

The Vision of Teams

In 1993 four women stood ready to embark on a fantastic adventure. For the next 67 days they survived incredible hardships to travel across Antarctica and reach the South Pole. This program takes you on their epic journey to teach you how to come together, learn together and take action as a team.



Insight and application
ideas for the trainer

LEADER'S
GUIDE

Welcome to The Vision of Teams

Thank you for your interest in “The Vision of Teams.” My goal is to offer our story as a new way of looking at the challenges that come with creating an effective and unified team from a diverse group of people.

The video presents the journey of the American Women's Expedition, the first women's team to ski across Antarctica to the South Pole. In “The Vision of Teams,” I talk about our journeys—both our trek to the Pole and our quest to become a smoothly running team made up of individuals who like and respect each other. Although the tasks before our team were unique, the challenges we faced are universal.

First, we had a bottom line: Getting to the Pole. That meant we had to "produce" or ski so many miles each day to reach our goal.

Second, we had teammates who didn't begin as friends and didn't always get along. As team leader, I picked the members; they weren't able to choose with whom they worked.

In pulling together the most effective team that I could, I assembled a group of talented and strong-willed individuals. The challenge then became creating an environment that would allow everyone's ideas to come forward in a constructive way.

Third, we faced rigid time constraints. If we didn't start our trip on time, the weather in Antarctica could have prevented us from traveling at all that year. Similarly, if we didn't proceed at our scheduled fast pace, we faced a real danger of running out of food.

Fourth, we operated on a tight budget that left little room for error.

Fifth, communication between team members was important but also difficult. The reasons were both practical—we spent our days skiing single file with facemasks on—and emotional—we shied away from talking about failures or disagreements.

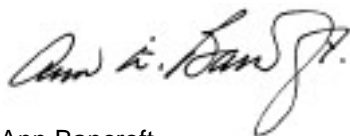
Sixth, like most “coworkers,” we had longer-term careers that would be affected by our success—or lack of it—in Antarctica.

Seventh, like most people, we wanted to feel good about ourselves and each other and enjoy the challenge before us, even as we worked incredibly hard to reach it.

And finally, just as most teams do, we made mistakes along the way. However, we tried to learn from our errors, overcome our weaknesses, and capitalize on our strengths to achieve our shared goal.

The lessons we learned on our journey to the South Pole apply to almost any team trying to reach a goal. Whether your mission is to develop a better software application, turn around a faltering division, or increase test scores in your school, I hope and believe that our story will inspire, motivate, and entertain you.

Sincerely,



Ann Bancroft

Welcome to The Vision of Teams

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Welcome to The Vision of Teams

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Welcome to The Vision of Teams

About Ann Bancroft

Ann Bancroft is the first woman to travel across the ice to the North and South Poles and is one of only a handful of people who have journeyed to both Poles. Her career first captured the public's attention in 1986, when she skied to the North Pole as the only female member of the Steger International Polar Expedition. In November 1992, Ann led the American Women's Expedition to the South Pole. This group of four women skied more than 660 miles, each pulling 200-pound sleds, to reach the Pole in January 1993.

Between trips, Ann is an active citizen, diplomat, and community volunteer. She continues her work with the American Women's Expedition Educational Foundation, an organization whose goal is to highlight the strengths and achievements of women, as well as to educate young people on environmental challenges in Antarctica. She is an instructor with Wilderness Inquiry, a group that helps individuals with disabilities, as well as able-bodied people, to enjoy the wilderness.

Ann has worked with the American/Soviet exchange program, Ski for Peace, whose goal is to foster communication and understanding between citizens of different nations. She also has served on the boards of the Melpomene Institute for Women's Health Research and Friends of the Boundary Waters. Currently, she is a board member of the National Women's Hall of Fame. Ann has been a volunteer for numerous civic and charitable organizations, including Equity in Education and the Special Olympics, among others.

Ann was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1995 and the National Girls and Women in Sport Hall of Fame in 1992. In 1993, she received the YWCA Women First Award. Ann was named Ms. Woman of the Year in 1987 and the U.S. Jaycees Outstanding Young American in 1988.

Today, in addition to her work, Ann is preparing for her next expedition. This all-women's journey to the South Pole and across Antarctica is scheduled to begin in November 2000.

Ann earned her bachelor of science degree in physical education from the University of Oregon and previously taught physical education.

Welcome to The Vision of Teams

Using the Leader's Guide

The Leader's Guide expands on the concepts presented in the video, "The Vision of Teams," and provides examples that further illustrate each idea. The purpose of this Leader's Guide is to help you work with your group, so that your members receive as much benefit as possible from the information presented. The Leader's Guide was designed to be used by both inexperienced and professional facilitators.

The sections in the Leader's Guide follow the format described here:

1. Presenting the Concept

A. Key Concept - Each key concept is taken from the video.

(Note: Each key concept, printed for use as an overhead, also is found on the diskette that comes with the complete Vision of Teams package. The overheads were created in PowerPoint. You have permission to make copies of the overheads, or you may choose simply to use the PowerPoint presentation.)

