How Does a **Successful Team**

In any good team, each member brings specific talents and strengths. In a fleet maintenance facility, teams can be organized by shifts or skills. But once identified, successful teams work in harmony.

By John Dolce

How do we get a complex job done reliably, accurately, on or before time, easily, and confidently? With teamwork — individuals working together cohesively, each with particular strengths and skills contributing to the total effort.

The ideals of teamwork can often be illustrated through sports analogies.

In track, four runners comprise a relay team. Each runs in an assigned position according to individual strengths. The first runner must be fast enough to secure the lead and an inside spot. The second and third runners must be strong and dependable, maintaining the team position. The fourth and last runner is the best qualified, able to close the gap and break the finish line tape.

In baseball, three people are often required to complete a double play. The first player catches the ball, throws to the base to get the first out. The base player maneuvers to throw to the next base where the third player catches the ball for the second out, completing the double play. All three catch the ball; all three work to complete their individual parts to move the ball to the next player. Each must understand the total process and anticipate other players' needs.

Inspection is First Team Task

The work of a fleet maintenance facility team begins with the PM inspection. Depending on the vehicle's age, different levels of technician experience are required to accurately determine the necessary maintenance tasks. A less-trained eye can spot the maintenance tasks required for a newer vehicle, while pinpointing appropriate servicing for an older vehicle takes a more experienced technician's skill. A technician's performance and skills must be evaluated, and as he or she becomes trained and experienced, the more valuable each becomes to the team. The smarter the technician, the better questions he or she asks, a process that repeats itself, resulting in an increasingly skilled technician.

At a Glance

Successful work teams exhibit the following characteristics:

- Continuous improvement.
- Loyalty.
- Ability to accept criticism.
- Group commitment.
- Support and protection for other team members.
- Greater success.
- Greater problem-solving ability.
- The opportunity to have fun when appropriate.

Work?

Following the inspection, which typically takes a few hours, the vehicle-servicing job is handed off to the other players on the team.

In a typical maintenance shop, technicians, mechanics, and laborers may perform 500 servicing tasks. Most often 5 percent (25 tasks) are the most common, routine tasks, comprising 30 percent of the shop work.

Shift-Specific Teams Stress Skills

In one kind of team structure, various skills-specific technicians on each shift perform their individual tasks on a vehicle-servicing job that might take a total of 25-30 hours. Generally, this is an efficient process. However, some team members may fall into the habit of simply choosing the easiest tasks, leaving the difficult servicing to a later shift when a less-qualified technician may be left to finish the job. This inefficient practice creates nonproductive PM operations. It keeps the vehicle on the line so the 25-30 hours of work grows to 35-50 hours and the downtime pushes out from 2-3 days to 5-7 days.

The supervisor is the key to tracking an efficient teamwork process. The shift supervisor knows his or her staff and their expertise levels, as well as those of other shifts. Specific tasks are assigned to the most appropriately skilled technician on the shift. As a team, each technician performs the job he or she does well. Multi-shift operations require a person to direct shift supervisors.

Cross-Shift Teams an Alternative

An alternative team format partners a worker on shift one with a worker on shift two and a third on shift three. This three-person team is assigned to a vehicle, with resulting specific performance accountability.

Usually, hands-on staff members are assigned a service bay, where they place their individual tools. Each bay houses a two- or three-shift team. Some service bays are designated solely for scheduled PM servicing and are stocked with parts and fluid with space available to do the inspections and routine repairs. The unscheduled non-repeat generated repairs go to a different bay space.

Winning Teams Work Together

Once the team process is defined with the proper players, we look for team harmony. Successful teams that win reflect:

- Continuous improvement.
- Loyalty.
- Ability to accept criticism.
- Group commitment.
- Support and protection for other team members.
- Greater success.
- Greater problem-solving ability.
- The opportunity to have fun when appropriate.

Rewards and recognitions can help reinforce teamwork and heighten a supportive, cohesive environment. Workers and supervisors can be recognized for an overall improvement or productivity milestones. When a vehicle passes inspection, rewards can be directed at an identifiable team. Such rewards might include a team lunch or cash incentive.

Team members can remain the same while the unit works well and continues to improve in skills, productivity, and efficiency. Occasionally, members may be moved to another team to provide a new dynamic or fill a lack in skill or experience.

Identifying leadership among team members also helps motivate workers. To be recognized as the "go-to" person provides an incentive that can help foster ever-more efficient operations and also support team loyalty.

Teams alone cannot succeed unless leaders and managers fit the right people to the tasks. Teams succeed based on their combined skills and ability to work as a team on assigned tasks.

- Leaders develop teams.
- Managers coordinate tasks.
- Teams perform the work successfully.
- Vehicle service has plenty of work.

With good leaders and managers, the maintenance team will succeed — a win-win situation for drivers and fleet operations. GF