

# The 'Low-Down' on Team Development, Part I

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## **Sample of Content:**

The process of team development is neither complicated, nor impossible. Many new and previously inexperienced team leaders are able to build a team with proper training and coaching.

## **Content:**

In recent years in the business-world there has been a lot written and said about team development. Unfortunately, most of the people doing the majority of talking lack the psychological background to accurately describe the conditions under which people choose to become a true team.

In a large retail store it can be a challenge to build an environment where all or most of the employees feel they are part of a store team. It's more common to find individual departments that act as a team, rather than the entire store. That's because as a general rule it's easier to build a relatively small team of up to a dozen team members than it is a team with a hundred or more members.

The developmental process of a group of people evolving into a cohesive interdependent team that can direct itself to solve organizational problems rarely happens spontaneously. A true team does not happen by chance or accident, but requires planning, an understanding of group dynamics, and most of all effective team leadership. Most people in business today confuse ineffective groups, committees and other adverse groupings as a true team. An adverse grouping is a situation where people come together, either by accident or on purpose, but function in some way other than a true team. Once a person has been a member of a true interdependent team, that experience isn't soon forgotten. And that experience can sour the person in the future to serve on ineffective groups, and committees, because the person now knows what it feels like to be a member of a real team. An interdependent team is a highly unusual and unique interpersonal experience there is probably no other parallel in all of human experience.

The process of [team development](#) is neither complicated, nor impossible. Many new and previously inexperienced team leaders are able to build a team with proper training and coaching. Being successful as a team leader requires only a minimal knowledge of the process, but it does demand a willingness to try new techniques and methods. For most new team leaders it means stretching beyond what may feel natural or even comfortable. Whether you are experienced or inexperienced, old or young, it is possible for you to become an effective team leader.

Before we learn what an interdependent team is, let's first understand what it isn't. There are four typical negative or adverse reactions to the grouping of people in interpersonal relationships. This is true in both personal and professional relationships. These adverse reactions are observable in behavioral terms and for simple clarification are called: mob, gang, committee and group.

**Mob.** Individualistic or selfish thinking can identify mob behavior. People displaying mob behavior are tactical in that they think only for the moment and have virtually no strategic or long-term planning. In mob behavior there is no leadership, which creates mob disorganization. When we think of street mobs, the first thing that comes to mind is violence, but actually violence is the product or outgrowth of disorganization, which happens because there is no effective leadership.

**Gang.** Although gang behavior sounds similar to mob behavior, it differs in almost every aspect. Strong autocratic leadership along with a hierarchical system of management characterizes gang behavior. Gang members are highly territorial and defensive, thus creating aggression in defending their perceived territory. In business, gang behavior frequently includes empire building where gang members attempt to exclude "outside" resources by becoming totally self-reliant or self-sufficient.

**Committee (Task Force).** In business, committees are usually thought of in positive terms. Actually, compared to interdependent teams, committees are inefficient and ineffective. Due to the lack of team cohesion and identity, traditional committees frequently have problems focusing on their purpose until they satisfy a strong need for organization, defining procedures, establishing policies, and having a controlled leadership. Some committees invest most of their available time in these areas. This results in a lengthy process that is cumbersome and oftentimes fails to achieve superior results.

**Group.** A group consists of people in a setting that lacks purpose, leadership, communication, and obviously results. The best examples of groups are the people in an elevator or doctor's office. They are there, but have superficial communication at best. In fact, if someone breaks the rules of groups by attempting to lead or force communication, other members of the group become uncomfortable and unwilling to cooperate. If you doubt this, try asking someone in an elevator to join you in singing a song. The person will likely rebel at your comment, because it's not acceptable group behavior.

If you are a student of human behavior you can probably see examples of these four types of adverse reactions to human interaction in almost every aspect of life. When one department in a store demonstrates gang behavior toward another department, it can result in a very unhealthy situation. There may be a sign placed on a backroom door that says, "Research and Development Personnel Only." This would be characteristic of people defining their territory demonstrating gang behavior. Obviously, any of the four adverse reactions can be counter-productive to smooth store operations.

Next month we'll look at the process a leader takes to build a group of people into an interdependent team. We'll see, for example, the benefits of team cohesion and team identity. Until then, keep your eyes on the teams in your workplace and see how many of them might be mobs, gangs, committees, or groups.

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Due to outstanding scholarship while a doctoral candidate at Oxford University, Dr. Williams was honored with Knighthood. His formal title is, therefore, "Sir Doctor Williams."

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