B. From the Video - Specific portions of the video script, which are relevant to the key concept, are presented. These should help in identifying precisely how Ann Bancroft explained each idea in the program.

C. Program Insight - Each insight further explains the concept. These explanations may help you discuss the topics in your own words.

2. Developing Further Discussion

A. Facilitator Questions and

B. Possible Responses

You may find these suggested facilitator questions, along with possible responses, helpful in generating meaningful discussions. In addition, they should help you to check how well the group understands and can apply the concepts presented.

(Note: A workbook for "The Visions of Teams" is available to further assist participants in individual learning.)

3. Putting It into Practice

A. Team Activity - A suggested team activity gives participants a chance to interact with and get to know other members of their team, while they continue to learn and apply each concept.

B. Expedition Insight - Each section ends with an anecdote or comment that shows how the members of the American Women's Expedition worked through the concept on their journey to the Pole.

Welcome to The Vision of Teams

Facilitation Tips

Before the Session

To get the most out of “The Vision of Teams,” you'll want to review both the video and the Leader's Guide before the session. It is helpful to think about how the concepts presented apply to your organization. You may want to examine the particular issues with which your team has struggled, the goals and structure of your team, and the strengths and weaknesses of each member. It also helps to think through the possible comments and questions that members of your group are likely to have after seeing the video.

During the Session

- Welcome the participants as they arrive.
- Although you will have already watched the video, be sure to sit with your group and watch it again. Participants will feel that you are involved and interested in the subject.
- After the video is over, sit quietly for a few seconds before turning on the lights, and give the viewers time to think about what they saw.
- When you ask the group a question, be patient if they don't respond immediately. Give them some time, and if they still need prompting, you can use questions from the Leader's Guide to get the discussion going.
- If the discussion becomes sidetracked, guide it back to the topic of teams.
- Discourage arguments and side discussions that involve only a few people. Again, guide the individuals back to the topic of teams.

Training Tools for “The Vision of Teams”

“The Vision of Teams” Presentation on PowerPoint
A diskette containing the overheads is included in the video package.

“The Vision of Teams” Workbook
“The Vision of Teams” Workbook was created to assist individual learning. It was designed to work with the video program, but it does not assume that a facilitator is involved. Of course, the workbooks can also be used for group study. One workbook has been included with the video package.

For additional copies or information on any of these items,
call 1-800-242-3220.

The Vision of **Teams**

Leader's Guide

with
Ann Bancroft

Notes

Key Concepts

Listed below are the team concepts identified in the video. This Leader's Guide includes more comprehensive information on each concept, as well as exercises that will help your team members apply the concepts to their own experiences.

1. First:

- It all begins with passion.
- But passion is not enough.
- Each team member brings a unique set of strengths and weaknesses.

2. Sharing a vision requires:

- truly communicating with each other and listening, rather than blaming;
- committing to a common goal; and
- meshing personal goals with the vision for the team.

3. Learning as a team means:

- learning from mistakes;
- learning from each other; and
- planning for communication, rather than leaving it to chance.

4. Taking action means:

- recommitting to the shared vision;
- working with and through other people to accomplish goals;
- putting in a solid effort, rather than just putting in the hours; and
- challenging yourself.

5. In conclusion:

We are transformed by working together and challenging ourselves to meet a common goal.

It all begins with passion.

From the Video

"It's the passion that really pushes you through the times when you're being told you couldn't, or you shouldn't, and you yourself are questioning, 'Why am I here?'" says Ann Bancroft. "It is those moments of reconnecting with that passion that allow you to put one foot in front of the other."

Program Insight

Passion—the strong feelings that we hold about an issue or cause—sparks our dreams and compels us to take action.

Whether we're trying to launch a new product, run a political campaign, or raise funding for a cause in which we believe, we need to hold tightly to our beliefs, because achieving our dreams often isn't easy. In fact, it usually requires hard work and a commitment of time or money, or both. Other people may try to discourage us. While we need to be open to intelligent, constructive input, we also have to be able to keep going even when others disagree with our goals.

Facilitator Question

List two things outside work about which you are passionate.

Possible Responses

An avocation.

A political or social cause.

A personal goal, such as completing a 100-mile bike ride.

Follow-up Question

List two things about your job or this organization about which you are passionate. Even if you are not particularly enthused about your current position, find a couple of things about the company or the work environment about which you care.

Possible Responses

Being continually challenged to do the best work I can.

Our company's reputation for cutting-edge research.

The people I work with.

It all begins with passion. (cont'd)

Team Activity

First, ask each team member to stand, introduce himself or herself, and briefly discuss his or her role in the company. Then ask each to identify one or two things about a company project that they find exciting or an aspect of the project in which they really want the team to excel. For example, if a team is working to develop a new product, the engineers are apt to care most about the product design, while the finance folks may be more interested in ensuring that the project stays on budget.

Record the responses. When you are finished, check to see whether all of the major facets of the project have a "champion." If not, discuss whom in the group would be a logical choice to assume these roles.

Expedition Insight

Passion fluctuates when you are working toward a big goal that demands a large commitment of time and effort. The trick is to find or develop ways to keep your passion going.

