

Partnering can improve performance in workplace



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QUESTION: What is partnering and how does it work?

ANSWER: Partnering is a process that strengthens collaboration, communication and mutual respect among individuals who are working together on a specific project, goal or mission.

The foundation of partnering is participation in a partnering retreat led by an experienced facilitator. Through exercises and discussions designed by the facilitator with input from the participants, group members learn about one another on a personal level; identify potential problems or challenges in completing their project or meeting their goal; and brainstorm solutions to prevent or overcome the potential problems and challenges.

The ideas and agreements that are generated in the partnering retreat are captured by the facilitator on a flip chart and later provided to each participant. The group then adopts a charter or pledge to abide by the identified goals and action steps during the retreat. To ensure the greatest success, the charter and action steps should be regularly reviewed and updated by the



PROFILE

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used on construction projects, but is it also useful in other situations?

A: Absolutely. The principles of partnering can be applied to any project or group working together.

Conflict is a fact of life in any setting. When the stresses of deadlines, unclear communication and different personalities and perspectives are brought together, the potential for conflict is even greater.

Partnering is the perfect recipe to reduce or even eliminate that potential. Through the partnering process, people learn about each other's different styles and personalities in a relaxed setting, anticipate po-

help the participants work successfully together.

Q: Skeptics in the workplace may think partnering is a waste of time. How do you convince them it is not?

A: I ask them to visualize the last project they worked on in the workplace and to identify the problems that arose during that project and what caused those problems. Did miscommunication, misunderstanding or personality clashes create problems? If yes, were these problems easy to resolve? Did they escalate? Was a lot of time and energy invested in addressing the problems? Did these problems impact productivity and delay time-

to avoid having the same problems again.

I have yet to meet anyone who enjoys conflict, miscommunication or failure to meet their goals. People with a common mission or goal want to succeed.

Therefore, participating in a partnering process that can strengthen relationships, work productivity and, ultimately, the bottom line, offers tremendous benefits and no downside.

Q: What is a typical partnering process? Who is involved? How often do they meet? How much does it cost?

A: Ideally, everyone involved in the project, team or department must agree to participate. The key stakeholders or management team will select an experienced facilitator to work with the group and design a process for the partnering retreat, including appropriate exercises and activities. Pre-surveys help to lay the foundation for a successful retreat that is customized to meet the needs of the people participating. The retreat should be conducted in a comfortable setting outside of the typical workplace and may

project or work.

Following the partnering retreat, the group must commit to regular reviews of the charter, action steps or other agreements that were outcomes of the retreat.

The cost of the partnering process will vary depending on the size of the group, the complexity of its work and the facilitator(s) hired to coordinate, design and conduct the partnering retreat.

Q: Who has used partnering in Hawaii, and where does a company go if they are interested in trying it?

A: Attorney Jerry Clay and I had the opportunity to work with a division of the Department of Human Services that had suffered downsizing and had been without a supervisor for a number of months. Following the one-day partnering retreat, the supervisor, Hinda Diamond, and various other employees who participated reported improved communication and a more open working environment.

Anyone interested in developing a partnering process for their office, department, nonprofit or busi-