, adequacy, currency, timely and reliability

In order to ensure that the information you are using is good enough, when you retrieve it, it must be relevant (only what you need), adequate (enough for you to make decisions), current (up to date), timely (in that you get it when you need it) and reliable (can be trusted).

Protecting electronic information

Information stored by electronic means is only safe if it is properly protected. This means looking after your pc and associated hardware/software, disks and preventing loss or damage of information. For example there are risks to your hardware through fire, dust or smoke, liquid spillages, magnetic field, power surges and accidents.

Although CDs and DVD are more durable than the old floppy disc, they can still be damaged or lost.

A lot of people assume that any data that has been deleted, either on purpose or accidentally, will be lost. Anything that you delete from your computer only wipes off its "address" so that you cannot find it again, but it is still there. There are many software packages around these days that may be used to retrieve data that has been deleted. Having said that, I have tried a few with little success!!

CHAPTER SIX

LEADING EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

Introduction

Have a think about the last time you went to a meeting and it started and finished on time! Those who do it best organise, run and follow up meetings in a structured and methodical way that enable them to get the very best out of the time people are spending with them.

I don't think anyone actually knows when the first meeting took place but I am willing to put money on it that it lasted far too long, the wrong people were there, nobody really knew what they were going to talk about, was boring and achieved very little.

Anyway, leap forward thousands of years. Does it seem any different these days? The problem is that meetings costs money because while you are attending one, you are arguably not producing. I have been to some public sector meetings that last for a whole day!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Many people have written about meetings and I could write a whole book on them myself, but here are some interesting facts. 70% of team leaders consider many of the meetings they attend a waste of time, lots of team leaders spend up to 75% of their time in meetings, the higher up the team leading chain you are, the more meetings you seem to attend and unproductive meetings are a significant source of job stress!

Meetings do, of course, serve a purpose and as someone famous once said:

“Consider this; our national economy is based on a 35 to 45 hour working week. Without meetings, this figure would dwindle to a few hours at the most. Our whole system as we know it would collapse”!!!!!!

Advantages and disadvantages of meetings

There are, of course, some great things that come out of some meetings such as exchanging ideas, making decisions, people feeling as though they are joining in, getting to know people more and getting people to work together.

The downside is that valuable time could be used better elsewhere, money would be saved, team leaders are forced to make decisions by themselves and stress is added to an already overworked workforce!

Reasons for ineffective meetings

Meetings are often considered ineffective because no-one bothers to produce an agenda, they nearly always over-run, people are more often than not, unprepared and nothing particularly interesting is decided upon.

In essence, you should only hold a meeting when something is going to happen as a result and you can't come up with an alternative method to achieve this result.

How to do it properly

At some time in your team leading career you will be required to chair a meeting and you do not want to fall for some of the silly mistakes we have already discussed. Chairing a meeting is actually quite an art, so let's have a look at the key areas:

- **Preparing to chair** – Before a meeting starts, your responsibility is to ensure that everything has been organised so the meeting can run like clockwork

- **During the meeting** – here you are responsible for running the meeting in line with your agenda and making sure everyone has a chance to contribute. One thing you may come across is difficult people - those who like to disrupt your meeting for one reason or another. You must deal with these people appropriately
- **After the meeting** When your meeting is over you should ensure that a review takes place to see if your meeting was effective or not. For example, were the right people there? Did you handle conflict appropriately? Did people read papers in advance like they were asked to do? You should also ensure that any agreed after-meeting actions are monitored to make sure they are carried out.

Assessing your current skills

If you need to improve the way in which you chair meetings, then you really need to look back over what you have done in the past and assess them. This way you can identify changes that you need to make and try them out in future meetings.

You can also get questionnaires about meetings that will help you assess your competency in this area or you could ask someone to watch you!!

SHARE YOUR SUCCESS!!

I hope that you have found this book useful and that you have been able to introduce some of the things that the best team leaders do.

I would love to hear about your successes, so we can share it with other team leaders. Send your story on how you successfully used KD Training Solutions suggestions to improve your team leader knowledge, skills or abilities to garydennis@kdtraining.co.uk

Have you enjoyed this book?

You can email us to let us know what you thought of this book at garydennis@kdtraining.co.uk. Also, why not get a colleague or friend to register on our website at www.kdtraining.co.uk and get a copy for themselves. They will also receive many other benefits from registering with us.

Come to KD Training Solutions event

If you go to our website you will see that we have FREE places on some of our ½ day team leader workshops. We would love you to come along and see for yourself how we can help you.

Finally If you have read this book and you like it, go to courses.kdtraining.co.uk and register on our short course website. There you will find a FREE extended version of Chapter Two of this book.

Warmest regards,

Gary Dennis
Founder of KD Training Solutions
01893 853222
www.kdtraining.co.uk
courses.kdtraining.co.uk