One way that Ann Bancroft kept up her enthusiasm during the five years she planned and prepared for her trip to Antarctica was to tie the expedition to another of her passions, education. Working through the American Women's Expedition Educational Foundation, she and other teachers developed a curriculum based on the trip for several hundred thousand school children. For example, the children following the Expedition learned about art and music taking place in Inuit, or Eskimo, communities.

Although some adults told team members that the venture was bound to fail, the school children never questioned their ability to succeed. The kids' enthusiasm, which was always on display when Ann and the group did presentations on Antarctica, helped team members stay connected with their passion.

But passion is not enough.

From the Video

"I've learned that passion is not enough," says Ann Bancroft. "Not enough for you to succeed in your environment, and not enough for me to succeed as leader of the first women's expedition to cross Antarctica on skis. Passion is not enough, because we cannot do it alone. Achieving our vision requires teamwork."

Program Insight

While passion may spark a dream and compel one individual to act, achieving a dream almost always requires working with others. Even a goal that appears to be the work of one person, such as an individual's commitment to lose weight or stop smoking, is easier to reach with the support of others.

Because of this, it's essential that we all develop the skills that will allow us to be contributing members of a functioning, effective team.

Facilitator Question

Can you think of a goal you have achieved that required the support and efforts of others in your life?

Possible Responses

Taking a job that required a move or a change in hours.
Going back to school, which meant less time with family members.
Quitting smoking or drinking.

Follow-up Question

Identify the qualities that an individual needs to fully contribute to a team.

Possible Responses

An ability to listen.
An ability to work with a diverse group of people.
An ability to take responsibility.

But passion is not enough. (cont'd)

Team Activity

This exercise takes the previous one a bit further, getting more specific about individual project responsibilities. Ask participants to talk to the person(s) sitting next to them about his or her role(s) on the team. How will each team member's work affect the others' work? What information does each need from the other? If one area runs into problems, how will that affect the other areas? What actions can each take to help the other person(s) and move the team more quickly to its goal?

Expedition Insight

One obvious benefit of working with a team is that it allows you to share the work. On the Expedition, each team member became an expert at a particular task. Of course, everyone on the team knew how to do all of the tasks, in case of an emergency.

Ann Bancroft communicated with the outside world via the group's radio. Sunniva Sorby made sure that the team completed the research they were supposed to do as they traveled. Anne Dal Vera worked with a dietitian to devise a nutritious mix of foods that could be packed on sleds and survive the Antarctic climate. And Sue Giller worked with a Global Positioning System to determine how far the group had skied each day and whether they were still on course.

One drawback of Sue's job: to get the batteries that powered the system to operate in the Antarctic, Sue first had to put them in her long johns for an hour or two to warm them up. The effect, she says, was like dropping a bag of ice down her pants!

Each team member brings:

a unique set of strengths and weaknesses.

From the Video

In preparing for her trip, Ann Bancroft says, "My first step was to choose the members of my team. I looked for passion, experience, and a complementary set of skills."

Program Insight

Most successful teams offer a mix of skills. A diverse set of talents and experiences helps to ensure that all angles of a project are covered. In addition, creating a strong, deep team means that more members are able to take on leadership roles. This is important, because it is unrealistic to expect the "official" leader of the group to have all of the answers.

Facilitator Question

What strengths do you bring to the group? On what aspects of the project are you an expert?

Possible Responses

Technical expertise.

Knowledge of the bureaucracy or politics surrounding the project.

Project-management skills.

People or communication skills.

Follow-up Question

In what areas would you like to improve?

Possible Responses

Could be any of the above.

Each team member brings:

a unique set of strengths and weaknesses. (cont'd)

Team Activity

Like the trip to the South Pole, most projects include some ancillary jobs that can't be neatly assigned to one person or department. Examples might include heading a special event or studying a particular issue.

Now that participants understand the expertise and skills of the other members, ask the team to identify which members are the most logical ones to take charge of such functions. Pair each ancillary activity with the appropriate team member(s), who will take responsibility for becoming an "expert" at that job.

Expedition Insight

Sometimes a team member's contribution veers from that described in his or her official job description. When Sunniva Sorby became injured, her contribution to the group's progress in logging miles while pulling a sled packed with 200 pounds of gear obviously lapsed. In fact, the others had to take much of the weight off her sled.

However, her concern for the others and cheerful willingness to give them emotional support remained intact. This was not an insignificant achievement, given the emotional, as well as physical, rigors of the trip. "In that sort of environment, almost everyone goes into survival mode," says Ann. "You do only what absolutely needs to be done. It's easy to decide not to make an effort to be friendly or supportive. However, Sunniva would give emotionally so unabashedly and freely, and sometimes at great expense to herself."

For example, if Sunniva was first in the tent at night, while her tent-mate was finishing her own chores, she made sure she had a cup of tea or soup waiting for her. She was able to cheer up Anne Dal Vera when she was down, and also help Sue Giller, who has an intense personality, relax a bit.

Sharing a vision requires:

**truly communicating with each other—listening,
rather than blaming.**

From the Video

Ann Bancroft describes the end of the Great Slave Lake training trip when team members had to wait two days before a plane could fly them out. The group had made many mistakes on the trip, and everyone was ready to point a finger. "There was a lot of anger," Ann says. "So, we sat down and thrashed it out. Criticism is never comfortable. We had to set aside the natural tendency to be defensive and really listen. Listening, not blaming, got us back on track."

Program Insight

When a team is working toward a goal, it's critical that members listen openly when something goes wrong, rather than simply blame others.

In the long run, blaming is usually counterproductive. People become defensive and may avoid doing more than just the task in front of them. In addition, blaming makes it easy to overlook all of the reasons something went wrong. Usually, mistakes occur because of problems throughout the system. For example, if an order is late, it could be because the item was held up in production, the delivery date was incorrect, credit information was wrong, or a number of other reasons.

Facilitator Question

At one point or another, almost everyone fails to really listen. Can you describe a time that you didn't listen, but instead assumed someone else had made a mistake?

Possible Responses

When working on a project, I blamed another department for bungling their responsibilities, only to find out later that they hadn't been given the correct information. When something broke at home, I blamed a family member until I realized that the item broke from neglect.

Follow-up Question

Can someone recall a time when you were blamed for a mistake that you didn't cause? How did this affect your commitment to and actions on the project?

Possible Responses

Made me less likely to go out of my way to contribute.
Lowered my commitment.

Sharing a vision requires:

**truly communicating with each other—listening,
rather than blaming. (cont'd)**

Team Activity

Telephone is a game that probably everyone played in kindergarten, yet it still has value for adults. Ask one person in the room to whisper his or her weekend plans to another person. Let the whispered message make its way from person to person around the room. (Don't let anyone repeat himself or herself, even if the other person doesn't hear all of the message; after all, when people are rushed or preoccupied, it's easy to end up listening with less than full attention.) How much did the message change from the first person to the last?

Expedition Insight

One morning of the expedition, Anne Dal Vera made what could have been a serious mistake: She forgot to secure her daypack on top of her sled. The pack contained everything she might need that day, including an extra jacket and gloves, goggles and her lunch. All of these items were necessary, and the team had no spares. Soon after the four set off, the daypack fell off Anne's sled and was left behind.

While the mistake was serious, the group resisted the impulse to point a finger at Anne. Instead, the team came up with a plan: Anne Dal Vera would go back for the pack, while Ann Bancroft would take over her sled, in addition to her own. This meant that Anne, skiing without a sled, would travel quickly. The rest of the group would keep pace with Ann and, obviously, ski more slowly.

The plan kept the time lost to a minimum. More importantly, team members remained supportive of Anne, meeting her with hugs and hot chocolate on her return. That didn't mean they ignored what had happened. In fact, the experience reinforced in everyone's mind the need to create safeguards so that it didn't happen again. After that, every morning a round of "Are the packs secured?" would go out before the group left.

Sharing a vision requires:

committing to a common goal.

From the Video

"Without the team's commitment to a shared vision, I knew we didn't stand a chance," says Ann Bancroft. "But as we talked and listened to each other, we realized that we did share a vision of how we could reach our expedition's goal."

Program Insight

In trying to reach a challenging goal, everyone's wholehearted support is essential. Otherwise, team members may end up just going through the motions and will be less likely to give the extra effort when needed. In some cases, they may even sabotage efforts to move toward the goal.

Facilitator Questions

Of course, it's not always possible for everyone to contribute to or agree with the vision of a group. In crises, for example, leaders usually act quickly, without much input from anyone else. However, in most cases, people want a chance to contribute to the goals and actions of the group. Can you recall a time when this didn't happen; when you were part of a team or organization yet weren't allowed an opportunity to provide input on an issue? How did that affect your commitment to the goal?

Possible Responses

Made me less willing to give 100 percent to implementing or carrying out the goal.
Made me want to carry out only the letter—and not the spirit—of the goal.

Follow-up Questions

How well do the members of your team know and share a vision? Ask all of the team members to write down what they believe the team vision is. Collect the notes. How different are the visions?

Possible Responses

Will vary from team to team.

Sharing a vision requires:

committing to a common goal. (cont'd)

Team Activity

Here's an exercise that can help the team come up with a common vision or goal: First, ask each person to rank, in order of priority, the different aspects of the goal. Start with the most important and end with the least important.

For example, say the group has a broad goal of improving the city's schools. To some team members, this will mean increasing test scores. Others may focus on eliminating violence or cliques. Still others may want to boost the number of students who can go on to college.

Review the responses as a group, and look for themes that regularly appear at the top of everyone's lists. Using these as a starting point, create several sentences that convey what the group agrees is its goal.

Expedition Insight

Perhaps not surprisingly, each member of the American Women's Expedition had a strong commitment to preserving the environment. They held true to their belief, even when it meant more work and expense. For example, their decision not to leave any garbage behind meant that much of the food packaging had to be biodegradable. Their commitment also meant that the team had to carry refuse out of Antarctica, which weighed down their sleds and affected their pace.

Sharing a vision requires:

meshing personal goals with the vision for the team.

From the Video

"We all had to put the team vision ahead of our own individual agendas," says Ann Bancroft. "We found out how dysfunctional and miserable we'd be if we didn't learn to work together."

Program Insight

Even when people are part of a group, they naturally think of their own agendas and wonder how the group's efforts will affect their own goals and careers. Realistically, it would be impossible to completely eliminate each person's self-interest.

However, each team needs to find ways to accommodate both the personal agendas of its team members and the group goal. Most times, if the group does well, everyone—no matter what his or her immediate goals are—also does well. Conversely, if each person focuses only on his or her own goals, it is likely that neither the group, nor its members, will accomplish what they set out to do.

Facilitator Question

What are your personal goals as a member of this team?

Possible Responses

A chance to demonstrate my skills.

The opportunity to gain new skills, which may help in getting a new job.

The ability to use this experience as leverage in asking for a promotion or a raise.

Follow-up Question

How important is the success of the team to your personal goals?

Possible Responses

In most cases, the success of the team should be important to each member's individual goals.

Sharing a vision requires:

meshing personal goals with the vision for the team. (cont'd)

Team Activity

One danger in organizations is that people sometimes focus on optimizing their own performance at the expense of the larger group. For example, a salesperson may extend orders to customers who have questionable abilities to pay, figuring that the employees in the credit department can worry about collecting the money.

Ask team members if there are any goals that may encourage this sort of behavior. If so, can they develop a set of checks and balances? In the example, for instance, a goal of increased sales could be balanced by a goal of maintaining or reducing the percentage of uncollected accounts.

Expedition Insight

The original goal of the American Women's Expedition was to journey to the South Pole and then ski the rest of the way across Antarctica. As the team completed the trek to the Pole, it became clear that not all four team members would be able to make the rest of the trip due to health problems.

Ann Bancroft thought about continuing on with just one other team member. However, this would have nearly doubled the cost of the expedition, as two plane trips, rather than just one, would have been needed to get all four team members out of Antarctica. Given that funding for the trek came largely from donations and that each plane trip cost several hundred thousand dollars, it was clear that continuing was simply too expensive.

Talking about her decision to end the trip at the South Pole, Ann says, "It was a moment of understanding my legacy. I could have continued, but what kind of legacy would I be leaving? It wasn't about me or my goal to traverse Antarctica any longer."

Learning as a team means:

learning from mistakes.

From the Video

"Don't bury your failures and problems," says Ann Bancroft. "Dig them up and sift through them for the lesson. Successful teams talk about what went wrong and how to improve. Teams that learn from experience are ready when it's time to take action."

Program Insight

Many times, organizations don't like to talk about their mistakes, because it's tempting to think that if mistakes are ignored, they will be forgotten. In addition, talking about where things went wrong means people may have to acknowledge their own shortcomings or lapses in judgment, which is always difficult. However, burying mistakes increases the chances that you'll repeat them. The key is to use mistakes as learning opportunities and move forward.

Facilitator Question

Can you identify two or three larger or significant mistake(s) that the team (or team members) has made so far?

Possible Responses

Will vary by team.

Follow-up Question

How have they been handled?

Possible Responses

We've ignored them.

Team members have talked about the mistakes informally, but we really haven't hashed them out as a group.

We've talked about our mistakes and are trying to see how we can prevent another one.

Learning as a team means:

learning from mistakes. (cont'd)

Team Activity

Ask team members to trace each mistake back to its root cause. It may be helpful to diagram this in a flowchart. Is there a pattern to the causes? For example, are people making mistakes because they haven't been adequately trained? Are there frequent lapses in communication? Is anyone being stretched too thinly?

Once you have identified the root causes, brainstorm ideas on correcting or working around those issues. Most groups, of course, have only limited amounts of time, money, or other resources with which to tackle problem areas. That's why it's important to encourage creativity and allow all ideas, no matter how seemingly silly or impractical, to come forward.

Expedition Insight

Many times, mistakes happen when groups try to stick to schedules that no longer are feasible. This had happened to the team on their Greenland training trip. The pilot, who would take the team to their starting point, had grown concerned that a storm was rolling in. Thinking he was being helpful, he loaded all of the equipment on the plane before the group could check it. It would have taken hours to unload and check the gear. If a storm had started, the team likely would not have been able to leave for a week or two. As a result, the group decided not to do a last-minute check of their equipment before leaving the airport.

When they got to the starting point, the team found that their stoves didn't work with the fuel they had. This meant no water and limited food. "We all were seasoned expeditioners," Ann says, "and knew we were breaking a cardinal rule. However, we all felt the pressure to leave while we could." Fortunately, the team was able to obtain the correct fuel, and in the end, all they lost was time.

Learning as a team means:

learning from each other.

From the Video

When one team member became sick on the Greenland expedition, all of the team members pitched in. "The extra pressure sparked new energy in one of our less-confident teammates," Ann says. "She rose to the challenge, and we all learned that she had a lot more to contribute than we'd imagined."

Program Insight

No one has all of the answers or all of the abilities. Bigger goals can best be reached by combining strengths so that the result is more than simply the sum of the parts. For this to occur, everyone on the team must respect input from all other team members.

It can be easy to assume that someone is less knowledgeable, just because he or she is from a different department or works at a lower-level position. Many times, quieter team members are overlooked. However, ignoring someone can result in a more limited pool of information and ideas. In the end, that can hurt your team's chances of reaching its goal.

Facilitator Question

Can you recall a time when someone surprised you with their knowledge or insights?

Possible Responses

I overlooked a person who was less experienced, or younger, only to find out she had good ideas.

I dismissed input from someone as a complaint, or a way to get out of work—then I realized his concerns were important and valid.

I assumed that someone from outside the group wouldn't understand, when actually he had been in a similar situation with another organization.

Follow-up Question

Once it became clear that the person could contribute, how did his or her input change the group or the actions you took?

Possible Responses

We sought his or her input when we ran into problems in his or her area of expertise.

We included more factors in our analysis.

We changed the outside partners, such as vendors, with whom we were working.

Learning as a team means:

learning from each other. (cont'd)

Team Activity*

This activity is designed to help members get to know more about each other in a fun, nonthreatening way. Before the session, ask each member to tell you a fact about himself or herself that he or she is fairly sure the rest of the group doesn't know and one that would be fun to share. For example, perhaps a member spent time studying abroad or came from a family of ten children. Then assemble the responses and hand out a list of the facts to everyone at the session. Then ask team members to match each fact with the correct person. Members can talk among themselves, although they shouldn't ask direct questions. After a few minutes, tell everyone the correct pairings. You may want to give a prize to the person with the highest score.

** Part of this exercise is completed before the session.*

Expedition Insight

Even though all four team members were skilled, experienced explorers, each was willing and able to learn more about different ways of doing things. "Part of it was curiosity, and their general willingness to explore," Ann says. "However, everyone also knew that being open to new ideas and ways of doing things would enhance the chance of success."

Learning as a team means:

planning for communication, rather than leaving it to chance.

From the Video

After a particularly discouraging time in Greenland, when it appeared that the team might not make the trek to Antarctica, Ann pulled the team together to talk about their goals, and why they were all there. "Together we learned not to leave communication to chance..." she says. "We decided that every time one of us passed another in line, we had to acknowledge the other, even if all we could muster was a grunt. It was communication, an acknowledgment of each other, and it was important."

Program Insight

Relationships fizzle when communication lags. People start operating under their own assumptions, little problems take on greater proportions, and it's easy to think that one's contributions aren't being appreciated.

It's important to note that lapses in communication can happen to a team of any size. At times, it is easier for this to occur in small teams, because you just assume that you're communicating. Bigger teams, on the other hand, often are more likely to establish regular schedules and procedures for communicating.

Facilitator Question

How well does your team communicate with all members on a regular basis?

Possible Responses

Not well at all.

We started out communicating regularly, but communication has fallen off as the project has gotten underway.

We communicate regularly, but not frequently enough.

We've got it under control.

Follow-up Question

Have you seen any fallout or errors because of the lack of regular communication?

Possible Responses

We've run into problems that were avoidable.

Some people say they find out about events after they should.

We've had to backtrack, because we haven't always had timely information.

Learning as a team means:

planning for communication, rather than leaving it to chance. (cont'd)

Team Activity

Devise a schedule and assign responsibilities for communicating within the team. The goal here is to keep everyone up to date, while also being practical. For example, the team may decide that it needs to hold biweekly team meetings and that the facilitator will issue weekly e-mail status updates.

Expedition Insight

Finding the energy to communicate proved difficult after team members spent eight to fourteen hours each day skiing, and then had to take another hour or two in the morning and again at night to create their living quarters. Not communicating was counterproductive, however, as team members began to feel disconnected from the goal and from each other.

"It was better for us in the long run to make the physical effort to communicate, in order to get the emotional 'miles' we needed," says Ann. "In the end, this would help us get the physical miles we needed to reach our goal."

Taking action means:

recommitting to the shared vision.

From the Video

"There are times on every team when certain members are down," Ann says. "As the leader, I knew I had to counteract any negative influence to protect the team and move us toward the goal together. I restated the vision, and asked them to recommit . . . which they all did. I repeated the process whenever spirits were flagging."

Program Insight

It's easy to assume that team members are keeping the vision front and center in their minds. However, even when the goal is straightforward and everyone is committed to achieving it, it is easy for team members to forget why they are doing what they're doing. Repeatedly talking about the vision is necessary to keep everyone moving forward and in the same direction.

Facilitator Question

On large projects, it's easy to become wrapped up in day-to-day activities and forget the larger goal. Does anyone have a trick or system that you use to remind yourself of your mission or vision?

Possible Responses

Write it down and review it regularly.
Acknowledge the small successes along the way.

Follow-up Question

Sometimes it helps to keep a group's goal visible. How can your group do this?

Possible Responses

Print our vision statement on all pieces of communication.
Give people reminder cards that state the goal.
Hang posters that illustrate our mission.

Taking action means:

recommitting to the shared vision. (cont'd)

Team Activity

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. Ask each team member to think of and draw a symbol or logo that he or she feels illustrates what the team is all about. This could be an original symbol or an adaptation of something familiar.

Collect the drawings, and ask each participant to talk about his or her symbol: What does it mean? Why did he or she choose it? How does it convey what the team is about?

Then ask participants if there is one symbol that team members feel best represents the group. If not, can they take elements from several symbols to devise a composite symbol? Finally, can the team incorporate the logo on their communication pieces?

Expedition Insight

Once the team arrived in Antarctica, the difficulty of their task loomed before them. As a result, even though team members knew that they didn't have a great deal of slack built into their schedule, it became easier to give in to the temptation to slow down, or even to find an excuse to stop. Getting to the South Pole was a long and arduous process, and it sometimes seemed that the team wasn't making much progress—obviously, a discouraging idea.

The experience taught Ann and the rest of the team the importance of keeping their goal visible. "You have to verbally do it," Ann says, "and not think that just because the goal is written on a piece of paper, that it's set in stone and everyone is thinking about it. You also can't assume that just because everyone is experienced, that you don't need to talk about your mission."

Taking action means:

working with and through other people to accomplish goals.

From the Video

"Getting the team to the Pole was the most important thing to think of," Ann says. "Not to reach the Pole, but to work as a team, travel as a team. Our motto became 'Four to the Pole.'"

Program Insight

Being a team can take on many forms. Although the four members of the American Women's Expedition spent much of their time skiing single file in a line, Ann says, "I never worked on anything that demanded so much that we act like a team." A team is defined by its members working toward a common goal, where everyone's efforts are needed to reach it.

On the ice, the hard and soft skills of the four women had to come together so that the team could function efficiently and effectively in the unforgiving Antarctic environment. For example, instead of each member insisting on her own way of putting up a tent or building a snow wall, the group used ideas from everyone to arrive at the fastest and easiest method.

Facilitator Question

To effectively work with other people, team members have to feel confident about expressing their thoughts and making contributions. The challenge is creating an atmosphere that allows this. How well has your team done at this?

Possible Responses

Not well at all; our meetings become pretty hostile.
Just a few people seem comfortable voicing their opinions.
We've done OK, but there's room for improvement.
We're doing great!

Follow-up Question

How can we enhance the atmosphere of the group, so that everyone is comfortable taking risks and expressing ideas?

Possible Responses

Agree to seek out ideas from all team members when problems arise.
Agree that no ideas will be dismissed without fair consideration.

Taking action means:

working with and through other people to accomplish goals. (cont'd)

Team Activity

Many times, the stakeholders in a project extend beyond official team members. Examples of outside stakeholders include support departments, suppliers, customers or clients, consultants, volunteers, and executives within the company, among others.

Ask team members to list outside stakeholders who are important to the group's success. Then, ask them to consider the following questions: Is the communication between the team and its stakeholders timely? Is it sufficient? If not, how can we increase it? If we are overloading stakeholders, how can we best reduce the information flow? When is it important to seek their input? If appropriate, how can we acknowledge their support?

Expedition Insight

While the video shows just the four women who made it to the South Pole, the American Women's Expedition really comprised many more members. Approximately 150 volunteers helped to raise money and get the group packed and ready for the trip. For example, schoolchildren packed all of the Expedition food—everything from bread and butter to cookies.

Hundreds of thousands of people made financial donations. The contributions ranged from a single dollar to several thousand, although the majority of donations were under one hundred dollars.

And finally, it's important to acknowledge again the importance of the schoolchildren's enthusiasm and confidence in the team. "Sometimes, when it was tough skiing, I would look at the sled and see those 300,000 kids," Ann says. "It was enough to help me kick it in gear for several more miles."

Taking action means:

putting in a solid effort, rather than just putting in the hours.

From the Video

About one-third of the way to the Pole, team members had started to ease up a bit, and weren't giving their full effort to the goal. "I went into a little tirade today about miles and days and cleaning up your act [getting enough sleep]," Ann says. "Not just putting in the hours, but putting in the miles."

Program Insight

On many projects, as the initial enthusiasm wears off, it's easy to become complacent or a bit sloppy about the mundane, everyday tasks that need to be done. The work involved in meeting most goals often involves many small steps, as well as a fair amount of less-than-exciting tasks. It becomes tempting to take shortcuts, figuring that the work will somehow get done or that even if it doesn't, it won't matter.

Facilitator Question

Does anyone have any tricks or methods that you use to keep your attention on and dedication to monotonous tasks?

Possible Responses

Injecting some fun into them; for example, challenging myself to continually beat my best pace at a task.

Rewards, such as heading to the candy machine after completing a tedious job.

Follow-up Question

Could any of these work for the team?

Possible Responses

Most should be adaptable. For example, to make a specific task more fun, the team could come up with a contest geared around it.

The team also could implement a simple reward system, such as ordering in lunch after hitting specific goals.

Taking action means:

putting in a solid effort, rather than just putting in the hours. (cont'd)

Team Activity*

It is easy to misjudge the level of effort people are giving specific tasks or jobs, especially if team members work in areas that operate in widely varying ways. To help participants appreciate the challenges members in other departments face, ask them to switch positions for a day. If actually switching places isn't practical, ask team members to observe one another in action. Try to pair up people who come from very different areas or who seem to know the least about one another's role.

After the switches have occurred, ask team members the following questions: What surprised you most about the other person's job? How has the experience changed how you view the other person's role and responsibilities? What did you learn from others, such as customers or vendors, with whom you came into contact? Will this change how you do your job?

** Part of this exercise is completed outside the session.*

Expedition Insight

Like most people, the members of the American Women's Expedition were vulnerable to the temptation to slack off. According to their official schedule, the foursome were to ski two hours, take a 15-minute break, and then start skiing again. However, the breaks gradually began to stretch out, so that the team was losing valuable time. As the leader, Ann often had to be the one to "blow the whistle," which wasn't fun for anyone.

Ann brought the problem before the members of the group and noted that the whole team would have to solve it. Sue Giller came up with a simple remedy: She suggested that they log just their time actually spent skiing, rather than also include breaks in their daily tally. Because the suggestion came from a team member, and not the leader, it was easier for the other team members to feel that they were part of the solution. As a result, improvement was immediate. Team members began to police their own break periods and even cut them short when things were going well.

Taking action means:

challenging yourself.

From the Video

"The allure for me is exploring myself," Ann says. "How will I perform at that moment of truth? That is, to me, the real adventure."

Program Insight

As Ann's comment suggests, challenging ourselves is both enticing and scary. We want to see how well we can do, yet we worry about the hard work ahead, and we wonder whether we'll perform as well as we hope.

However, if we never push ourselves, we won't know just how much we can accomplish. Challenging ourselves, both individually and in a group, allows us and our team to grow. And, as the Expedition shows, it enables ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things.

Facilitator Question

Think of a time that you challenged yourself and rose to the occasion.

Possible Responses

Aced a test.

Nailed a job interview.

Gave a speech.

Follow-up Question

How did you prepare for the challenge?

Possible Responses

Regularly set aside time to practice or study for it.

Took several practice tests before taking the real one.

Asked others for their guidance and support.

Taking action means:

challenging yourself. (cont'd)

Team Activity

This exercise should be done in a spirit of friendly rivalry. Its purpose is to point out how teams, as well as individuals, benefit from challenging themselves. Divide members of your team into two or more small groups, and give each thirty to sixty minutes to meet a challenge that you set before them. While the exact nature of the competition will vary by group, here are several suggestions: competing in a game of "Trivial Pursuit," using questions about your organization; developing a team song; or completing a scavenger hunt around your workplace. Again, it's important to note that while the task itself is not important, the purpose of the exercise is to challenge members while they work toward a goal.

Expedition Insight

Again, like most people, the members of the American Women's Expedition couldn't consider challenging themselves to be a once-in-a-while proposition. Rather, they trained year-round for several years to be ready for their journey to the South Pole. In the off-season, for example, each of the four would bike, climb, or run for two to four hours a day. As a training expedition drew near, they increased their workouts in intensity and duration. (It's important to note that these sessions were in addition to the members' regular jobs as outdoor educators and guides.)

The group-training expeditions also were critical, because they gave the four members an opportunity to find the most effective way to use their skills and talents in unison.

We are transformed by:

working together and challenging ourselves to meet a common goal.

From the Video

"In the end, this is what transforms people: working together on something they believe in strongly," says Ann Bancroft.

Program Insight

Many people told the members of the American Women's Expedition that there was no way four women could make it to the South Pole—that the physical and emotional rigors of the trip would be too much for them. Of course, the group proved them wrong and, in the process, made history.

While the goal of the American Women's Expedition was unique, their success shows how ordinary people, working together, can accomplish great things. Each of us has the power to make a difference in our workplaces, communities, and families. Doing our best to change things is profoundly rewarding and exciting.

Facilitator Question

Think back to the achievement you spoke about previously. What impact has reaching that goal had on you?

Possible Responses

Increased my self-confidence.
Enabled me to land a better job.
Gained a better understanding of myself.

Follow-up Questions

Even though the American Women's Expedition made it to the South Pole, they were unable to continue across Antarctica. Their experience shows how even goals that you don't fully meet can have a big impact. Does anyone have a similar experience? What effect has the experience had on you?

Possible Responses

Responses will vary.

We are transformed by:

working together and challenging ourselves to meet a common goal. (cont'd)

Team Activity

Of course, not all achievements will dramatically alter one's life. That doesn't mean that they're not important. Each should provide a sense of accomplishment and help better an individual, organization, or community.

Ask team members to pretend that an article on the team's accomplishments will run as the lead story in the local paper once their project is complete. What will the article say? What will the team have achieved? How will the organization or community be improved? How will this have affected the team members' lives? What steps will they take next?

Expedition Insight

"You know when you jump off to start a new project that you will be changed, but you're not sure how," says Ann Bancroft. "That's what makes it an adventure."

For Ann, the expedition gave her a better understanding of her strengths and weaknesses. As a result, she is more comfortable delegating tasks at which she isn't an expert. The trip also taught her a great deal about how to motivate people. Finally, she adds, "More than anything, the trip showed me the power that each of us has to make a difference. It's important that we use that power by voting, speaking up, and getting involved."